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## Comparative Analysis of Writing Strategies between Malaysian and Indonesian Students

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the differences in writing strategies between upper secondary school students from rural schools in Penang, Malaysia, and Pontianak, Indonesia, to understand the influence of cultural and educational backgrounds on their approach to writing tasks in English. Utilizing a structured questionnaire with a Likert Scale, data from 109 Malaysian and 100 Indonesian students were analysed through descriptive statistics and t-tests for Equality of Means. The findings reveal significant differences in general, pre-writing, during-writing, and post-writing strategies between the two groups. Malaysian students exhibit a stronger inclination towards writing in their native language and utilizing bilingual dictionaries, while Indonesian students demonstrate a higher preference for writing in English during leisure, using English-to-English dictionaries, and relying on English grammar books. The study highlights the diverse approaches to language use and learning, suggesting potential cultural or educational influences shaping these practices. The data accentuates the importance of considering these contextual factors in enhancing writing instruction and suggests tailored educational interventions to address specific needs and practices. The findings also suggest educational interventions can improve planning and outlining skills, promote creative language use, and increase language resource usage. Educators should consider students' cultural and educational contexts, tailoring strategies to diverse learning styles by integrating*

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*bilingual resources, promoting language experimentation, and emphasizing feedback and revision.*

**Keywords:** Cross-cultural education, English language learning, writing strategies.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Writing proficiency in a second language is a crucial academic skill, reflecting a complex relationship of cognitive, cultural, and educational factors. Despite the geographical proximity and historical ties, Malaysia and Indonesia exhibit distinct educational practices, particularly in language education (Rusydiyah et al., 2023). Recent research highlights various aspects of educational practices, including writing strategies (Fajrina et al., 2023; Raoofi et al., 2014). However, a direct comparative analysis focusing exclusively on the writing strategies between Malaysian and Indonesian students appears to be a gap in the literature. Several studies provide indirect insights into the educational practices and challenges faced by students in both countries, which can be indicative of the broader context in which writing strategies are developed and employed. Studies have highlighted the unique approaches each country takes towards early childhood education, with both Malaysia and Indonesia implementing their own systems to develop the young generations for the future (Pranoto et al., 2020).

Despite sharing many cultural, social, and economic similarities, the two countries exhibit differences in educational practices that could extend to language learning and teaching strategies (Pranoto et al., 2020). The shift to online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic further accentuated these differences, revealing challenges unique to each country's context in teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language, particularly in terms of technological skills, internet accessibility, and effective online interaction (Mazlan et al., 2022). Furthermore, the integration of English language education within the broader curriculum and the emphasis on different language learning strategies in Malaysia and Indonesia point towards divergent educational philosophies and practices. These differences are not only confined to the early stages of education but extend to higher education and professional development programmes (Muhdi et al., 2018).

The current body of research indicates a rich field of educational practices within each country, but highlights a significant gap in comparative studies on writing strategies between Malaysian and Indonesian students. Such comparative research could provide a comprehensive understanding of effective educational practices and help develop more effective language education policies and strategies suited to the linguistic and cultural contexts of each country. The study examines the general, pre-writing, during-writing, and post-writing strategies of students. It seeks to investigate whether these differences extend to students' writing strategies, which could impact their academic performance and proficiency in second language acquisition. This comparative analysis aims to explore the differences in writing strategies among upper secondary school students from rural schools in Penang, Malaysia, and Pontianak, Indonesia. Hence, the research questions are as follows:

1. Are there significant differences between Malaysian and Indonesian students' general writing strategies?
2. How do pre-writing strategies vary between Malaysian and Indonesian students?
3. What are the differences in writing strategies employed by Malaysian and Indonesian students?
4. Are there any significant differences in the post-writing strategies between Malaysian and Indonesian students?

This study is significant as it addresses a notable gap in comparative research on second language writing strategies between two culturally and geographically linked Southeast Asian countries. By examining the specific writing strategies used by Malaysian and Indonesian students, educators and policymakers can derive important findings on how national educational frameworks influence language learning outcomes. The findings could inform curriculum design,

teacher training, and cross-cultural educational initiatives aimed at improving writing proficiency in English as a second or foreign language. Furthermore, the study contributes to the broader field of applied linguistics by highlighting the contextual factors that shape students' writing practices across different educational systems.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Second Language Acquisition Theories

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories offer a multifaceted framework for understanding the processes through which individuals learn languages beyond their first, providing essential insights into the cognitive, social, and instructional practices of learning. These theories are particularly significant in analysing how students with diverse linguistic backgrounds develop writing skills in English. Formal generative theory and emergentist theory, components of SLA, delve into the innate linguistic capabilities and the influence of environmental stimuli on language acquisition, respectively. They illuminate how learners navigate the grammatical structures and vocabulary of English, enhancing their morpho-syntactic and phonological understanding (He & Oltra-Massuet, 2021). The input and output hypotheses clarify this process by stressing the need for comprehensible input and active language production, both essential for developing language skills (Wenzhong & Muchun, 2015).

Cognitive and linguistic theories address the mental processes such as memory, attention, and perception, alongside the acquisition of linguistic rules, aiding in understanding how students approach writing in English amidst cognitive challenges and linguistic complexities (Al-Dali, 2018). Sociocultural theory emphasises the significance of social interaction and participation in cultural and linguistic practices, suggesting that writing in English is influenced by engagement with English-speaking communities and adherence to the cultural norms of English academic writing (Shrestha, 2020). Finally, interlanguage theory, which describes the evolving linguistic system that learners develop, highlights the influence of the learner's first language, the target language, and the learning environment on this development process, illustrating the unique constructions of written English by students from different linguistic backgrounds (Yu, 2020). Together, these SLA theories provide a comprehensive understanding of how learners from varied linguistic backgrounds approach and refine their writing in English, integrating cognitive processes, linguistic knowledge, and socio-cultural interactions.

### 2.2 Cognitive Process Theory

The Cognitive Process Theory of writing, originally articulated by Flower and Hayes (1980), has significantly advanced our understanding of writing as a complex, recursive activity involving distinct but interconnected stages: planning, translating, and reviewing. This theory posits that during the planning phase, writers engage in brainstorming, organizing ideas, and setting objectives, with the recursive nature of revisiting and refining these plans being emphasized throughout the writing process (Latif, 2021). The translating phase involves the critical task of converting thoughts into coherent written language, requiring the balancing of content generation with the grammatical and stylistic constraints of language (Kadmiry, 2021). Finally, the reviewing stage is where writers evaluate their drafts, making both minor and major revisions to ensure the text meets its intended purpose and resonates with the audience, highlighting the importance of a reflective approach to writing (Galbraith & Baaijen, 2019).

Several recent studies continue to build on this foundational theory. For example, research by Ewoldt and Morgan (2022) has provided empirical evidence on the cognitive processes involved in writing, especially regarding the strategies that can support writers in navigating these stages more effectively (Ewoldt & Morgan, 2022). These contributions not only reaffirm the relevance of the Cognitive Process Theory in contemporary writing research but also emphasize the importance of instructional practices that foster a deeper understanding of these cognitive

processes to enhance students' writing proficiency and confidence. Integrating these insights helps educators adapt instruction to writers' needs across planning, translating, and reviewing, fostering a more supportive writing environment.

### **2.3 Sociocultural Theory**

The sociocultural theory, as articulated by scholars such as [Shrestha \(2020\)](#), serves as a useful approach to understanding that the writing process is understood not merely as an individual cognitive act but as deeply rooted in social interaction and cultural norms. This theoretical framework suggests that the strategies involved in writing are significantly influenced by the writer's engagement in social practices and adherence to cultural conventions, highlighting a shift from viewing writing as an isolated skill to recognizing it as a complex, socially mediated activity ([Shrestha, 2020](#)). [Moradian et al. \(2021\)](#) further explore this by emphasizing writing's holistic nature, learned through dialogic interactions, thereby highlighting the collaborative aspect of learning to write within cultural and social contexts ([Moradian et al., 2021](#)). This approach is supported by the work of [Rahimi and Fathi \(2021\)](#), who point to the mediated nature of writing, where learners employ strategies shaped by their social interactions and the cultural tools available to them to internalize language knowledge ([Rahimi & Fathi, 2021](#)).

The Vygotskian framework, utilized by [Leontjev and deBoer \(2022\)](#), further enriches this perspective by examining how individual and social processes coalesce in the co-construction of knowledge, with culture and language playing pivotal roles in the development of writing strategies ([Leontjev & deBoer, 2022](#)). [Damanhour's \(2021\)](#) exploration of scaffolding within this theory illustrates how peer and tutor support can significantly enhance the writing capabilities of second language learners, emphasizing the critical role of social support and cultural context in the evolution of effective writing strategies ([Damanhour, 2021](#)). These findings emphasize the importance of embedding sociocultural understanding in writing instruction to support socially and culturally responsive teaching practices.

### **2.4 Contrastive Theory**

Contrastive Rhetoric, evolving into intercultural rhetoric, studies how a writer's linguistic and cultural background influences their second language (L2) writing, highlighting how native conventions impact writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL). This field, recognizing the dynamic interplay of culture in a postmodern, multilingual world, examines the persistence of L1 organizational patterns in L2 writing and suggests that fluidity of modern identities necessitates a re-evaluation of traditional views in contrastive rhetoric ([Khartite & Zerhouni, 2016](#)). The approach, which originated with Kaplan in the 1960s, emphasizes that rhetorical practices are deeply embedded in cultural attitudes towards communication ([Kaplan, 1966](#)).

Studies like those by [Elachachi \(2015\)](#) highlight the specific linguistic and cultural challenges Arab EFL learners face, pointing to the necessity of pedagogical strategies that bridge linguistic and cultural gaps. These results point to the importance of integrating an awareness of contrastive and intercultural rhetoric in language teaching, advocating for methods that respect the diverse backgrounds of learners while facilitating their mastery of L2 writing. Thus, Contrastive Rhetoric offers a comprehensive understanding of writing as a culturally and linguistically mediated activity, essential for developing effective L2 writing instruction that accommodates the complexity of students' cultural and linguistic identities.

### **2.5 Writing Strategies in the Malaysian and Indonesian Contexts**

The relationship of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories, Cognitive Process Theory of Writing, Sociocultural Theory, and Contrastive Rhetoric provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the various aspects of ESL writing strategies among secondary school students in Malaysia and Indonesia. In Malaysia, studies have highlighted moderate

engagement in during-writing activities among lower secondary students and the benefits of collaborative writing and social media in enhancing writing skills and fluency, emphasizing the importance of cognitive and social interactions in learning (Azman & Said, 2020; Juin et al., 2022; C. K. S. Singh et al., 2020; Yunus et al., 2019).

In Indonesia, research emphasizing the role of teacher feedback, social interaction, cognitive strategies, and learner autonomy in developing writing skills, endorsing pedagogical approaches that consider students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Arifin, 2020; Budiharso, 2016; Mulati et al., 2020; Ragawanti, 2019; Reffyal et al., 2018; Syafii & Miftah, 2020). These studies promote instructional strategies that integrate cognitive, sociocultural, and linguistic considerations, enhancing the effectiveness of writing education in diverse linguistic and cultural settings.

### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1 Participants

The study involved upper secondary school students from two separate rural schools, one located in Penang, Malaysia, and the other in Pontianak, Indonesia. The Malaysian sample consisted of 109 students, while the Indonesian sample comprised 100 students. The participants were selected to represent the student populations of these rural schools, aiming to explore their writing strategies in English language learning.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

A structured questionnaire employing a Likert Scale was used to gather data on students' writing strategies. The questionnaires were adapted from the English as a Second Language Proficiency (ESLP) of 82 questionnaires on writing strategies from Marquette University (n.d, <https://www.marquette.edu/oie/documents/ESLP82QuestionnaireFa08.pdf>). The Likert Scale ranged from 1 to 5, with the following designations: 1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, and 5=most often. This scale measured the frequency of various writing strategies employed by the students. The questionnaire consisted of 45 items divided into four main sections: general students' strategies for writing, students' pre-writing strategies, students' during-writing strategies, and students' post-writing strategies. The questionnaires were administered to the students during regular class hours, ensuring that all participants received identical instructions for completing the survey. The respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and informed that the survey was conducted for research purposes only. Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and assured of their anonymity. Participation was voluntary, with students having the option to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

#### 3.3 Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed quantitatively. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were computed for each item to understand the central tendency and dispersion of responses. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to assess the reliability of the questionnaire, resulting in a high reliability coefficient of 0.951, indicating excellent internal consistency. To examine the differences in writing strategies between Malaysian and Indonesian students, t-tests for Equality of Means were conducted. These tests were performed for each questionnaire item to determine statistically significant differences in the writing strategies employed by students from the two countries. The analysis was supplemented by Levene's test for equality of variances to decide whether to assume equal or unequal variances for the t-tests.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were organized into tables, presenting the mean scores and standard deviations for each item, grouped by country. This format facilitated the comparative analysis of writing strategies between the two groups of students.

##### 4.1 Differences Between Malaysian and Indonesian Students' General Writing Strategies

Table 1 reveals distinct preferences and habits in language use among Malaysian and Indonesian respondents. For Malaysia, the highest mean score is observed in the activity 'I often write in my native language' (M=4.4587), indicating a strong inclination towards using their native language for writing purposes. This is followed by the use of a bilingual dictionary (M=3.3028), suggesting a reliance on bilingual resources to aid in language comprehension or learning. The lowest mean score is for 'I use an English-English dictionary' (M=2.1009), highlighting less frequent use of monolingual English dictionaries, which may reflect a preference for bilingual aids or possibly less comfort with English-only resources. In contrast, Indonesian respondents also show their highest mean score in 'I often write in my native language' (M=3.7700), though it is notably lower than that of Malaysian respondents. This indicates a preference for using their native language for writing, but to a lesser extent. The use of an English grammar book or handbook scores relatively higher in Indonesia (M=2.6400) compared to Malaysia, suggesting a greater emphasis on learning English grammar among Indonesian respondents. The lowest mean score in Indonesia is observed for 'I use a bilingual dictionary' (M=2.3500), which contrasts with the Malaysian preference, indicating possibly less reliance on bilingual dictionaries among Indonesians.

**Table 1.** Mean and standard deviation of Malaysian and Indonesian students' general writing strategies.

| Item no. | Description                                              | Malaysia (N = 109) |                    | Indonesia (N = 100) |                    |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
|          |                                                          | Mean               | Standard deviation | Mean                | Standard deviation |
| 1.       | I often write in my native language.                     | 4.45               | 0.91               | 3.77                | 1.05               |
| 2.       | I often write in English.                                | 2.84               | 0.61               | 2.74                | 0.80               |
| 3.       | I write for pleasure in my free time in English.         | 2.24               | 0.76               | 2.51                | 1.03               |
| 4.       | I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English. | 2.26               | 0.86               | 2.29                | 0.97               |
| 5.       | I use a bilingual dictionary.                            | 3.30               | 1.13               | 2.35                | 1.21               |
| 6.       | I use an English-English dictionary.                     | 2.10               | 0.98               | 2.47                | 1.06               |
| 7.       | I use an English grammar book or handbook.               | 2.31               | 1.02               | 2.64                | 1.13               |
| 8.       | I read native English writing.                           | 2.32               | 1.04               | 2.26                | 1.07               |
| 9.       | I use the English words I know in different ways.        | 2.81               | 1.02               | 2.80                | 1.03               |

Overall, the data reflect a stronger inclination towards using native languages for writing and a varied reliance on bilingual and English-only resources in both Malaysia and Indonesia. Malaysian respondents show a slightly higher preference for writing in their native language and using bilingual dictionaries, while Indonesians indicate a more pronounced use of English grammar resources. Comparatively, activities related to writing in English (for pleasure, notes, messages, letters, or reports) and using English dictionaries or grammar books score lower on average for both countries, pointing towards a more utilitarian or academic approach to English rather than for leisure or personal communication. The relatively close mean scores in activities such as 'I write for pleasure in my free time in English' and 'I read native English writing' across both countries suggest a shared moderate engagement with English in more personal or immersive contexts. The differences in mean scores and standard deviations highlight the diverse approaches to language use and learning, suggesting potential cultural or educational influences shaping these practices. The standard deviations in the data suggest variability in responses within both countries, with Indonesia generally showing slightly higher variability, as indicated by the standard deviations in activities like 'I often write in my native language' and 'I use a bilingual

dictionary'. This could reflect a broader range of experiences or attitudes towards language use and learning strategies among Indonesian respondents.

There are significant differences in certain aspects of general writing strategies between Malaysian and Indonesian students. The t-test results for 'I often write in my native language' show a significant difference between Malaysian and Indonesian writers (one-sided  $p < .001$ , two-sided  $p < .001$ ), with both tests assuming equal and unequal variances, indicating a strong significance. This suggests that there is a statistically significant difference in the frequency of writing in the first language between the two groups, with Malaysians likely writing in their native language more often than Indonesians. For the statement 'I write in English when I have free time', the t-test results indicate a significant difference between the two groups (one-sided  $p = .015$ , two-sided  $p = .030$ ) when equal variances are assumed and similar significance when variances are not assumed (one-sided  $p = .016$ , two-sided  $p = .032$ ). This signifies that the habit of writing in English during leisure differs significantly between Malaysian and Indonesian writers, with Indonesians possibly engaging more in this practice compared to Malaysians. The use of bilingual dictionaries also shows a significant difference (one-sided  $p < .001$ , two-sided  $p < .001$ ) for both equal and unequal variance assumptions. This indicates a significant variance in the utilization of bilingual dictionaries between the two cohorts, with Malaysians potentially using these dictionaries more frequently than their Indonesian counterparts. Similarly, there is a significant difference in the use of English-to-English dictionaries (one-sided  $p = .005$ , two-sided  $p = .010$ ), suggesting a noteworthy distinction in how often these dictionaries are used by Malaysian versus Indonesian writers, with Indonesians likely using them more than Malaysians. The analysis of using English grammar books reveals a significant difference (one-sided  $p = .015$ , two-sided  $p = .029$ ) between the groups. This suggests a distinct difference in the frequency of using English grammar books, with Indonesians possibly relying on these resources more than Malaysians.

The analysis of writing strategies among Malaysian and Indonesian students reveals distinct preferences and habits in language use, shaped by their respective educational and cultural contexts. The findings indicate that Malaysian students exhibit a stronger inclination toward using their native language for writing, as evidenced by the highest mean score in this activity. This preference may stem from the dominant role of Bahasa Melayu in both formal and informal settings in Malaysia, which reinforces its usage in students' daily lives and educational practices. This aligns with A. Singh and Maniam's (2020) findings on the interference of Bahasa Melayu in English essay writing, where students might use bilingual aids to navigate the complexities of writing in a second language. In contrast, while Indonesian students also prefer writing in their native language, the slightly lower mean score suggests a more balanced use of their native language and English.

Malaysian students show a higher reliance on bilingual dictionaries, which may indicate their strategy of using native language resources to aid in English comprehension and learning. On the other hand, Indonesian students display a greater reliance on English grammar books and monolingual English dictionaries, suggesting a more direct approach to learning English, possibly reflecting different educational priorities or resource availability in Indonesia. A study by Mat et al. (2019) discusses both similarities and differences in how students from Malaysia and Indonesia perceive the importance of English and manage their learning strategies, which could explain these variations in resource usage.

The t-test results further highlight these differences, showing significant variations in how frequently students from both countries engage in specific writing activities. For instance, the more frequent use of bilingual dictionaries by Malaysian students suggests a stronger tendency to rely on their native language as a support tool in English writing tasks. Conversely, the higher use of English-to-English dictionaries and grammar books among Indonesian students indicates a more immersive approach to English learning, potentially fostering better language proficiency but also pointing to distinct educational strategies between the two groups.

The findings also suggest differences in how Malaysian and Indonesian students engage with English in non-academic contexts. The significant difference in the habit of writing in English during leisure time, with Indonesian students possibly engaging more in this practice, highlights varying attitudes towards using English outside the classroom. This could be influenced

by factors such as curriculum emphasis, exposure to English media, or societal attitudes towards English as a global language. The challenges faced by Malaysian and Indonesian students in academic writing contexts abroad, as discussed by [Abrar et al. \(2023\)](#), may also reflect these different approaches to English language use and learning.

These differences in writing strategies reflect broader educational frameworks, cultural norms, and language policies in each country. For example, the emphasis on Bahasa Melayu in Malaysia as a key component of national identity could contribute to the higher frequency of writing in the native language. In contrast, Indonesia's diverse linguistic landscape might encourage a more pragmatic use of English as a common medium in educational and professional settings.

Considering these findings, educators and curriculum developers must tailor writing instruction to the specific linguistic and cultural contexts of students. For Malaysian students, this might involve incorporating more opportunities for English practice while still acknowledging the role of their native language. For Indonesian students, strategies could focus on building upon their existing use of English resources to further enhance their grammar and fluency.

#### 4.2 Variations in Pre-Writing Strategies Between Malaysian and Indonesian Students

Table 2 shows the mean scores and standard deviations for various pre-writing activities, such as reviewing class materials, brainstorming, and using dictionaries. The data highlight differences in how students from each country prepare for writing tasks, providing insights into their educational practices and needs.

**Table 2.** Mean and standard deviation of Malaysian and Indonesian students' pre-writing.

| Item no. | Description                                                                                    | Malaysia (N = 109) |                    | Indonesia (N = 100) |                    |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
|          |                                                                                                | Mean               | Standard deviation | Mean                | Standard deviation |
| 1.       | I review my class notes, handouts, and assignment requirements before beginning to write.      | 3.13               | 1.07               | 3.0                 | 1.18               |
| 2.       | I consider the task or assignment and instructions carefully before writing.                   | 4.05               | 0.84               | 3.72                | 1.03               |
| 3.       | I discuss what I am going to write with other students or my teacher.                          | 3.44               | 1.00               | 3.23                | 1.05               |
| 4.       | I brainstorm and write down ideas before I begin to write.                                     | 3.87               | 1.05               | 3.75                | 0.92               |
| 5.       | I make plans and notes in my native language before writing.                                   | 3.47               | 1.35               | 3.34                | 1.14               |
| 6.       | I make an outline or plan in English.                                                          | 2.20               | 0.87               | 2.26                | 1.01               |
| 7.       | I make a timetable for when I will do my writing.                                              | 2.07               | 1.10               | 2.30                | 0.97               |
| 8.       | Before writing the first draft, I do extra study outside the classroom to improve my writing.  | 2.37               | 0.91               | 2.38                | 1.03               |
| 9.       | I think of the relationships between what I already know and new things that I learn.          | 3.00               | 0.98               | 3.25                | 1.01               |
| 10.      | I notice vocabulary related to a topic that I will write about, and try to remember the words. | 3.40               | 1.02               | 3.38                | 1.06               |
| 11.      | I use a dictionary to check things I am not sure about before I write.                         | 3.74               | 1.12               | 2.96                | 1.24               |
| 12.      | I use a grammar book to check things I am not sure about before I write.                       | 2.60               | 1.11               | 2.84                | 1.15               |

The analysis of pre-writing strategies among students in Malaysia and Indonesia, as depicted in Table 2, provides critical insights into how these students prepare for writing tasks. The data show that Malaysian students prioritize understanding assignment requirements, as indicated by the highest mean score for 'I consider the task or assignment and instructions carefully before writing' (M=4.055). This suggests a strong emphasis on thorough preparation before beginning the writing process. The next highest score for Malaysian students is for 'I brainstorm and write down ideas before I begin to write' (M=3.8716), indicating that brainstorming is also a significant part of their pre-writing routine. However, the lowest score is

for 'I make an outline or plan in English' ( $M=2.2018$ ), pointing to a less frequent use of formal planning in English, which highlights an area for potential improvement in organizing and structuring their writing.

Indonesian students also show a preference for brainstorming, as their highest mean score is for 'I brainstorm and write down ideas before I begin to write' ( $M=3.750$ ). This aligns with findings from [Abas and Aziz \(2016\)](#), who observed that Indonesian students actively engage in brainstorming, drafting, and revising, although perhaps to a slightly lesser extent compared to their Malaysian counterparts ([Abas & Aziz, 2016](#)). Similarly, the lowest score for Indonesian students is in 'I make an outline or plan in English' ( $M=2.260$ ), mirroring the trend observed in Malaysia. This suggests that planning and organizing writing in English is a common area that could benefit from further development in both countries.

The overall high mean scores for pre-writing strategies in both countries indicate that students place significant importance on preparation before writing. However, the lower scores for planning and outlining in English suggest a need to enhance these skills, particularly to help students better organize their thoughts and structure their writing. The variability indicated by the standard deviations, with Indonesian respondents showing slightly greater variability, may reflect differences in individual approaches to writing or variations in educational practices between the two countries.

The t-test for equality of means reveals a significant difference between the groups, with a one-sided p-value of .005 and a two-sided p-value of .011 for equal variances assumed. This significant difference suggests distinct approaches between Malaysian and Indonesian students in how they interpret and prepare for writing assignments. It may imply that one group takes more time or employs different strategies to ensure they fully understand the task, which could influence the quality and relevance of their writing.

The significant difference in the use of dictionaries between the two groups, as reflected by a one-sided p-value of  $<.001$  and a two-sided p-value of  $<.001$ , highlights variations in language confidence, familiarity with English, or reliance on external resources. The group that uses dictionaries more frequently may be more meticulous in verifying word meanings or more dedicated to improving language accuracy, which can positively impact the clarity and precision of their writing. This finding aligns with the results from [Rahmawati et al. \(2019\)](#), who noted that Indonesian students frequently employ pre-writing strategies, including the use of dictionaries, to enhance their writing accuracy ([Rahmawati et al., 2019](#)).

The exploration of pre-writing strategies reveals that both Malaysian and Indonesian students engage in similar practices, such as brainstorming and reviewing class materials before writing. However, Malaysian students show a slightly higher emphasis on these activities. This supports the findings of [Aluemalai and Maniam \(2020\)](#), who observed that successful ESL students in Malaysia often prefer planning strategies before writing ([Aluemalai & Maniam, 2020](#)). Additionally, the study by [Fajrina et al. \(2023\)](#) found that Indonesian EFL students also use pre-writing strategies moderately but face challenges in structuring their writing, which could explain the lower scores in planning and outlining observed in this study ([Fajrina et al., 2023](#)).

#### **4.3 The Differences in During-Writing Strategies Employed by Malaysian and Indonesian Students**

The analysis of students' during-writing strategies between Malaysian and Indonesian respondents, as detailed in Table 3, reveals detailed insights into their writing processes and preferences. Malaysian respondents exhibited the highest mean score in utilizing their background knowledge to develop ideas ( $M=3.8624$ ), suggesting that they place significant emphasis on leveraging prior knowledge to enhance the content and depth of their writing. This is closely followed by their preference for writing in a comfortable, quiet place ( $M=3.8073$ ), indicating the importance they place on the writing environment to improve focus and productivity. In contrast, the lowest mean score was observed for 'making up new words if the right ones in English are not known' ( $M=1.9266$ ), which suggests a conservative approach to language use, with a reluctance to deviate from standard expressions.

**Table 3.** Mean and standard deviation of Malaysian and Indonesian students' during-writing strategies.

| Item no. | Description                                                                             | Malaysia (N = 109) |                    | Indonesia (N = 100) |                    |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
|          |                                                                                         | Mean               | Standard deviation | Mean                | Standard deviation |
| 1.       | I try to write in a comfortable, quiet place where I can concentrate.                   | 3.80               | 1.04               | 3.72                | 1.11               |
| 2.       | I use my background knowledge (world) to help me develop my ideas.                      | 3.86               | 1.07               | 3.57                | 1.02               |
| 3.       | I like to write a draft in my native language first and then translate it into English. | 3.22               | 1.23               | 3.49                | 1.15               |
| 4.       | I edit for content (ideas) as I am writing.                                             | 3.09               | 1.04               | 3.19                | 1.16               |
| 5.       | I edit for organization as I am writing.                                                | 2.65               | 1.00               | 2.93                | 1.15               |
| 6.       | I like to change or make my ideas clearer as I am writing.                              | 3.00               | 1.01               | 2.95                | 1.08               |
| 7.       | I use a dictionary to check things I am not sure about when I write.                    | 3.77               | 1.00               | 3.02                | 1.11               |
| 8.       | I use a grammar book to check things I am not sure about when I write.                  | 2.65               | 1.08               | 3.00                | 1.19               |
| 9.       | If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.  | 3.60               | 1.08               | 3.25                | 1.10               |
| 10.      | I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English when I am writing.       | 1.92               | 1.00               | 2.81                | 1.06               |
| 11.      | I make my writing assignments fun for myself.                                           | 2.44               | 0.94               | 3.23                | 1.16               |

Indonesian respondents, on the other hand, showed the highest mean score for writing a draft in their native language first before translating it into English ( $M=3.4900$ ). This highlights a distinct strategy where students leverage their first language to facilitate English writing. This approach aligns with findings by [Rahmawati et al. \(2019\)](#), who observed that Indonesian students often draft in their native language to better conceptualize ideas before refining them in English ([Rahmawati et al., 2019](#)). Additionally, the practice of making writing assignments enjoyable ( $M=3.2300$ ) reflects a creative and positive attitude towards writing tasks. The lowest mean score among Indonesian students was for using a dictionary to check uncertainties when writing ( $M=3.0200$ ), indicating a potential area for improvement in enhancing language accuracy and resource utilization.

Overall, the total mean scores across various strategies indicate a balanced engagement with during-writing strategies in both countries, though with different areas of emphasis. Malaysian students prioritize idea development and maintaining a conducive writing environment, whereas Indonesian students are more inclined towards leveraging their native language as a foundation for English writing and incorporating enjoyment into their writing tasks. This finding is consistent with the study by [Fajrina et al. \(2023\)](#), which highlights that Indonesian students often use their native language as a strategic tool in the writing process ([Fajrina et al., 2023](#)). The use of resources like dictionaries and grammar books varied, with Malaysian students more likely to use a dictionary ( $M=3.7706$ ), while Indonesian students showed a slightly higher preference for grammar books ( $M=3.0000$ ).

The significant differences observed in the use of background knowledge, dictionaries, and grammar books between the two groups reveal distinct approaches to writing. The significant difference in utilizing background knowledge ( $p=.045$ ) suggests that Malaysian students may draw more heavily on prior knowledge to enrich their writing, which could reflect differences in educational practices or cultural experiences. The highly significant difference in the use of dictionaries during writing ( $p<.001$ ) highlights the varying reliance on these resources, possibly reflecting differences in language confidence or attitudes towards vocabulary expansion. The significant difference in the use of grammar books ( $p=.028$ ) highlights divergent approaches to grammatical accuracy, suggesting that Indonesian students may prioritize or have greater access to grammatical resources compared to their Malaysian counterparts. This finding is supported by the study by [Juin et al. \(2022\)](#), which found that Malaysian students frequently use dictionaries and grammar books during writing to ensure accuracy and clarity ([Juin et al., 2022](#)).

A very significant difference was also observed in the practice of inventing new words when unsure of the correct English terms ( $p < .001$ ), with Malaysian students showing a greater reluctance to create non-standard expressions. This divergence could be related to differences in linguistic creativity or comfort with language experimentation. The analysis also revealed a significant difference in the strategy of making writing assignments enjoyable ( $p < .001$ ), suggesting that Indonesian students may engage more in strategies that enhance enjoyment and motivation, possibly reflecting differences in pedagogical practices or cultural values related to education and leisure. This aspect is discussed by [Ardila \(2020\)](#), who highlights that Indonesian students often adopt creative strategies to make writing tasks more enjoyable and less stressful ([Ardila, 2020](#)).

#### 4.4 Significant Differences in Post-Writing Strategies Between Malaysian and Indonesian Students

The analysis of students' post-writing strategies between Malaysian and Indonesian respondents, as detailed in Table 4, highlights distinct practices and priorities in refining and evaluating their writing. These strategies reveal differences in how students from both countries approach tasks such as revising, editing, using resources, and seeking feedback.

**Table 4.** Mean and standard deviation of Malaysian and Indonesian students' post-writing strategies.

| Item no. | Description                                                                                   | Malaysia (N = 109) |                    | Indonesia (N = 100) |                    |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
|          |                                                                                               | Mean               | Standard deviation | Mean                | Standard deviation |
| 1.       | I give myself a reward when I have finished writing.                                          | 2.17               | 1.07               | 2.97                | 1.10               |
| 2.       | I go back to my writing to revise the content and make my ideas clearer.                      | 3.25               | 1.03               | 3.38                | 1.08               |
| 3.       | I go back to my writing to revise and improve my organization.                                | 2.97               | 1.13               | 3.18                | 1.02               |
| 4.       | I go back to my writing to edit the grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.           | 3.05               | 1.05               | 3.38                | 1.08               |
| 5.       | I use a dictionary after I finish writing a draft.                                            | 2.37               | 1.00               | 2.78                | 1.14               |
| 6.       | I use a grammar book after I finish writing a draft.                                          | 2.24               | 0.94               | 2.81                | 1.09               |
| 7.       | I discuss my work with other students to get feedback on how I can improve it.                | 3.26               | 1.07               | 3.21                | 1.15               |
| 8.       | I discuss my work with my teacher to get feedback on how I can improve it.                    | 2.98               | 1.07               | 2.95                | 1.08               |
| 9.       | I evaluate other students' writing and give them feedback on how they can improve it.         | 2.74               | 1.066              | 2.96                | 1.02               |
| 10.      | If I do not understand a comment when getting feedback, I ask the person to explain it to me. | 3.30               | 1.05               | 3.29                | 0.99               |
| 11.      | I make notes or try to remember feedback I get so I can use it the next time I write.         | 3.10               | 1.01               | 2.93                | 1.10               |
| 12.      | I record the types of errors I have made so I do not keep making the same types of errors.    | 2.76               | 1.17               | 3.14                | 1.11               |
| 13.      | I read the feedback from my previous writing and used this feedback in my next writing.       | 3.24               | 1.08               | 3.24                | 0.09               |

Indonesian respondents showed a notably higher mean score for rewarding themselves after completing writing tasks ( $M=2.9700$ ), suggesting that positive reinforcement is a more common motivational strategy among Indonesian students compared to their Malaysian counterparts ( $M=2.1743$ ). This finding is consistent with the broader emphasis on self-regulation and motivation strategies in Indonesian educational contexts, as discussed in recent research by [Umamah and Cahyono \(2020\)](#), which found that self-regulated strategies, including self-reward, play a critical role in students' writing processes ([Umamah & Cahyono, 2020](#)).

Both Malaysian and Indonesian students displayed a similar level of engagement in revising content to clarify ideas, with Indonesian students scoring slightly higher ( $M=3.3800$ ) than Malaysian students ( $M=3.2569$ ). This reflects a shared understanding of the importance of

revisiting and refining written work to enhance clarity and effectiveness, a practice highlighted in studies by [Abas and Aziz \(2016\)](#) and [Budiharso \(2016\)](#). These studies emphasize the significance of revision in improving the quality and coherence of students' writing.

A key area where Indonesian respondents outscored Malaysian respondents was in editing for grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation ( $M=3.3800$  for Indonesia vs.  $M=3.0550$  for Malaysia). This suggests a stronger emphasis on language accuracy among Indonesian students in the final stages of writing. This trend is further supported by research from [Rahmawati et al. \(2019\)](#), which indicates that Indonesian students actively employ post-writing strategies to enhance grammatical accuracy and vocabulary usage ([Rahmawati et al., 2019](#)).

Interestingly, both groups similarly value discussing their work with others to receive feedback, with Malaysian students ( $M=3.2661$ ) and Indonesian students ( $M=3.2100$ ) showing comparable mean scores in seeking peer feedback. The utilization of peer feedback as a post-writing strategy is well documented in the literature. For instance, [Damanik \(2022\)](#) found that peer feedback significantly improves students' writing by fostering critical thinking and collaborative learning, a practice evident in both Malaysian and Indonesian contexts ([Damanik, 2022](#)). The use of dictionaries and grammar books after completing a draft is more common among Indonesian students, as indicated by their higher mean scores in these areas compared to Malaysian students. This suggests a proactive approach to language learning and error correction among Indonesian students, which is further supported by studies such as those by [Razali et al. \(2021\)](#), who observed that Malaysian students tend to rely more on teacher feedback than self-directed use of language resources ([Razali et al., 2021](#)).

The t-test results indicate highly significant differences between the two groups in several post-writing practices. For example, there is a significant difference in self-rewarding practices after writing ( $p<.001$ ), highlighting a notable divergence in how students from these countries motivate themselves. Additionally, significant differences were observed in editing practices ( $p=.029$ ), the use of dictionaries ( $p=.007$ ), the use of grammar books ( $p<.001$ ), and the recording of writing errors for future avoidance ( $p=.018$ ). These findings suggest varying degrees of emphasis on accuracy, resource utilization, and reflective practices between the two groups.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The paper offers a detailed statistical comparison of writing strategies between Malaysian and Indonesian students, highlighting significant differences in their approaches to writing tasks. Despite their geographical proximity and historical ties, the study reveals distinct variations in educational practices, particularly in language education. Differences in educational systems, teacher expertise, and cultural norms suggest Malaysian and Indonesian students use distinct writing strategies that impact their learning and language acquisition.

Given these findings, it is evident that the educational context plays a crucial role in shaping students' writing strategies. Understanding these contextual factors is essential for educators and curriculum developers, who should tailor writing instruction to address the specific needs of students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. By doing so, educators can enhance writing skills development and support more effective language learning.

While the study provides important findings, they are limited by the sample size and setting. Future research should expand to include a broader range of schools and incorporate mixed-methods approaches to gain a deeper understanding of writing strategies. By considering cultural and educational contexts, educators can create more effective strategies to enhance second language writing outcomes.

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