

## Undergraduates' Experiences and Attitudes of Writing in L1 and English

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### ABSTRACT

Writing is considered an important language skill. Although the importance of writing is undeniably realized and highly stressed by ESL scholars, educators and instructors, most ESL tertiary students and young graduates find creating a coherent and extended piece of writing difficult and challenging. Therefore, to overcome this problem, there is a need to be aware of the students' experiences and attitudes to writing in their first language and English language. This research is a quasi-experimental study that employs a mixed-method approach. Participants were 30 tertiary ESL students enrolled in an obligatory course in the first year of Bachelor of Arts (English) programme. The study compares participants' writing experiences and attitudes using questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. An interview was also conducted as a triangulation measure. Results suggest that participants mostly preferred using English language for various writing activities. Moreover, overall items of the questionnaire revealed that there was no significant difference between the participants' writing attitudes in their first language and English language. Furthermore, with regard to each item of the questionnaire, three of them showed significant difference. Although the remaining items did not show any significant difference, most of the items did receive higher mean for attitude to writing in English than first language. Participants' interview responses revealed various reasons for their attitude, which supported findings obtained from the questionnaire analysis. The findings of the present study contribute to a better understanding of why some of the students do not like to write. Considering those reasons, instructors can then help their students to improve on their writing skill.

**Keywords:** attitude; writing skill; first language; English language; ESL

### INTRODUCTION

Writing is known as a straight forward act of saying what the writer means, the mental struggles the writer goes through, and the interpretations readers make (Flower & Hayes, 1980). In addition, writing is an integrative ability and a significant, productive and complex learning process (Abdullah, 2011). Therefore, writing can be defined as a productive learning process from the generation of ideas and gathering required data to the publication of a finalized text. Writing is a means of communicating and a major cognitive challenge and thinking process (Kellogg, 2001) because when someone starts to write, his/her thinking and act of writing are inseparable.

Due to the importance of writing to ESL students, it is essential to know their writing experiences and attitudes so that the correct instructional approach can be proposed. The term *attitude* has been defined as "affective feelings of liking or disliking toward an object that have

an influence on behavior" (Kaufman, 1999, p. 50). Writing attitude is also defined as "the feelings and beliefs students have about their writing ability and about written language tasks" (Sturm & Rankin-Erickson, 2002, p.128). Students' attitudes are one of the main factors that determine their success in language learning. Attitude to the second language, its speakers and the learning context may all play some part in explaining their success or failure in different aspects of language learning (Candlin & Mercer, 2001). Writing performance can be one of those aspects. Moreover, one important aspect of understanding second language writing is knowing how it differs from first language (L1) writing (Silva, 1992). Writing in L1 and ESL contexts are different from various aspects such as writing process which entails planning, transcribing, and reviewing. Another aspect is written text features such as fluency, accuracy and quality of the written text (Silva, 1993). Knowing about the differences between writing in L1 and ESL contexts from these aspects leads the researchers to conduct more studies to compare the students' attitudes to writing in L1 and English Language.

### **REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES**

Similarities and differences between L1 and ESL writing have been discussed in various studies in writing. ESL writing practitioners have been advised to adopt practices from L1 writing. Underlying this advice, it seems that L1 and L2 writing are identical or at least very similar. L1 and L2 writing are similar in their broad outlines; that is, in both L1 and L2 writers employ a recursive composing (Silva, 1993). However, a closer examination of L1 and L2 writing through observation and analysis of students' behaviors and written texts will reveal salient differences (Silva, 1992).

Where differences between L1 and ESL writing are concerned, studies were conducted to investigate the composing process (Hall, 1990), written texts (Cook, 1988), correlations between L1 and ESL writing ability (Cook, 1988), organizational pattern (Hirose, 2003), word identifications (Wang & Coda, 2007), and written text features including fluency, accuracy, and quality. As for fluency, many studies (e.g., Silva, 1990) reported that texts written in English were shorter. Studies related to the accuracies revealed that more errors were made when students write in English (e.g., Silva, 1990). Studies investigating quality (e.g., Xu, 1990) showed less effective texts (i.e., received lower holistic scores).

What is more important than observation is to know the students' attitudes about the differences in writing in the first and second languages (Silva, 1992). Regarding the writing attitudes, students may dislike writing for different reasons such as the lack of interest and motivation (Cumberworth & Hunt, 1998), lack of sufficient opportunities to practice writing (Buhrke et al., 2002), and being anxious about peer response. Among all, motivation is regarded as one of the most important factor that encourage student to write (Thang, Ting, Nurjanah, 2011). Thus, students should be given chances of success in the writing class. "An attention to attitude will offer students the chance to see how and what they bring to writing influences what they can ultimately achieve in writing" (Yancey, 1992, p. 116). Students usually have the various tendencies, beliefs and myths in their practices and attitudes of writing such as having a tendency to view writing as a discrete act or product, separate from reading, research and reflection or discovery of ideas. Moreover, students believe that writing is a recipe comprising rules of Standard English. Students also think that the rules of Standard English are arbitrary grammar school rules rather than a writer's control over the flow of ideas. Furthermore, students believe in writing the introduction and thesis before the paper, and finding a real thesis in the end. In

addition, students do not understand the benefits of writing as discovery towards quantification (how many pages? how many words? how many sentences?), and they fall into commonplaces, rather than sustaining a controversial opinion and argument. Students know abstract grammatical rules but cannot use them. Finally, students want models or forms (recipes) rather than learn principles of excellence (Blackford, 2004).

Many researchers have conducted empirical studies about students' attitudes of writing (Buhrke et al., 2002; Yong, 2010). Students' tendencies, beliefs and myths in their practices of writing were investigated in a research study by Yancey (1992). The study showed that most students tend to perceive writing as a product rather than a process which is almost not connected or relevant to reading, researching and mentally reflecting or discovering new ideas. Secondly, the students viewed writing as a product consisting of arbitrary grammar rules and not a process based on the writer's flow of ideas and thoughts. They also tended to focus on how many sentences or pages they had written instead of discovering new ideas. Moreover, they did not sustain controversial opinion and argument in their writing, and tended to be familiar with abstract grammar rules rather than applying them to writing. Finally, they followed certain models of writing instead of learning to write creatively. Therefore, it is important to provide learners with opportunities to practice writing successfully.

A project on writing process was carried out by Cumberworth and Hunt (1998) among seventh and eighth graders in a low to middle class community located in western Illinois, U.S.A. Three types of intervention namely authentic purposes for writing, a change in the amount and quality of instructional strategies, and emphasizing meta-cognitive strategies related to the writing process were implemented by the researchers. The findings showed that the students increased their positive attitudes of writing as an academic and life-long skill. They also enhanced their writing process and in particular, writing revision. Similarly, in implementing a writing programme to enhance the attitudes of fourth and fifth-grade classrooms in three elementary schools in the western suburbs of Chicago, Pierce et al. (1997) found that not only the participating students increased their positive attitudes of writing, but also they became more motivated and confident in writing.

In addition, Buhrke et al. (2002) conducted a writing project which aimed at enhancing fourth grade students' writing skill attitudes of writing. The project comprised writing rubrics, modeling the writing process, exposure to various genres of writing, increasing writing frequency and duration, facilitation of authentic and meaningful writing, and journaling weekly. The results obtained from analyzing the data collected through post-student writing prompts and writing attitude surveys revealed that the students became more fluent in writing, and their writing performance was enhanced as indicated by the increased scores and positive attitudes to writing.

Furthermore, three models of the structural relationship between the writing achievement and primary grade students' attitude towards writing was investigated. The models tested were first, writing attitude influences writing achievement in a unidirectional manner. Second, writing achievement influences writing attitude in a unidirectional manner. Third, the effects of writing attitude and achievement are bidirectional and reciprocal. The model that best fit the data was based on the assumption that writing attitude influences writing achievement. The direct path between attitude and achievement in this model was statistically significant (Graham, Berninger & Fan, 2007).

Moreover, the relationship between motivation/attitude and L2 writing was investigated. Participants were TEFL students that were selected randomly. Data were collected through using

Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery Questionnaire. A Writing Proficiency Test was administered to assess the participants' English writing proficiency level, respectively. Although results indicated no relationship between the participants with instrumental type of motivation and success in L2 academic writing, there was a relationship between integrative type of motivation and the participants' writing skill. Although there was no relationship between negative attitude and success in L2 writing; there was a relationship between positive attitude and the writing skill (Hashemian&Heidari, 2013).

Reviewing the literature revealed that there are some studies on writing attitudes and the comparison between L1 and ESL writing from various aspects. However, there are not enough studies comparing L1 and English language writers' experiences and attitudes toward writing. Investigation of attitudes towards writing can be effective for improving students' writing because knowing the students' attitudes towards writing in L1 and L2 (English language) might help instructors to propose better instructional approach.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Writing in L1 and ESL contexts has been investigated in various aspects. However, due to the importance of writing and the effects of attitude on writing achievements, more studies are required to compare students' writing experiences and attitudes in L1 and English language. Moreover, while the studies mentioned in the literature are informative, there are not enough studies that primarily focus on the students' experiences and attitudes in their L1 and English language. Therefore, the present study attempts to find the answer to the question "What are the ESL students' writing experiences and attitudes for their L1 and English language?"

### **METHODOLOGY**

A quasi-experimental design is similar to randomized experimental design in that it involves manipulation of an independent variable but differs in that subjects are not assigned randomly (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). Since the participants of this study are not selected randomly, this research is a quasi-experimental study that employs a mixed-method approach. In line with what Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2009) mentioned whereby the sample size of minimum 30 subjects is reasonable in the context of the quasi-experimental study, the participants of the present study were thirty tertiary ESL students enrolled in an obligatory course in the first year of Bachelor of Arts (English) programme, comprising 7 males (23.3%) and 23 females (76.7%). Out of the 30 participants, 40% of them were in the age range of 18-20 years old, while the rest were 21-23 years old. Participants had different first languages: Malay (76.7%), Mandarin (13.3%), Tamil (6.7%), and French (3.3%). Most of them (86.7%) had obtained a band score of 4 on the Malaysian University English Test (MUET), while the rest (13.3%) had a band score of 5. The highest MUET band is 6, and the lowest is 1.

Data collection instruments used in this study were a questionnaire (see Appendix A) and interview (see Appendix B). The purpose of the questionnaire was to find out the participants' attitudes and experiences to writing in L1 and English. All the participants responded to the questionnaire. The questionnaire begins with enquiring respondents' profile, followed by sections A and B on attitudes to writing in L1 and English. Each section contains 20 items adapted from the writing attitude questionnaire designed by Podsen (1997). Responses are given based on a four-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Items in section C are related to students' writing experiences in L1 and English. Creswell (2008) believed that

content and face validity of the questionnaire should be admitted by a panel of experts. Therefore, in the present study a panel of experts comprising of ESL instructors and researchers from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) (see Appendix C), validated the content and face validity of the questionnaire. In addition, the questionnaire was piloted among 28 Bachelor of Arts ESL students. The purpose of piloting the questionnaire was to test the internal reliability of the instrument and to accommodate to the possible problems that can be encountered in the administration process due to the wording of the items (Cheng, 1998). Following the studies in the literatures (e.g., Salehi&Yunus, 2012), three of the thirty participants in the pilot study were also randomly selected for cognitive interview (Cohen & Manion, 1989). This method was employed for ensuring construct validation and to determine the participants' level of understanding of the items in the questionnaire as intended by the researcher. Besides, the participants' point of view on the questionnaire structure, items, and wordings helped to shape the final draft of the questionnaire (Salehi&Yunus, 2012). To test the internal reliability of the questionnaire, cronbach alpha coefficient was calculated. According to Wu (2008) a cronbach alpha  $> .6000$  can be considered acceptable for reliability. The reliability level for Sections A and B of the questionnaire is 0.93 and 0.87 respectively.

Another data collection method used in the study was a semi-structured interview (see Appendix C). The semi-structured interview was conducted to triangulate the data obtained from the questionnaire. Due to the depth and extent of the information sought in the interview, there was no general rule about the number of participants to be interviewed. However, the primary criterion of sample size is redundancy of information. Sampling should be terminated when no new information is obtained from new individual interviewee, referred to as "data saturation" (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010, p. 429). Therefore, in the current study 18 participants (more than half of the participants) were interviewed individually. Concerns addressed in the interview were: 1) participants' attitudes to writing in L1 and English, and 2) participants' experiences of writing in L1 and English. Recording of the interview sessions were done to ensure the validity of the interview questions (Basit, 2010). The same panel of experts also ensured that the interview questions were appropriate and clear. Moreover, for both the pilot and actual studies, the researchers conducted the interviews. The selected time and venue of the interview were based on mutual agreement between the researcher and the students. The interview sessions were tape recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The participants' writing experiences and attitudes in L1 and English are discussed in this section followed by the participants' interview responses to the experiences and attitudes in L1 and English.

### **PARTICIPANTS' WRITING EXPERIENCES IN L1 AND ENGLISH**

To report the participant's writing experiences in L1 and English, it is essential to explain what we mean by writing and process writing. Writing is considered as a general concept. It is a major language skill that is a means for communicating and developing of ideas. Process writing refers to writing in several stages, for example, planning, drafting, and revising. Based on these two concepts, the results revealed that 50% of the participants confirmed that their teachers asked

them to write in groups in L1, while 76.7% of them were asked to write in groups by their teachers in English language writing class. In terms of process writing in L1, 63.3% of the participants experienced process writing individually, while about 36.7% experienced process writing in groups. In comparison, more participants experienced process writing individually in L1 than process writing in a group. With regard to process writing in English, the results revealed that the participants experienced process writing individually (56.7%) more than writing in a group (43.3%). Therefore, comparing the participants' process writing in L1 and English, they have mostly experienced group process writing in English.

In addition, the participants' experiences showed that in L1 writing classes, teachers mostly chose the writing topic for them (66.7%), while in English writing classes, participants commonly (73.3%) selected the topic. In terms of using computers in L1 and English language writing classes, 53.3% of the participants in L1 and 63.3% in English language used computer in their writing classes. Moreover, 36.7% of the participants wrote online group essay in L1 writing classes, while in English writing classes, 56.7% had such experience. Thus, more participants experienced writing online group essay in English.

Regarding the responsibility for writing improvement, 70% of participants felt that the responsibility was on the students to improve their writing skill, while 30% believed that teachers had such responsibility. However, in English language writing classes, 46.6% believed that students was responsible to improve their writing skill, while 53.3% declared that teacher were responsible (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Participants' writing experiences in L1 and English

	Items	L1		English	
		N	%	N	%
a	My writing teacher asked me to write in a group.	15	50	23	76.7
b	Process writing refers to writing in several stages. Teacher often asked me to do process writing individually.	19	63.3	17	56.7
c	Teacher often asked me to do process writing in a group.	11	36.7	13	43.3
d	The topic for writing was chosen by the students.	10	33.3	22	73.3
e	The topic for writing was chosen by the teacher.	20	66.7	8	26.7
t	I used a computer to write in the writing class.	16	53.3	19	63.3
g	I used a computer connected to the Internet to write in the writing class.	10	33.3	20	66.7
h	I have written an essay online in a group.	11	36.7	11	56.7
i	I was responsible to improve my own writing skill.	21	70	14	46.6
j	My teacher was responsible for improving my writing skill.	9	30	16	53.3

The participants' experiences of writing activities in L1 and English were also investigated (see Table 2). Results showed that 16.7% of the participants wrote their email in L1, while the rest (83.3%) used English. For writing informal letters, 46.7% of the participants wrote in L1, 46.7% wrote in English, and about 6.7% did not write informal letters at all. Where writing on Facebook is concerned, 16.7% of the participants used L1 to write, while 83.3% used English. Ten percent of the participants used L1 blogs, 33.3% used English, and 56.7% of them did not

have blogs. Besides, a small number of participants was familiar with wiki. Ten percent of the participants used English to write on wiki, and 90% did not use wiki. With regards to daily planner, 46.7% of the participants wrote in L1, while 30% in English. Moreover, 40% of the participants used L1 for writing in Messenger and chat, while 60% wrote in English. For writing short notes, 63.3% of the participants used L1, while 36.7% used English. More than half of the participants used English (56.7%) and 43.3% of the participants used L1 for writing SMSes on mobile phones. Finally, 10% of the participants tweeted in English, while the majority did not tweet at all. Thus, except for daily planner and short notes, the participants used mostly English for the mentioned writing activities.

TABLE 2. Participants' writing activities in L1 and English

	Items	L1		English		Not Used	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
a	Email	5	16.7	25	83.3		
b	Informal letter	14	46.7	14	46.7	2	6.7
c	Facebook	5	16.7	25	83.3		
d	Blog	3	10	10	33.3	17	56.7
e	Wiki			3	10	27	90
f	Daily planner	14	46.7	9	30	7	23.3
g	Messenger and chat	12	40	18	60		
h	Short Notes/messages	19	63.3	11	36.7		
i	SMS through cell phone	13	43.3	17	56.7		
j	Twitter			3	10	27	90

From the interview responses, 55.6% of the participants preferred using English, 16.6% preferred L1, and 27.8% did not have a specific language preference because they could write in either language. Some participants preferred English because of the presence of some abbreviations that made writing in English less difficult. For example, Hassan said:

I choose English language because it is easy to communicate and understand the purpose of the person you are communicating with. It also is quicker to write in English. It has some abbreviations that make writing in English easier that are not in my own language.

Nurul chose English for various writing activities because she learned English from childhood and she felt comfortable writing in English. According to her:

Although my L1 is Malay, I was taught to write in English language since I was a kid. So, I am more comfortable with writing in English language.

However, Siti believed that L1 is easier because it is her mother tongue and is used naturally. Another participant, Noor, responded differently. Her preference for which language to write in depended on the situation. She stated:

I like to write in both L1 and English. It depends on the person and the situation I am going to write for. For example, if I am sending a message to my friends or someone whom I know from school time, I choose the first language. For contacting to the instructors, I choose English language since my major is English.

## PARTICIPANTS' ATTITUDES TO WRITING IN L1 AND ENGLISH

The writing attitude questionnaire is based on a four-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Item analyses of the questionnaire provide a clear picture of the participants' attitudes to writing in L1 and English.

### FREQUENCY RESPONSES OF THE PARTICIPANTS' ATTITUDES TO WRITING IN L1

There are some points worth discussing based on the information obtained from the participants' L1 attitude to writing questionnaire (see Table 3). One concerns item 3 of the questionnaire. According to the obtained results, about 80% of the participants agreed that their minds go blank while writing in L1. This finding indicates that they suffered from lack of ideas in their attempt to write. Consistent with this is the finding for item 10 in which the majority of the participants (93.3%) agreed that they were not able to write down their ideas clearly in L1. This, too, is indicative that the participants did not perceive themselves to be able to brainstorm a number of ideas on a certain topic in L1, and they had difficulty generating ideas in L1. As for item 4, more than 70% of the participants agreed that expressing their ideas through writing in L1 is a waste of time.

TABLE 3. Attitudes to writing in L1

No.	Item	1	2	3	4	Mean	SD
1	I avoid writing in my first language whenever possible.	6.7	23.3	50	20	2.8333	.83391
2	I look forward to writing down my ideas in my first Language.	6.7	23.3	56.7	13.3	2.7667	.77385
3	My mind seems to go blank when I start writing in my first Language.	6.7	13.3	50	30	3.0333	.85029
4	Expressing my ideas through writing in my first Language is a waste of time.	16.7	13.3	36.7	33.3	2.8667	1.07425
5	I like to write my ideas down in my first Language.	3.3	26.7	56.7	13.3	2.8000	.71438
6	Others seem to enjoy what I write in my first language.	3.3	16.7	63.3	16.7	2.9333	.69149
7	I like to have my friends read what I have written in my first Language.	3.3	16.7	63.3	16.7	2.9333	.69149
8	I enjoy writing in my first language.	6.7	13.3	56.7	23.3	2.9667	.80872
9	I think I can express my thoughts easily when writing in my first Language.	6.7	13.3	53.3	26.7	3.0000	.83045
10	I never seem to be able to write down my ideas clearly in my first language.	3.3	3.3	73.3	20	3.1000	.60743
11	I'm not a good writer in my first language.	13.3	16.7	56.7	13.3	2.7000	.87691
12	I like seeing my thoughts on paper in my first language.	3.3	20	60	16.7	2.9000	.71197
13	Discussing my writing in my first language with others is an enjoyable activity.	13.3	10	60	16.7	2.8000	.88668
14	It is easy for me to write good essays in my first language	13.3	16.7	50	20	2.7667	.093526
15	I don't think I write as well as most people in my first language.	10	43.3	36.7	10	2.4667	.81931

16	Writing in my first language is a lot of fun.	6.7	16.7	63.3	13.3	2.8333	.74664
17	Writing in my first language is less difficult than writing in English.	6.7	40	26.7	26.7	2.7333	.94443
18	When I have something to express, I would rather write it in my first language than say it.	3.3	43.3	43.3	10	2.6000	.72397
19	I think writing in my first language is difficult.	26.7	43.3	20	10	2.1333	.93710
20	Writing in my first language is more complicated than writing in English.	23.3	33.3	33.3	10	2.3000	.95231

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With regard to item 6, about 80% of the participants confirmed that others had enjoyed what they wrote in their L1. This means that what the participants wrote, appealed to others and was enjoyable to read. Put it another way, participants were satisfied with their written output. This is similar with item 7 whereby 80% of the participants liked their friends to read their writing in L1. The reason could be the fact that participants preferred to have others' comments, suggestions, and feedback as a resource to improve their writing skill more. This is in correspondence with item 13 that showed 76.7% of the participants liked to discuss their writings with others.

Another item worth nothing is item 8. It shows 80% of the participants confirmed that they had enjoyed writing in their L1. This can be related to item 11, in which about 70% of the participants perceived themselves to be good writers in their L1. Item 16 also showed that 76.6% of the participants believed that writing in their L1 was a lot of fun. Moreover, in item 14, 70% of the participants admitted that writing good essays in their L1 was easy. This is similar with item 19 where about 70% of the participants found that writing in L1 was not difficult.

In addition, individual interviews about the participants' attitudes to writing in general and in L1 showed that more than half of the participants (55.6%) liked to write in general while 44.4% did not like to write. One of the participants, NurNadiyahana, liked to write because she thought it as a way of conveying the thoughts and ideas without face to face interaction. On the other hand, Hasnaa did not like to write because of being lonely and lack of communication. She said:

I do not like to write since I have to stay lonely and write something without any response. I prefer to talk to others and communicate rather than sitting alone and write.

Noor Adila had a similar idea but with a different reason. She did not like to write because it was not interesting for her, and sometimes she got a low score in writing. She responded:

I do not like writing because it is quite boring to sit a long time and write, I mean it is not interesting to do it alone, and sometimes I get a low score from writing course.

Besides, interview responses revealed that 44.4% of the participants liked to write in L1, while 55.6% felt otherwise. Participants had different reasons. Suzi said:

Generally, I like to write in my L1 because I learned it in my school time, and it is the first language that I learned.

Chong did not like to write in L1 because her first language, Mandarin, was really difficult. She explained:

Writing in my L1 is not as good as my writing in English. My first language is Mandarin. You know, speaking is different from writing. Writing in mandarin is really difficult. I mean it's difficult to remember the structure of the words. I have to memorize the words one by one if you forget one, the whole paragraph would be quite hard to understand.

**FREQUENCY RESPONSES OF THE PARTICIPANTS' ATTITUDES TO WRITING IN ENGLISH**

The participants' responses to writing attitudes questionnaire to English (see Table 4) showed that, for item 3 about 76.7% of the participants agreed that their minds go blank during writing in English. This illustrates that, similar to writing in L1, participants did not have enough ideas for writing in English. This can be related to item 10 that 53.3% of the participants agreed that they were not able to write down their ideas clearly in English. This shows that the participants did not think positively about their own ability to generate ideas on a certain topic in English. As for item 4, all participants (100%) agreed that expressing their ideas through writing in English is a waste of time. This implies that the participants had problems on elaborating their ideas through writing in English.

TABLE 4. Attitudes to writing in English

No.	Item	1	2	3	4	Mean	SD
1	I avoid writing in English whenever possible.		13.3	56.7	30.0	3.1667	.64772
2	I look forward to writing down my ideas in English.		6.7	73.3	20	3.1333	.50742
3	My mind seems to go blank when I start writing in English.	3.3	20.0	66.7	10.0	2.8333	.64772
4	Expressing my ideas through writing in English is a waste of time.			66.7	33.3	3.3333	.47946
5	I like to write my ideas down in English.		6.7	73.3	20.0	3.1333	.50742
6	Others seem to enjoy what I write in English.		23.3	60.0	16.7	2.9333	.63968
7	I like to have my friends read what I have written in English.		6.7	73.3	20.0	3.1333	.50742
8	I enjoy writing in English.			76.7	23.3	3.2333	.43018
9	I think I can express my thoughts easily in writing in English.		33.3	46.7	20.0	2.8667	.73030
10	I never seem to be able to write down my ideas clearly in English.		46.7	43.3	10.0	2.6333	.66868
11	I'm not a good writer in English.	3.3	63.3	26.7	6.7	2.3667	.66868
12	I like seeing my thoughts on paper in English.		16.7	63.3	20.0	3.0333	.61495
13	Discussing my writing in English with others is an enjoyable activity.		6.7	76.7	16.7	3.1000	.48066
14	It is easy for me to write good essays in English.	3.3	40.0	40.0	16.7	2.7000	.79438
15	I don't think I write as well as most people in English.	20.0	53.3	23.3	3.3	2.1000	.75886
16	Writing in English is a lot of fun.			76.7	23.3	3.2333	.43018
17	Writing in English is less difficult than writing in my first language.	3.3	53.3	33.3	10.0	2.5000	.73108
18	When I have something to express, I would rather write it in English than say		40.0	43.3	16.7	2.7667	.72793

	it.							
19	I think writing in English is difficult.	13.3	43.3	40.0	3.3	2.3333	.75810	
20	Writing in English is more complicated than writing in my first language.	10.0	33.3	50.0	6.7	2.5333	.77608	

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For item 6, 76.7 % of the participants expressed that others had enjoyed what they wrote in English. Item 7 also revealed that most of the participants (93.3%) liked their friends read their writing in English. A possible reason could be that they were eager to have others' comments as a resource to improve their own writing. Furthermore, item 13 that showed 93.4% of the participants liked to discuss their writings with others.

Regarding Item 8, all the participants enjoyed writing in English. Moreover, in item 11, about 66.6% of the participants regarded themselves as good writers in English that is consistent with item 16 in which all of the participants (100%) claimed that writing in English was a lot of fun. Besides, in item 14, 56.7% of the participants declared that writing good essays in English was easy. This is in consistent with item 19 where about 56.6% of the participants found that writing in English wasnot difficult.

The findings through the interview helped us to gain more information about the participants' attitudes to writing in English. Interview responses revealed that 77.8% participants liked to write in English, for example, Nurul believed:

Although English language is not my mother tongue, I have been almost always learned to think and write in English.

Hassan believed that he liked to write in English because his major was English. He said:

I would say English language because it is an international language and makes communication easy with people from all over the world. Rather than this, we are English language students, and we need to improve our English language.

However, Chong, one of the Chinese participants declared that she liked to write in English because English language helped her to express everything easier than her First language. According to her:

English is a language that helps me to express my feelings, emotions, and my thoughts easier than Mandarin. In fact, I used to write in English. All those education I have had from secondary school was on English. My first language is really difficult to write in. Generally, I like to write in English.

#### COMPARING THE PARTICIPANTS' ATTITUDES TO WRITING IN L1 AND ENGLISH

To analyze the collected data quantitatively and to choose a proper statistical test, the normality of data should be checked which shows whether parametric or non-parametric tests are required for the calculation (Field, 2009). To compare participants' attitudes to writing in L1 and English, the normality of data was checked with skewness and kurtosis. "A skewness and kurtosis value between -1 and +1 is considered excellent for most psychometric purposes, but a value between -2 and +2 can be acceptable" (George & Mallery, 2003, p. 98). The results showed that the items on attitude to writing in L1 and English enjoyed normal distribution except item 10 in L1 writing attitude (see Table 5). This allowed the researcher to proceed with paired sample t-test to compare writing attitude in L1 and English for each item except for item 10 that was compared through Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test (see Table 6). T-tests are parametric tests based on the

normal distribution. There are two main assumptions that make using T-test possible. First assumption is that the sampling distribution is normally distributed and second, data are measured at least at the interval level (Field, 2009).

TABLE 5. Normality test for the participants' attitudes to writing in L1 and English

Items in L1/English	N	Skewness		Kurtosis	
		Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Item 1- L1	30	-.432	.427	-.083	.833
Item1- English	30	-.166	.427	-.502	.833
Item 2- L1	30	-.515	.427	.354	.833
Item2- English	30	.266	.427	.945	.833
Item 3- L1	30	-.787	.427	.445	.833
Item3- English	30	-.650	.427	1.426	.833
Item 4- L1	30	-.612	.427	-.806	.833
Item4- English	30	.745	.427	-1.554	.833
Item 5- L1	30	-.292	.427	.261	.833
Item5- English	30	.266	.427	.945	.833
Item 6- L1	30	-.583	.427	1.160	.833
Item6- English	30	.054	.427	-.352	.833
Item 7- L1	30	-.583	.427	1.160	.833
Item7- English	30	.266	.427	.945	.833
Item 8- L1	30	-.776	.427	.768	.833
Item8- English	30	1.328	.427	-.257	.833
Item 9- L1	30	-.774	.427	.587	.833
Item9- English	30	.214	.427	-1.019	.833
Item 10- L1	30	-1.029	.427	4.406	.833
Item10- English	30	.586	.427	-.589	.833
Item 11- L1	30	-.664	.427	-.025	.833
Item11- English	30	.897	.427	.769	.833
Item 12- L1	30	-.467	.427	.673	.833
Item12- English	30	-.016	.427	-.092	.833
Item 13- L1	30	-.852	.427	.342	.833
Item13- English	30	.319	.427	1.599	.833
Item 14- L1	30	-.581	.427	-.309	.833
Item14- English	30	.168	.427	-.609	.833
Item 15- L1	30	.114	.427	-.327	.833
Item15- English	30	.335	.427	.041	.833
Item 16- L1	30	-.779	.427	1.089	.833
Item16- English	30	1.328	.427	-.257	.833
Item 17- L1	30	.055	.427	-1.089	.833
Item17- English	30	.567	.427	-.089	.833
Item 18- L1	30	.210	.427	-.234	.833
Item18- English	30	.396	.427	-.957	.833
Item 19- L1	30	.527	.427	-.421	.833
Item19- English	30	-.151	.427	-.398	.833
Item 20- L1	30	.108	.427	-.886	.833
Item20- English	30	-.356	.427	-.138	.833
<b>Overall-L1</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>-.031</b>	<b>.427</b>	<b>0.573</b>	<b>.833</b>
<b>Overall- English</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>1.187</b>	<b>.427</b>	<b>.901</b>	<b>.833</b>

Of the 20 items of attitude to writing in L1 and English questionnaire, only three items had statistically significant difference between participants' attitude to writing in L1 and English, including item 4 ( $t(29) = -2.249, P > .05$ ), item10 ( $Z = -2.846, p < .05$ ), and item16 ( $t(29) = -$

2.183,  $P > .05$ ). Participants' responses to items 4 and 10 were significantly higher in attitude to writing in L1 and item 16 was significantly higher in attitude to writing in English (see Table 6). Although not statistically recording significant difference, most of the remaining items did receive higher mean for attitude to writing in English than L1 such as item 2 (I look forward to writing down my ideas in English), item 5 (I like to write my ideas down in English), item 7 (I like to have my friends read what I have written in English), item 8 (I enjoy writing in English), item 12 (I like seeing my thoughts on paper in English), item 13 (Discussing my writing in English with others is an enjoyable activity), and item 18 (When I have something to express, I would rather write it in English than say it). Besides, the overall items ( $t(29) = -0.543$ ,  $p > .05$ ) revealed that although there was not any statistically significant difference among attitude to writing in L1 and English (see Table 6), the results showed higher mean for attitude to writing in English.

TABLE 6. Summary of the mean differences between the participants' attitudes in L1 and English for each item

No	Item	L1		English		t	Z	Sig (2tailed)
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
1	I avoid writing in L1/English whenever possible.	2.83	.834	3.17	.648	-1.471		.152
2	I look forward to writing down my ideas in L1/English	2.77	.774	3.13	.507	-1.943		.062
3	My mind seems to go blank when I start writing in L1/English.	3.03	.850	2.83	.648	.812		.423
4	Expressing my ideas through writing in L1/English is a waste of time.	2.87	1.074	2.63	.479	-2.249		.032
5	I like to write my ideas down in L1/English.	2.80	.714	3.13	.507	-1.904		.067
6	Others seem to enjoy what I write in L1/English.	2.93	.691	2.93	.640	.000		1.000
7	I like to have my friends read what I have written in L1/English.	2.93	.691	3.13	.507	-1.140		.264
8	I enjoy writing in L1/English.	2.97	.809	3.23	.430	-1.352		.187
9	I think I can express my thoughts easily in writing in L1/English.	3.00	.830	2.87	.730	.519		.608
10	I never seem to be able to write down my ideas clearly in L1/English.	3.10	.607	2.63	.669		-2.84	.004
11	I'm not a good writer in L1/English.	2.70	.877	2.37	.669	1.471		.152
12	I like seeing my thoughts on paper in L1/English.	2.90	.712	3.03	.615	-.660		.514
13	Discussing my writing in L1/English with others is an enjoyable activity.	2.80	.887	3.10	.481	-1.663		.107
14	It is easy for me to write good essays in L1/English.	2.77	.935	2.70	.794	.258		.798
15	I don't think I write as well as most people in L1/English.	2.47	.819	2.10	.759	1.733		.094
16	Writing in L1/English is a lot of	2.83	.747	3.23	.430	-2.183		.037

	fun.							
17	Writing in English is less difficult than writing in my first language.	2.73	944	2.50	.731	.793		.434
18	When I have something to express, I would rather write it in L1/English than say it.	2.60	.724	2.77	.728	-.817		.420
19	I think writing in L1/English is difficult.	2.13	.937	2.33	.758	-.769		.448
20	Writing in English is more complicated than writing in my first language.	2.30	.952	2.53	.776	-.763		.452
<b>Overall</b>		69.75	9.64	71.33	8.57	-	.543	.592

Besides, the same participants were interviewed to investigate if writing in L1 or English was easier. About 33.3% believed that writing L1 and English was the same, 22% believed that writing in L1 was easier and 44.5% reported that English was less difficult. For example, Farhan believed that:

For writing there are some principles that we should learn. Then, we do not have any problem in writing, no matter in L1 or English. I mean English and L1 are the same.

However, Li Yuan, one of the Chinese participants thought differently. She mentioned:

I think English is easier. Because Mandarin is a quite difficult language, it is easy to speak but difficult to write that is why I prefer to write in English language.

Moreover, Noor Adila believed that L1 is easier as mentioned in the following excerpt:

L1 is easier since it is my mother tongue and since I was born all the family spoke in this language with me and I learned it naturally.

## CONCLUSION

The obtained results about participants' writing experiences revealed that process writing and online writing in a group was not something new for students, especially in English language writing classes. Moreover, participants mostly preferred English rather than L1 for various writing activities in their daily lives.

Additionally, the participants were interviewed to find out whether they liked to write in general. The obtained results showed that most of the participants liked to write in general and those who did not like to write, presented different reasons such as having negative attitude to writing which corroborate with the findings from Cuevas's (1995) study, having the low score in writing and lack of motivation that is similar to the findings of Pierce et al.'s (1997) study, not being interested in topic that is consistent with the findings of Loudermilk's (1997) study, and lack of interest and feeling of being lonely. Some of the participants mentioned that they did not like to write alone, and they liked to write with others because in this case, writing was more fun and more useful in a way that it improved their writing skill. Writing in groups also decreased the students' anxiety (Storch, 2005). Besides, participants could learn many things from their friends and writing process was not difficult any more.

Furthermore, the comparison of overall items in attitude to writing in L1 and English revealed that although there was not any statistically significant difference among attitude to

writing in L1 and English, the results showed higher mean for attitude to writing in English. Besides, comparing each item in attitude to writing in L1 and English questionnaire revealed that only three items had statistically significant differences between L1 and English including items 4,10, and 16. Although not statistically significant difference, most of the remaining items did receive higher mean for attitude to writing in English than L1. It shows participants may have had a bit more positive attitude to English than L1.

The participants' responses to the interview questions gave us a clear picture of students' attitude to writing in L1 and English. Some participants in response to the interview question about which language is easier to write in mentioned that act of writing is the same in English and L1 (Van Weijen et al., 2009), some preferred L1 for writing and mostly preferred English. Since this study was conducted in Malaysia, participants had different L1, but most of them were trained to read and write in English language from childhood specially those who originally were Indian and Chinese as well as some of the Malaysian participants. This can be one of the reasons why they prefer English. Another reason mentioned by some of the Chinese participants was the fact that their L1 was different from English. In other words, it was difficult to write and construct a sentence in Mandarin. The third reason was that they were English language students, and they tried to write everything in English to improve their English language. These three main reasons make it acceptable why they preferred English to L1 for various writing activities and why they may have a bit better attitude to English.

Future studies can be conducted in different contexts with larger groups of participants. Moreover, gender can be considered to compare male and female attitudes to writing in L1 and English. Additionally, the reason that male and female student present for their attitudes to writing in L1 and English can be helpful in improving the participants' attitude to writing skills that may results in improving the students' writing skill.

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**APPENDIX A**

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

**WRITING ATTITUDE AND EXPERIENCE**

**Purpose of the Questionnaire:**The purpose of this questionnaire is to investigate students’ attitudes and experience toward writing in their first language and English language.

**Instructions to Respondents:**Do not spend too much time on any one item, but give the response that best describes your opinion. Please read each item carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree. Please tick (✓) your response to all items.

**Respondent Profile**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Major: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender:  Male  Female

Age:  18-20  21-23  24-26

First Language: \_\_\_\_\_

English Proficiency (Band/Score): IELTS ( ) TOEFL ( ) SPM English ( ) STPM English ( ) MUET ( )

**Section A: Writing in the First Language**

	<b>Options Items</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
1.	I avoid writing in my first language whenever possible.				
2.	I look forward to writing down my ideas in my first language.				
3.	My mind seems to go blank when I start writing in my first language.				
4.	Expressing my ideas through writing in my first language is a waste of time.				
5.	I like to write my ideas down in my first language.				
6.	Others seem to enjoy what I write in my first language.				
7.	I like to have my friends read what I have written in my first language.				
8.	I enjoy writing in my first language.				
9.	I think I can express my thoughts				

	easily when writing in my first language.				
10.	I never seem to be able to write down my ideas clearly in my first language.				
11.	I am not a good writer in my first language.				
12.	I like seeing my thoughts on paper in my first language.				
13.	Discussing my writing in my first language with others is an enjoyable activity.				
14.	It is easy for me to write good essays in my first language				
15.	I do not think I write as well as most people in my first language.				
16.	Writing in my first language is a lot of fun.				
17.	Writing in my first language is less difficult than writing in English.				
18.	When I have something to express, I would rather write it in my first language than say it.				
19.	I think writing in my first language is difficult.				
20.	Writing in my first language is more complicated than writing in English.				

**Section B: Writing in English**

	<b>Options Items</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
1.	I avoid writing in English whenever possible.				
2.	I look forward to writing down my ideas in English.				
3.	My mind seems to go blank when I start writing in English.				
4.	Expressing my ideas through writing in English is a waste of time.				
5.	I like to write my ideas down in English.				

6.	Others seem to enjoy what I write in English.				
7.	I like to have my friends read what I have written in English.				
8.	I enjoy writing in English.				
9.	I think I can express my thoughts easily in writing in English.				
10.	I never seem to be able to write down my ideas clearly in English.				
11.	I am not a good writer in English.				
12.	I like seeing my thoughts on paper in English.				
13.	Discussing my writing in English with others is an enjoyable activity.				
14.	It is easy for me to write good essays in English.				
15.	I do not think I write as well as most people in English.				
16.	Writing in English is a lot of fun.				
17.	Writing in English is less difficult than writing in my first language.				
18.	When I have something to express, I would rather write it in English than say it.				
19.	I think writing in English is difficult.				
20.	Writing in English is more complicated than writing in my first language.				

**Section C: Writing Experience in First Language and English Language**

1. Below is a series of items concerning your experience in First Language and English Language writing classes. Please tick (✓) your response in both columns to the corresponding items.

	Items	First Language	English Language
a.	My writing teacher asked me to write in a group.		
b.	Process writing refers to writing in several stages. Teacher often asked me to do process writing individually.		
c.	Teacher often asked me to do process writing in a group.		
d.	The topic for writing was chosen by the students.		
e.	The topic for writing was chosen by the teacher.		
f.	I used a computer to write in the writing class.		
g.	I used a computer connected to the Internet to write in the writing class.		
h.	I have written an essay online in a group.		
i.	I was responsible to improve my own writing skill.		
j.	My teacher was responsible for improving my writing skill.		

2. If you are involved in the following writing activities, please tick (✓) whether you write in your first or English language.

	Writing Activities	First Language	English Language	Not used
a.	Email			
b.	Informal letter			
c.	Facebook			
d.	Blog			
e.	Wiki			
f.	Daily planner			
g.	Messenger and chat			
h.	Short Notes/Messages			
i.	SMS through cell phone			
j.	Twitter			

Items in section A and B have been adapted from:

Podsen, I. J. (1997). *Written expression: The principal's survival guide*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

## APPENDIX B

### Samples of Interview questions

1. Do you like writing?
2. Do you like to write in your first language? Why?
3. Do you like to write in English language? Why?
4. Writing in which language is less difficult: Your first language or English language? Why?
5. When you want to send an email or leave comments in your facebook do you write in your First language or English Language. Why?

## APPENDIX C

### Panel of Experts

The panels of experts were:

- i. Supyan Hussin(PhD)is Associate Professor in the School of Language Studies and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
- ii. Bee Hoon Tan(PhD) is Associate Professor in the Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, at Universiti Putra Malaysia.
- iii. Mei Fung Yong(PhD) is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, at Universiti Putra Malaysia.
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