

The Interplay between L1 and L2 Writing Proficiency

Ferri Yonantha¹

*STAIN Sultan Abdurrahman Kepulauan Riau
ferriyonantha@gmail.com*

Nanda Kristia Santoso²

*STIE Pembangunan Tanjungpinang
nandamasda@gmail.com*

Taqiyuddin³

*STAIN Sultan Abdurrahman Kepulauan Riau
taqiyuddin@stainkepri.ac.id*

Lina Eka Retnaningsih⁴

*STAIN Sultan Abdurrahman Kepulauan Riau
lina@stainkepri.ac.id*

Hairunnizam⁵

*STAIN Sultan Abdurrahman Kepulauan Riau
hairunnizam@gmail.com*

Corresponding author: Ferri Yonantha, ferriyonantha@gmail.com

Abstract

Today, there is still a combative discussion on the domination of mother tongue (L1) use on second/foreign language acquisition (L2). Particularly, whether or not the use of mother tongue directly affects the ability to write in L2. Experts differ in their opinions on whether mother tongue positively or negatively affects foreign language writing proficiency. This study aims to investigate the interplay between Indonesian (L1) and English (L2) and how significant L1 influences students' ability to write in L2. The case is for Indonesian University context specifically on how L1 applied at pre writing stage could bring some impacts on their English writing. A pre experimental one-group-pre-test-post-test design was employed involving 15 students of English Education Major of a public University in Indonesia as the respondents who were examined through a Purposive Sampling technique. In addition, to analyze the obtain the data of students' writing proficiency Pre-test and post-test were conducted as research instruments. Finally, the findings showed that the Sig.(2-Tailed) value is $0.001 < 0.05$ with the conclusion that there is a significant interplay of the use of Indonesian language on the students' writing ability in English which if represented by 47%.

Keywords: *Interplay, First Language (L1), Second/foreign Language (L2), Indonesian, English.*

INTRODUCTION

There has always been a vigorous debate over whether or not the use of mother tongue, also called first language (L1), is necessary in second language (L2) learning. This debate has given rise to the term language dichotomy. A strong statement regarding the control of this language dichotomy is to use the L2 exclusively and fully (Garcia & Wei, 2014). This is believed to be because L1 interferes with learning (Chamber, 1991;

Halliwell and Jones, 1991; Macdonald, 1993; Garcia & Wei, 2014) and reduces the use of L2 (Cook, 2001). Using the L2 in totality will create real learning and develop students' foreign language/L2 skills automatically. In other words, thinking and using the L2 system in learning L2 without L1 intervention. This thinking is in line with Krashen's (1981) hypothesis of clear input and natural and not contrived second language acquisition. The L2 or target language (foreign language being learned) should be used as the main input for students learning the language so that they can achieve their goal in learning the L2, which is to be able to use, understand, and develop L2 competence.

However, according to other experts, it is wise to involve the use of L1 in learning L2 (Shin, Dixon, & Choi, 2019; Castelotti & Moore in Thompson, 2006; Duff & Polio, 1990). Others argue that the use of L1 in L2 learning is indispensable from a psycholinguistic point of view because it can help reduce students' memory problems (Harbord, 1992; Kern, 1994); to stimulate and maintain student interaction during L2 learning (Brooks and Donato, 1994); improve students' linguistic and cognitive abilities (Scott, 1996); and as a learning tool (Macaro, 2001). The contribution of L1 in L2 learning can be positively benefited. Students can minimize the obstacles in thinking for too long to express what they want to say.

In Indonesia, English is the main foreign language studied in formal education or higher education which always involves four main skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Writing skills are considered to be the most difficult to master because there are so many complex components to learn and mistakes made will be very obvious. Writing in L2 is potentially difficult (Putriani, 2020). There is always an involvement of L1 usage in L2 writing positively and negatively. Other authors (Puspitasari & Yumarnamto, 2020; Scott, 1996; Wang, 2003; Wang and Wen, 2002; Woodall, 2002; and others) believe that L1 is fundamentally beneficial for L2 students in organizing ideas in writing. However, the previous researchers barely discussed on how L1 could be influential in the pre writing phase generating the ideas. This stage is a crucial stage because it can determine whether or not students are able to develop topics into meaningful writing ideas. In addition, this stage also involves the process of acquiring writing ideas and linguistic information that will be used in L2.

Writing skill is one of the compulsory courses that must be mastered by students majoring in English Education at a University in Riau Islands. A preliminary study was

conducted on the third semester students regarding their writing skills, it was found that writing is the most difficult skill to get good grades because of the complex supporting components that must be mastered such as the use of punctuation, capital letters, word selection, grammar, coherence, and cohesion. Many of them still have difficulties in generating main and supporting ideas in writing using English due to limited vocabulary and references in writing. Some of them first write the outline into Indonesian, and some write directly into English.

Therefore, from the description above, the researcher is interested in further investigating how Indonesian language (L1) interplays students' writing ability in English language learning (L2).

METHODS

The researcher employed a Pre-Experimental Research with One-group-pre-test-post-test design. Cresswell (2015) says that this type of design is experimental research where the researcher chooses an existing group of participants rather than individuals because the researcher is unable to form the group of participants themselves. The group is then pre-tested, exposed some treatments and finally post-tested to see the change. The population of this study involved students of class 2022, Department of English Education of a university in Riau Island Province, Indonesia involving 15 students who were purposively selected based on their lower writing ability in the class. Their writing score in the previous semester were “C” or below. To obtain the data of the study, writing tests consisting of pre-test and post-test were given to the students. A pre-test was distributed before the implementation of Indonesian use on the ore stage phase, while the post-test was carried out after treatment. In this case, the respondents brainstormed the ideas that would be poured into their writing into Indonesian first before they start their English writing.

The data collected from pre-test and post-test can be depicted by the several procedures. Firstly, all respondents had not been instructed to brainstorm writing ideas using a particular language they wanted. They were freed to use their own writing patterns. Furthermore, the students received 2 treatment meetings where each meeting the class was directed to brainstorm their writing ideas using Indonesian. After that, post-test was given to them in the form of writing test into English. At this stage, they are guided to generates the ideas in Indonesian before they did some finalization into a qualified

writing product. Finally, their writing score were assessed through an ESL Composition Profile converted into the classification of the students' score which is shown below (Arikunto, 2014).

Table 1. The Score Classification

Score	Categories
80 – 100	Very good
66 – 79	Good
56 – 65	Sufficient
40 – 55	Less
30 – 39	Fail

To determine whether Indonesian Language had significantly impacts on the English writing results, a paired sample T-test was employed using SPSS 25.0 to analyze students' writing score gained from two independent raters. According to Hartono (2020), this statistical test is used to compare two different mean scores of a groups. Previously, Gay and Airasian (2000) explain that the paired samples T-test is used to ascertain if there is a significant difference between the two different mean scores

The t-table was utilized to assess the significance of the difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups. The following hypotheses were tested:

- H₀ : There is no significant interplay of L1 on L2 writing
H_a : There is a significant interplay of L1 on L2 writing

The null and alternative hypotheses were analysed with the paired sample T-test. If the calculated sig-2-tailed value is greater than the 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This would suggest that Indonesian Language had significantly influenced the English writing results.

FINDINGS

1. Respondents' Writing Ability Before Treatment

In this activity, this data collection was done by giving respondents an English writing pre-test. They were offered 5 topics to write about. This topic was an argumentative essay writing activity. Students chose 1 of the 5 topics offered. The topics offered were as follows.

- a. Plastic use should be banned
- b. How digital era changes the world
- c. Should smoking be banned in universities?
- d. Are gadgets bad for kids?
- e. Private vehicles should be limited.

The presentation data of the pre-test results of the students can be seen through table 2 below.

Table 2. Writing Pre-test Results

NO	PRE-TEST		
	RATER 1	RATER 2	MEAN SCORE
S1	65	65	65
S2	68	65	66,5
S3	60	65	62,5
S4	70	70	70
S5	72	70	71
S6	64	65	64,5
S7	70	70	70
S8	55	55	55
S9	78	75	76,5
S10	66	65	65,5
S11	65	60	62,5
S12	60	60	60
S13	55	55	55
S14	65	67	66
S15	80	80	80
TOTAL	993	987	990
AVERAGE	66,2	65,8	66

From Table 2 above, there are 15 respondents. The total pre-test score is 990. The average pre-test score is 66. Seeing this mean score, the class could be categorized **Good**

also. In addition, it can be seen from the table above where the highest pre-test score is 80 and the lowest score is 55. Overall the majority were classified into Good category (score 66-79) as it is shown by 7 students have reached that.

2. Respondents' Writing Ability After Treatment

After the treatment was carried out for several meetings where this treatment was in the form of brainstorming writing ideas into Indonesian initially. They, then, continued composing the essay based on the ideas they developed in Indonesian. After treatment, post-test was given to respondents involving several topics below to be chosen.

- a. Trashes should be classified.
- b. Virtual Learning is better than face-to-face learning
- c. Is smoking room necessary in university?
- d. Social media should not be limited
- e. Healthy lifestyle is fundamental.

The writing post-test scores can be seen through the presentation data presented through table 5 below.

Table 3 Post-test Results

NO	PRE-TEST		
	RATER 1	RATER 2	MEAN SCORE
S1	75	77	76
S2	75	70	72,5
S3	75	70	72,5
S4	70	70	70
S5	75	75	75
S6	70	67	68,5
S7	80	80	80
S8	60	55	57,5
S9	80	80	80
S10	65	68	66,5
S11	75	75	75
S12	60	65	62,5
S13	65	65	65

S14	78	80	79
S15	88	85	86,5
TOTAL	1091	1082	1086,5
AVERAGE	72,7	72,1	72,4

From Table 3 above shows the students' post writing score. The total post-test score is 1086. The average pre-test score is 72.4. Seeing this mean score, the class could be categorized **Good** also. Comparing to the pre-test mean score, it has increased for 6.4. In addition, it can be seen from the table above where the highest score is 86.5 and the lowest score is 57.5. Overall the majority were classified into Good category (score 66-79) as it is shown by 9 students have reached that. Meanwhile, it cannot be abandoned that 3 students have successfully elevated into **Very Good** category by achieving 80 and greater.

To find out whether there is a significant interplay of L1 towards L2 writing ability, the students' pre-test and post-test were further analysed with the paired sample T-Test Test. The T-test results can be seen in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Paired Sample Test Value

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-Post-Test	6.43333	4.32132	1.11576	5.766	14	<.001

From the table above, it can be seen that the t test value is 5.766 with a df value of 14, while the sig. (2-tailed) value is 0.001 with mean value 6.43333, and a standard error mean of 1.11576, By orienting the significance value, if it is lower than 0.05, H0 is rejected and Ha is accepted. And from the T test table data above it can be seen that the significance value is $0.001 < 0.05$, therefore it can be concluded that H0 is rejected and Ha is accepted.

So there is a significant influence of the use of Indonesian (L1) in the pre writing stage on students writing results. Furthermore, to find out the percentage significance of the improvement, it can be calculated through the following formula.

$$r^2 = \frac{t^2}{t^2 + n - 2}$$

$$r^2 = \frac{(5.766)^2}{(5.766)^2 + 15 - 2}$$

$$r^2 = 0.47$$

$$kp = r^2 \times 100\%$$

$$kp = 0.47 \times 100\% = 47\%$$

It can be interpreted that there is a significant influence on students' L2 writing ability after brainstorming treatment using Indonesian is applied with a percentage of 47%.

DISCUSSION

Considering the data analysis above that L1 (Indonesian) has a positive impact on L2 (English) writing, which is supported through findings of the study. With the use of L1 during the idea generation phase, students were able to produce appropriate content, bypass language constraints, improve originality and flexibility, and enhance the structure and flow of the paper. This position is also consistent with cognitive theories which include Krashen's input hypothesis and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Krashen's input hypothesis explains that there is no L2 acquisition without acquisition of L1 which in this case can act as a bridging support to make L2 input smoother and more comprehensible. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory explains the development of a person's intelligence - the development of intelligence is social, it is through our interaction with others and interaction with cultural instruments. In this context, L1 can be viewed as a cultural tool as well as a language aimed at cognition and language acquisition.

In addition, it can be established that the findings have some important consequences for the language teaching in practice. When teaching writing in L2, teachers need to integrate L1 within the specific contexts such as, the planning and drafting phases of writing in L2. A beneficial and wise method of teaching is where L1 and L2 are used concurrently. It is necessary to tailor what is to be done to the diverse learner characteristics that are ready for task engagement. Finally, there is a need to enhance students' metacognitive awareness for them to effectively leverage L1 as an asset when writing within L2.

The research brings a positive contribution in regards to the didactic teaching of languages. The use of L1 has driven a better result on students writing when the flow of ideas could be expressed well. Generating ideas in the pre composing phase when the students used L2 directly caused undelivered ideas as what they intended to. Once they have brainstormed, they can proceed their compositions in English at the next stage. It aligns with the ideas of Puspitasari & Yumarnamto (2020), as long as not overuse Indonesian language (L1) on the English (L2) classroom setting. The practice of integrating the mother tongue in a second language written communication practice is necessary, for instance, in the pre-writing and drafting stages. Two languages complementing each other may be more resourceful in terms of language acquisition. The learning gaps that learners have should be addressed since they are unique. Also, students may be encouraged to be more metacognitive and use their mother tongue appropriately as a resource in L2 composition.

Future research should look into the cognitive aspects that enable one benefit from L1 in the context of writing in an L2. Researching about the usage of L1 at a particular moment and in a certain extent may enrich at this point language educators. In response to these questions, researchers may improve teaching methods and increase language acquisition.

Finally, the findings also add further understanding to the ongoing debate about the use of mother tongue in second language acquisition. This study affirms that there can be an emphasis and positive emphasis of L1 on L2 writing, hence the need to advocate for L1 to be used in language classes. Change in language education methods is inevitable and new strategies which utilize L1 for easier acquisition of L2 have to be welcomed.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the pre-test and post-test tests above, it can be said that the results show that there is an effect of using the mother tongue on students' writing ability in English. And when compared, the results of writing with brainstorming using Indonesian are better than brainstorming with English directly. From the results of the investigation, the biggest influence is the fluency of the ideas of the content of the essay written. The students will find it easier to express and develop the main idea by adding many supporting ideas if they think using Indonesian as their mother tongue. On the

contrary, if they use English, they have limited vocabulary so that the development of ideas is not better.

Given the increasing globalization and diversity in classrooms, future research could delve deeper into the impact of L1 use on L2 writing for students from multicultural language backgrounds. By exploring the specific linguistic and cultural factors that influence L1 usage, researchers can provide more nuanced insights into effective language teaching practices. Besides, some the role of supporting technologies like learning apps, translation tools, AI, and learning forums can be investigated on how they could support language learners to enhance their L2 writing through L1 utilization.

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