



From Tagalog to English: Pupils' Writing Proficiency Levels After Three Years in Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education

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Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the impact of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) on students' writing skills in their first language (L1), Tagalog, and explore whether their proficiency in L1 contributes to their second language (L2) writing. This study employed a conceptual framework based on language acquisition and bilingual education theories, implying that proficiency in the first language positively impacts second language writing abilities, while implementing MTB-MLE improves overall writing skills. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed, and data were gathered from 135 Filipino Grade 5 pupils who took Tagalog (L1) and English (L2) writing tests. The students came from nine small elementary schools in Paracale, Camarines Norte, Philippines and underwent the same MTB-MLE treatment from Grades 1 to 3. During the exams, they were given two writing tasks in Tagalog and English, with three question options to choose from. This allowed them to select a topic they were comfortable with, including personal experiences during the pandemic and questions from Grade 5 textbooks to ensure reliability. Participants expressed their opinions and discussed their responses within a 150-word limit. Their compositions were evaluated using modified Tagalog and English rubrics provided by DepEd, which employed a 4-point scale representing Beginning, Developing, Accomplished, and Exemplary proficiency levels. These rubrics assessed four key writing elements: content, organization, vocabulary, and conventions. The evaluators used these elements as criteria to evaluate the student's work. The study's findings showed that students performed better in their L1 than in their L2, indicating a significant discrepancy in writing proficiency levels between L1 and L2. The students' L2 writing outputs were brief, disorganized, and filled with grammatical errors, while they also failed their Tagalog and English writing tests, implying that they could not apply the skills they acquired from MTB-MLE to improve their L1 and L2 writing outputs. The results of the study, however, have some limitations. The study cannot identify the factors that hinder students from improving their writing skills in both languages. Furthermore, given the prevalence of different regional languages, the study's findings cannot be generalized to other parts of the country. Therefore, the researcher recommends further investigating the factors influencing pupils' writing development in other regions with diverse L1 and L2 backgrounds.

Keywords: Writing Proficiency, First Language, Second Language, MTB-MLE

Introduction

English has emerged as the primary language of global communication in today's interconnected world, prompting many countries, such as Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and China, to name a few, to recognize its critical role in international affairs. This realization has led to an increase in students from these countries studying abroad to enhance their language skills, with the Philippines being one of the popular destinations. In 2014, approximately 30,000 Japanese students were reported to be studying in the Philippines (Satake, 2015), while in 2016, roughly 1,475,081 Korean students were recorded in the country (Sausa, 2017). Despite the high number of learners seeking to improve their English proficiency, many individuals from these countries face challenges due to their limited language background. Nonetheless, research has shown that being a monolingual speaker should not impede language learning. In fact, multiple studies have revealed a positive correlation between first (L1) and second (L2) language learning, with learners who first master their mother tongue exhibiting higher self-confidence, resulting in better classroom performance and effective acquisition of a new language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).



Although the Philippine government has adopted English as its primary language, promoting it as a second language starting from the first grade instead of using the students' mother tongue as a Mode of Instruction (MOI), recent studies conducted by local and international organizations suggest a decline in Filipinos' English language proficiency. For instance, GMA News Online (2018) reported that college graduates in the Philippines have lower English proficiency levels than high school students in Thailand, highlighting the country's deteriorating English language condition. Also, the EF English Proficiency Index (2022) shows that the Philippines' ranking in English proficiency dropped from 13th (High Proficiency) in 2016 to 20th (High Proficiency) in 2019 among 100 nations. In contrast, Singapore maintained its "Very high" proficiency level among Asian countries, despite the absence of a standardized dual-language program like the MTB-MLE in the Philippines, which aims to enhance students' language proficiency. According to a recent study conducted by UNICEF and SEAMEO (2020) with Grade 5 students in sampled classrooms from six different Southeast Asian countries, over 70% of 5th graders in the Philippines fell into one of the three lowest writing categories. The top scorers in this category may create highly restricted compositions with basic, inadequate concepts and a limited vocabulary, whereas the most disadvantaged pupils cannot express themselves in writing. Gustilo (2010) underlined the importance of writing in language competence, stating that it is one of the most sensitive academic intellectual abilities since it indicates linguistic ability, idea development, and reasoning.

Policymakers adopt the MTB-MLE into the educational system based on the findings of extensive research on the benefits of mother language instruction (Cabansag, 2016). For instance, Walter and Dekker's (2011) study in Labuagan, Kalinga, showed that using regional languages in instruction improves learners' comprehension of math and science concepts. These findings were used by the Department of Education (DepEd) to institutionalize MTB-MLE through DepEd Order No.16, s.2012, which expanded the program to include Bikol, Cebuano, Chabacano, Hiligaynon, Iloko, Kapampangan, Maguindanao, Maranano, Pangasinense, Waray, Tagalog, Tausug, Surigaonon, Aklanon, and Kinaray-a, and later added Sambal, Ivatan, and Ybanag in 2013 (Department of Education (DepEd), 2013). By using the mother tongue of Filipino learners in various subjects, the MTB-MLE program aims to strengthen their linguistic foundation and improve their L2 learning. This approach is critical since English, the MOI in most schools in the country, is often blamed for low student performance, particularly in writing.

According to DepEd Undersecretary Umali (as cited in Montemayor, 2018), the learners' mother tongue should be developed first before learning another language effectively. Hence, the DepEd tailors its curriculum to reinvigorate and promote the regional languages in the country. The DepEd Order No. 74's implementation has enabled local languages to regain their role in education by institutionalizing MTB-MLE in public and private schools nationwide. It aims to develop Filipino learners' language skills for academic achievement and lifelong learning, enhance their thinking abilities to help them master departmental competencies and help them discover and comprehend their culture, heritage, and language (Department of Education (DepEd), 2016b). Unfortunately, the mother tongue of the learners will continuously be used as MOI until Grade 3 only (Department of Education (DepEd), 2020). According to UNICEF (2019), Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in L1 requires five to six years of formal education. Otherwise, the development of CALP in L2, which can only be acquired after 2 to 3 years of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) in L2, may not be achieved.

There is currently a lack of research conducted by the DepEd that provides data about learners' language proficiency following the MTB-MLE implementation in 2012. According to DepEd Undersecretary Umali (as cited in Montemayor, 2018), the department relies solely on the National Achievement Test (NAT) results



to determine learners' needs without checking their English proficiency. Nonetheless, the DepEd Curriculum Guide (Department of Education (DepEd), 2016a) assumes that pupils have attained first-language fluency by Grade 3, suggesting that their L1 communication skills may improve, potentially aiding their academic pursuits and the acquisition of additional languages. Thus, this study aimed to examine the effect of MTB-MLE on learners' writing skills in L1 (Tagalog) and whether their L1 proficiency contributes to their L2 (English) writing.

Research Questions

This research sought to investigate how MTB-MLE use affects students' writing skills in their first language and their learning of a second language. To achieve these objectives, the study aimed to address the following research questions:

1. What is the level of writing proficiency in L1 and L2 of the participants who took the MTBLE program?
2. Is there any significant difference in the writing proficiency in L1 and L2 of the Grade 5 pupils who took the MTB-MLE program?
3. Is there a significant relationship between L1 and L2 writing proficiency of the Grade 5 pupils who took the MTB-MLE program?
4. What are the L1 and L2 writing difficulties of students?

Research Hypothesis

1. The participants who underwent the MTB-MLE program will demonstrate an Accomplished to Exemplary level of writing proficiency in both their L1 and L2 languages.
2. There is a significant difference in the writing proficiency in L1 and L2 of the Grade 5 pupils who took the MTB-MLE program.
3. A significant relationship exists between L1 and L2 writing proficiency of the Grade 5 pupils who took the MTB-MLE program.
4. Most pupils experience L1 and L2 writing difficulties primarily related to content, such as generating and organizing ideas effectively.

Literature Review

Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)

MTB-MLE is a program that utilizes a learner's native language as a means of teaching and learning, which is crucial in providing quality education. It concentrates on the learners' mother tongue and other languages and is offered to students in the early years from kindergarten to Grade 3 of primary education (Trammel, 2016). The MTB-MLE program mandates teachers to utilize suitable instruction, materials, and assessments tailored to the acquisition of the mother tongue (Official Gazette, 2013) because it preserves and uses native languages and traditions (Alcazaren & Rafanan, 2016). UNESCO also aims to implement mother tongue education in the classroom because it believes that learners primarily learn and use their first language, their mother tongue, before using another language (Malone, 2016).

The curriculum under mother tongue education aims to help learners develop their reading, speaking, listening, grammar, and writing skills. It also seeks to enhance students' knowledge, exploring, interpreting, cognitive



restructuring, and higher-order thinking skills (Wall & Ryan, 2010). Students become more effective thinkers and speakers when their first language is used in classroom discussions (Ricablanca, 2014). Thus, implementing MTB-MLE has become mandatory because, in multilingual nations, literacy and language skills can be transferred skillfully from one language to another if there is mastery of the L1. The people behind MTB-MLE contend that this program can assist learners in their language learning and development (Namanya, 2017).

Although there are 7,000 languages, most people speak only 300 (Alcazaren & Rafanan, 2016). However, 40% of children never learn in their native language (UNESCO Bangkok, 2018). Therefore, many researchers focus on mother tongue and L2 learning (Alcazaren & Rafanan, 2016). In several educational areas, mother tongue implementations have been favored since they provide a framework for learning secondary languages. Learning and development depend on mother tongue use. Malaysia has an MTB-MLE policy. Primary education uses the learners' mother language as an MOI and a subject (Tupaz, 2012). In 2006, UNICEF launched MTB-MLE to promote MTB-MLE in southern regions where the general population speaks Pattani-Malay (Malone, 2018).

In Southeast Asia, only the Philippines institutionalizes and enacts MTB-MLE education (Tupas & Martin, 2017). The DepEd implemented the MTB-MLE in 2009 under Order No. 74. However, the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 enacted new legislation (Tupas & Martin, 2017). President Benigno Aquino III approved legislation requiring mother tongue as the primary instruction from kindergarten to Grade 3. Under this law, a transition program from Grades 4 to 6 using English and Filipino was implemented until both languages could be used as MOI in secondary education (Tupas & Martin, 2017). In 2012, another legislation was issued to provide the MTB-MLE guidelines that changed the K to 12 Basic Education Program (Madrurnio et al., 2016).

Due to the implementation of a new language education policy, the curriculum for language education has undergone significant changes to cater to the needs of learners. The agency has designated 20 official languages as Mediums of Instruction (MoI), except for Filipino (L2) and English. The regional languages are taught as an MOI, while the subject areas focus on reading, writing, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary (L3) to enhance the language abilities of Filipino learners for academic achievement and life-long learning. Adopting this new policy aims to strengthen learners' thinking skills, enabling them to master competencies in all learning areas. Furthermore, the policy is designed to help learners understand their own culture, heritage, and language (Department of Education (DepEd), 2012).

Research on MTB-MLE in the Philippines has been conducted, motivating language policymakers to implement it. Alcazaren and Rafanan (2016) found that mother tongue instruction benefits language skills and abilities in L1, as it amplifies learners' success in other fields and L2. Walter and Dekker's (2011) quasi-experimental study served as an inspiration to institutionalize the new policy in 2012 through the Lingua Franca Project, as per DepEd Order No. 16 s.2012. The study collected data from the largest primary school in Libuagan, with one section from Grades 1 to 3 serving as a sample for both control and experimental groups. The experimental group utilized their mother tongue as the MOI, while the control group used English and Filipino as the MOI. The study's findings demonstrate that utilizing the learners' mother tongue as the MOI positively impacted their academic performance in all subject areas from Grades 1 to 3. However, the benefits vary across grade levels and subject areas (Walter & Dekker, 2011). Implementing the new language education policy is expected to improve the language abilities of Filipino learners for academic success and life-long learning. However, further investigation is needed to understand the benefits of using the mother tongue as an MOI in different grade levels and subject areas.



Writing Proficiency

Writing is crucial to academic competency as it demonstrates an individual's linguistic proficiency, conceptual development, and reasoning (Gustilo, 2010). Gustilo (2010) found that skilled writers produce high-quality compositions by planning during pre-writing. They write longer and better essays on topics requiring more general or specific knowledge. On the other hand, studies have shown that novice or weaker writers generate considerably shorter pieces with more writing mistakes.

DepEd has implemented the K to 12 Program in the Philippines as mandated by Republic Act 10533, the Enhanced Basic Education Act. One of the indicators of academic achievement for students is outstanding and comprehensive writing skills. Therefore, the Senior High School (SHS) curriculum includes several subjects to enhance students' linguistic communication abilities, such as academic writing (Pablo & Lasaten, 2018), improving high school students' writing performance. For instance, Domantay and Ramos (2018) evaluated the English writing skills of 11th-Grade students in Malasiqui, Pangasinan, during the 2017-2018 school year. They discovered that students had strong mechanics, vocabulary, and content but weak grammar. Furthermore, Pablo and Lasaten (2018) revealed that while students struggled with academic essay writing, their academic writing improved from poor to fair in their study of 227 Grade 11 Senior High School students from public and private schools in Laoag City's Schools Division. Moreover, the quality of academic essays written by private school students was superior to those submitted at public schools. Additionally, the findings indicated that students lacked conceptual diversity, cohesive devices, appropriate word usage, effective sentence structure, and citations. However, Filipino senior high school students' writing skills were deemed adequate in all four English linguistic components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic (Lasala, 2014).

The ongoing educational reform of the DepEd since the implementation of the K to 12 Basic Education Program has provided SHS and junior high school students with essential skills and competencies, particularly in writing. In fact, the study by Gepila (2018), which focused on typical writing mistakes of Grade 7 PUP Laboratory High School students in terms of content, thesis statement, organization, language use, and editing, revealed Very Good to Good scores across all writing genres. However, Labarrete (2019) posits that teaching core writing principles were challenging due to a lack of teaching resources. Scaffolding methods were used, such as lesson plans and graphics, Remediation Reinforcement Enrichment, explicit instruction, the little teacher strategy, and group work. Despite their effectiveness, these scaffolding methods failed to achieve complete instructional scaffolding. Thus, primary teachers' awareness of this component must be increased through professional development and related activities.

UNICEF and SEAMEO (2020) reported that 5th Graders in Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Vietnam lack writing skills. Only a small percentage of 5th graders in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and the Philippines can write well. In Myanmar, 60% of children were in the three lowest groups, whereas in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and the Philippines, it was 70%. The most accomplished students in this group may have basic, inadequate concepts and a limited vocabulary. The least advantaged children have insufficient ability to express themselves in writing.

The MTB-MLE component of the K-12 curriculum has been criticized for its effectiveness in developing students' English proficiency. However, it is crucial to note that MTB-MLE, which stresses mother language education from Grades 1 to 3, plays a vital role in developing children's writing skills. The program focuses on teaching all topics in the student's native language until Grade 3, with writing introduced as early as the third quarter of Grade 1. This multilingual education method improves cognitive abilities and builds reasoning skills,



allowing children to use many languages fluently, beginning with their first language (Department of Education (DepEd), 2016b). However, there are reasons why students are discouraged and fail to acquire a certain degree of writing proficiency (Harmer, 1998).

According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2017) report on implementing MTB-MLE in the Philippines, there were relatively few instances of writing instruction. Most classes primarily involved fill-in-the-blank or spelling exercises, with minimal evidence of writing tasks. The teachers' observations revealed that students were given an image to describe, were asked to write about it, and then answered comprehension questions based on a story. There was little evidence of authentic writing assignments. Saavedra and Barredo (2020) attributed elementary children's weak English and Filipino writing skills to five factors that language teachers believe have influenced them. Several factors can contribute to challenges in writing, such as limited vocabulary in the language being written, struggles with organizing and expressing thoughts, the belief that writing is a challenging task, lack of motivation, and difficulties with grammar, spelling, and constructing sentences. In conclusion, while the MTB-MLE component of the K-12 curriculum was designed to enhance English proficiency among students, the lack of emphasis on writing instruction has hampered the program's effectiveness. Therefore, it is crucial to address the identified factors that have impeded the development of students' writing skills, such as increasing vocabulary acquisition, providing opportunities for authentic writing tasks, and motivating students to write.

L1 and L2 Writing Connection

Developing effective writing skills is crucial for academic success, particularly for students learning a second or foreign language. Poor writing skills can severely hinder academic achievement, as stated by Tan (2011); and Chastain (1988) as cited in Javadi-Safa (2018). However, mastering writing is challenging as it involves a combination of fundamental skills, such as spelling and handwriting, and more advanced abilities, such as generating and organizing ideas (Gonca, 2016). In fact, writing is considered the most complex skill to learn due to its multifaceted nature, as shown in Bourdin and Payol's (1994) study as cited in Gonca (2016). Writing in a second language (L2) can be even more challenging due to limited proficiency in both L1 and L2 languages (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Moreover, cognitive overload can occur simultaneously when meaning-making and language processing happens (Scott, 1996). Consequently, writing clearly and coherently in L2 presents a significant challenge for language learners.

Many L2 learners depend heavily on their L1 as a coping mechanism to achieve mental stability, as they cannot simultaneously manage their attention's linguistic and cognitive requirements (Woodall, 2002). Several studies have shown that many students prefer to use their L1 in L2 composition (Wang & Wen, 2002). Rana (2018) found that multilingual writers use their L1s to produce ideas, alleviate cognitive load, find target language phrases, and back-translate, as they believe using their L1s may be enabling (easy to think) and debilitating (fear of making mistakes). In terms of prior knowledge, they organize their writings using their writing expertise.

Kim and Yoon (2014) found that lower-level students use L1 more than advanced students in L2 writing, but all students use L1 to various degrees, depending on the task. The data suggest that employing L1 strategically in L2 writing can improve ideational and compensatory goals. Similarly, Yigzaw (2012) found that using L1 during the pre-writing stage in an L2 composition writing impacts participants' writing development, especially in idea or interdisciplinary writing.



Wang and Wen (2002) explored how language learners utilize their L1 when writing in their L2 and found that L2 writers relied more on L1 to regulate their writing processes and develop and organize ideas but less for task-examining and text-generation tasks. Wolfersberger (2003) investigated how writers with low L2 proficiency shifted their production processes and strategies from L1 to L2 writing and found that learners struggled to implement all strategies that could have facilitated their L2 writing processes.

Using L1 can give better ideas for L2 writing and improve written work performance (Stapa & Majid, 2012). Learners utilize their L1 as a writing method to compensate for any weaknesses in their L2 competence and employ it for brainstorming, looking for subjects, formulating concepts, organizing information, and planning (Karim & Nassaji, 2013). However, skilled L2 learners do not depend considerably on the L1 to control the writing process (Stapa & Majid, 2012).

The degree to which L1 is used in L2 writing varies among L2 writers, with proficient L2 learners relying less on their L1 to manage the writing process due to their strong L2 automaticity and ability to think and organize in L2 (Jones & Tetroe, 1987). Several factors affect the improvement of L2 writing, including L1 writing ability, L2 proficiency, and writing experiences in both languages (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2008). In a study by Tiryakioglu et al. (2019) on eight Turkish high school EFL students aged 16–18 with high EFL proficiency, language exposure promoted fluency. The study found that as students' L2 proficiency increases, they dedicate more cognitive resources to deeper writing aspects. Consequently, their linguistic ability enhances the efficiency of the formulation process and improves meaning expression. Thus, expert writers benefit from their linguistic talents when writing L2 content, as language resources aid in preparing and writing better and following rhetorical principles in L2 writing.

Although some experts question the fundamental differences between writing in one's first language (L1) and a second language (L2), the study of L2 writing has been growing in the past three decades, and it has been suggested that L2 writers utilize similar cognitive processes as L1 writers (Tiryakioglu et al., 2019). For instance, in Beare's (2002) study on the writing techniques of bilingual writers, the findings revealed that professional bilingual writers used the same methods in L2 and L1 writing. Despite the need for robust pedagogical models, teacher development in teaching composition is inadequate (Canagarajah, 2016). Several researchers have recently highlighted insufficient research on teacher development in L1 and L2 composition education (Hirvela & Belcher, 2007; Lee, 2013).

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study assessed the effects of MTB-MLE on learners' writing skills in L1 and evaluated whether L1 contributes to L2 writing. The researcher used a descriptive-correlational research design to collect data on pupils' writing proficiency and examine the relationships between the pupils' first (L1) and second languages (L2). McBurney and White (2009) state that descriptive correlational design is commonly used in research studies to provide descriptions of particular circumstances, such as writing proficiency, and to determine the relationship between various variables, including L1 and L2 writing proficiencies.

Participants and Setting

The participants of this study were Grade 5 pupils who had already mastered their L1 and acquired the CALP two years after Grade 3, in line with Ball's (2011) assumption for pupils at this level. The participants were



purposefully chosen through the purposive sampling technique. However, since they were all minors, a parent and student consent form had to be secured before data gathering. Parents' assistance in conducting this study was deemed essential, especially since Camarines Norte was still under alert level II and children were still not allowed to go outside their homes without their parents. When asking for permission from the parents, the researcher provided an informed consent form that explained the purpose of the research, why the participants were chosen, participant requirements, and the advantages and risks of participating in the study. Also, the researcher included a description of confidentiality and privacy of the information gathered from the participants to ensure that the acquired data was safe and that the information collected from the respondents was kept confidential and only used to determine the implementation of MTB-MLE in the selected schools.

The participants comprised 135 pupils from nine small elementary schools in Paracale, Camarines Norte, Philippines, a Tagalog-speaking town. Small schools have fewer than 440 pupils based on DepEd Order No.19 s.2016 (Department of Education (DepEd), 2016c). The researcher gathered data from small schools because he had to ensure that the participants were classmates from Grades 1 to 3 and received the same treatment to establish the reliability of the results and findings. Their books are written in English and Tagalog only; hence, books translated into Bicol, the region's primary language, are no longer a researcher's concern because they are not using books written in this language. However, there could be a possibility that some students from these schools whose L1 is Bicol, so a strict screening and evaluation of the students' L1 will be observed. If there were students whose L1 is not Tagalog, they would be excluded from this study. Only 15 participants were included in each school as it is the only allowed number of students per classroom by the Department of Education to ensure that limited face-to-face classes are strictly implemented. DepEd Order No. 17, s.2022 states that for Grades 1 through 12, the number of pupils per classroom must consider the varied classroom sizes and the requisite one-meter physical distance between pupils.

Data Collection

With an authorized letter from the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS), the researcher was able to collect data from the students more efficiently, primarily since face-to-face classes are strictly implemented. Moreover, the researcher was able to request assistance from the participants' teachers, particularly when he needed additional supporting papers and information for his study during data collection since the participants of this study were pupils aged 10-12 years old. In collecting the data, participants were instructed to write two essays, one in Tagalog and one in English. The researcher carefully designed three questions for the writing assessments, allowing participants to delve into and expand on one. The technique was used to ensure that students could choose a topic that they were familiar with and at ease discussing, thus enhancing their involvement and accuracy in their responses. The participants' first topic was their own experiences throughout the outbreak. The researcher's goal in this topic was to explore the students' reflections and observations, allowing them to share their thoughts and feelings on a problem that directly affected their lives. This question elicited a more personal and subjective answer, adding depth and authenticity to the collected data. The researcher also included two more questions chosen from Grade 5 textbooks to ensure reliability and consistency in the assessment. These questions were carefully chosen to match the curriculum and academic standards, guaranteeing that the responses given by the pupils could be efficiently evaluated and analyzed. By including these standardized questions, the researcher intended to provide a balanced assessment and gain significant insights into the students' comprehension and writing abilities. Clear guidelines were supplied to help pupils with their written responses. They were invited to express their thoughts



and thoroughly discuss their responses within a word restriction of 150 to promote conciseness and clarity, allowing students to successfully convey their ideas while also offering a manageable scope for the evaluation process. Lowry (2023) states that fifth-graders must write at least 40 words in each paragraph; he emphasizes that they can always write more. However, because writing an essay is tedious, the researcher administered the exam for two days to help the participants to rest after a tedious writing activity. Their works were graded using the modified Tagalog and English rubrics from DepEd, and they are a 4-point rubric with four writing proficiency levels, such as Beginning, Developing, Accomplished, and Exemplary. The rubrics include four writing elements: content, organization, vocabulary, and conventions which are the bases of teachers in checking the students' outputs.

Results

Pupils' Writing Proficiency Levels in Tagalog and English

In order to determine the participants' writing proficiency level, the researcher examined the test results evaluated by three checkers using the rubrics developed by DepEd teachers for English and Tagalog writing exercises. All scores from each checker were tabulated and averaged.

Table 1 shows participants' writing proficiency levels in their first and second languages. The table also shows the group means in two languages, which determines the participants' level of proficiency as a group.

Table 1 Writing Proficiency Levels in Tagalog and English

Writing Proficiency Level	Tagalog		English	
	F	%	F	%
Exemplary	--	--	--	--
Accomplished	11	8.15	1	0.74
Developing	121	89.63	116	85.93
Beginning	3	2.22	18	13.33
General Weighted Mean	2.06		1.87	

The data shows that most participants have achieved the Developing Level in Tagalog ($f = 121$, $\% = 89.63$) and English ($f = 116$, $\% = 85.93$), with no participants at the Exemplary Level. However, there is a significant difference between the two languages in terms of participants at the Accomplished Level, with 11 (8.15%) participants at this level in Tagalog, but only 1 (0.74%) in English. It is also worth noting that there are fewer participants at the Beginning Level in Tagalog ($f = 3$, $\% = 2.22$) compared to English ($f = 18$, $\% = 13.33$).

Based on the general weighted mean of 2.06 in Tagalog and 1.87 in English, the grade 5 pupils' writing proficiency levels can be categorized as developing. This indicates that while they possess some basic writing skills, writing can still pose a significant challenge, especially for those still acquiring language skills. Therefore, it is vital to provide consistent support and guidance to enhance their writing abilities in both languages. The students can improve their writing proficiency with continued assistance and a focus on improving various writing areas such as content, organization, vocabulary, and conventions.

Test Difference in the Writing Proficiency in L1 and L2 of the Grade 5 Pupils who Took the MTB-MLE Program

Table 2 shows the mean difference in the test results of participants in Tagalog and English. The test difference determines whether the participants' writing proficiency skills vary per language they used in writing.



Table 2 Paired Samples t-test of Difference of Test Results in Tagalog and English

Pupils' Writing Proficiency	Descriptive Statistics			t-test for Equality of Means		
	N	M	SD	T	Df	p-value
Tagalog	135	2.06	0.32	4.38	134	.001
English	135	1.87	0.35			

As presented in Table 2, the participants' test results in Tagalog (M = 2.06, SD = 0.32) were higher than their test results in English (M = 1.87, SD = 0.35). However, these results were found to be statistically significant, $t(135) = 4.38, p = .001$, which indicates a notable difference in writing proficiency levels depending on the language used for writing. Additionally, the effect size was calculated as 0.36, indicating that the statistical difference was moderate. Therefore, it can be concluded that while there was some variation in writing proficiency levels between Tagalog and English, this difference was not substantial.

Correlation between L1 and L2 Writing Proficiency of the Grade 5 Pupils

Table 3 shows the Pearson correlation results in the writing test results of participants in Tagalog and English. The test determines whether there is a difference in the participants' writing proficiency skills in Tagalog and English.

Table 3 Pearson Correlation Among the Writing Test Results in Tagalog and English

Students' Writing Proficiency	Descriptive Statistics			Tagalog	English
	N	M	SD		
Tagalog	135	2.06	0.32	.45	
English	135	1.87	0.35		

The test results show that there is no significant relationship between the writing proficiency skills of participants in Tagalog (M = 2.06, SD = 0.32) and English (M = 1.87, SD = 0.35), $r(135) = -.07, n = 135, p = .45$. This suggests that the participants' writing abilities in one language do not necessarily predict their writing abilities in the other language. However, it is essential to note that while there may not be a significant correlation between the two, continued support and guidance in both languages can still improve writing proficiency overall.

Pupils' L1 and L2 Writing Difficulties

Figure 1 shows the mean scores in the writing test results of participants in Tagalog and English in every writing element. The figure also shows the components the participants are having difficulties with.

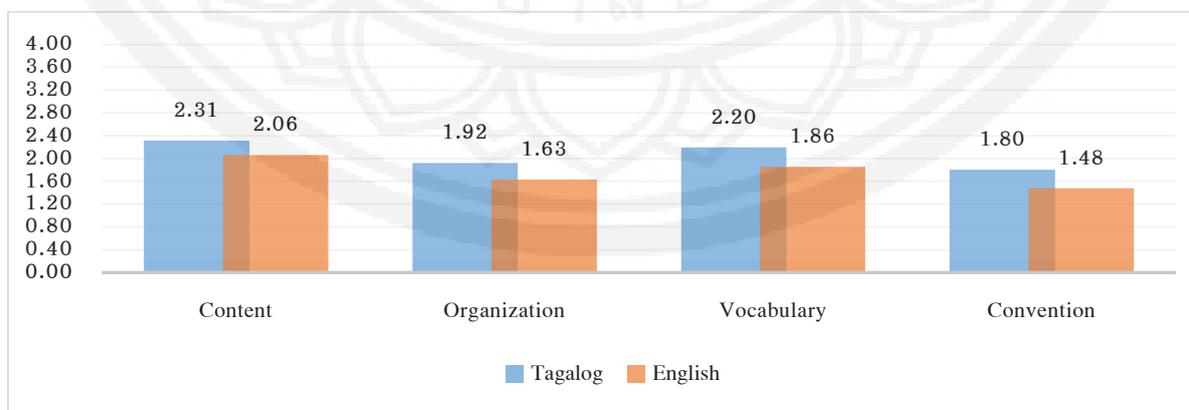


Figure 1 Students Writing Difficulties in Tagalog and English.



Generally, convention obtained the lowest mean score in both writing tasks, scoring 1.80 in Tagalog and 1.48 in English. Since convention showed the lowest score, it means that the majority of the students in both groups could not control their sentence conventions. The possible reason for this may be rooted in the participants' minimal knowledge of spelling and punctuation marks. Their most common errors in the writing convention can be seen in the following samples below:

The students' most common conventions errors were spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

1. Spelling: Errors in spelling were identified in various categories.

1.1 The learners insert extra letters to a particular word.

The covid19 is dangeruous (dangerous).

We love climbbing (climbing) and swimming.

He like planting trees and helping (helping) them grow.

1.2 The error was committed by omitting a letter in a particular word.

...seeng (seeing) them happy.

...tomorrow (tomorrow) in (at) the beach.

1.3 The learners replaced some letters with another letter.

We eat vegetables (vegetables) to be strong.

...becouse (because) they can protect them.

1.4 The learners interchanged the position of letters.

My brother see thier (their) food.

...that place is beuatiful (beautiful).

2. Capitalization: Although proper nouns have their counterpart in Tagalog, some participants were unaware of its rule. Thus, they commit mistakes in this aspect.

Father (father).

pulandaga (Pulang daga).

3. Punctuation: Participants were familiar with the most commonly used punctuation marks, such as question marks, commas, and periods. So, as expected, students committed errors in the writing conventions.

we want to know? (.)

my father bring us there to the beach (.)

4. Verb Tense: It was not surprising to know that students planked in this element since they consider verb tense one of the most complicated topics in the English subject.

We always go there and visited (visit) there my family everyday.

My sister gave mask when I go (went) outside.

On the other hand, the organization ranked second to the lowest in Tagalog (M = 1.92) and English (M = 1.63), meaning they are poor at arranging their ideas logically.

As seen in the data, participants got high vocabulary scores, especially in Tagalog, with a mean score of 2.20, while they scored 1.86 in English. Below are samples of sentences with incorrect choice of words.

1. Language Use: It was not surprising for these participants to make mistakes with their words because English has many vocabulary words.

...the treat (threat) of covid19 to my family.



Although writing is a difficult task and requires a skill for participants to compose sentences and paragraphs, the content received the highest mean score among all the writing elements from all the checkers. With a combined mean score of 2.31 in Tagalog and 2.06 in English, it means that participants were able to come up with essays that were relevant and related to the topic. Considering that participants are non-native speakers, it seemed that it was not difficult for them to express their ideas about the subject.

Discussion and Pedagogical Implication

This study examined participants' L1 and L2 writing skills of grade 5 pupils after taking MTB-MLE from Grades 1 to 3 as Department of Education (DepEd) (2016a) reports that students at this level have passed the CALP two years after completing third grade. The findings of this study provide insights into the writing proficiency levels of grade 5 pupils in Tagalog and English, as well as the differences and difficulties encountered in both languages. The results show that most participants achieved the Developing Level in both Tagalog and English, indicating that they possess basic writing skills but still face challenges in writing. The study findings highlight that students encounter significant writing challenges in both languages, particularly concerning writing conventions encompassing spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar. These findings align with Saavedra and Barredo's (2020) assertion that grammar, spelling, and sentence construction difficulties contribute to elementary children's limited English and Filipino writing skills. Such obstacles present significant hurdles to their overall writing proficiency. Consequently, targeted instruction and practice in these areas become imperative.

The comparison of writing proficiency levels in Tagalog and English reveals a notable distinction in the number of participants at the Accomplished Level. A greater number of participants achieved this level in Tagalog than in English, suggesting that students may be more proficient in expressing themselves in their mother tongue rather than in their second language (L2). These findings align with previous studies highlighting students' challenges when writing in a second language. These challenges are further compounded by limited proficiency in their first language (L1) and second (L2) languages (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Consequently, many L2 learners rely heavily on their L1 as a coping mechanism to attain mental stability since they struggle to simultaneously manage the linguistic and cognitive demands of L2 writing (Woodall, 2002). Several studies have demonstrated that students prefer using L1 during L2 composition (Wang & Wen, 2002). Rana (2018) discovered that multilingual writers employ their L1s to generate ideas, alleviate cognitive load, locate target language phrases, and even back-translate, as they perceive the use of their L1s as both enabling (facilitating thinking) and inhibiting (fear of errors). The lower number of participants at the Beginning Level in Tagalog, as compared to English, may suggest that students possess a stronger grasp of their first language, which is consistent with their linguistic and cultural background. This difference could also be attributed to the simultaneous cognitive overload that occurs when meaning-making and language processing transpire in the L2, as Scott (1996) suggested.

Generally, this study's findings counter Ricablanca's (2014) contention that students become more effective thinkers and communicators when their native language is utilized in classroom discussions and Namanya's (2017) claim that MTB-MLE may facilitate students' language acquisition and development. Based on the results, the L1 of the students does not influence their L2 writing as their L2 written outputs were typically brief, unorganized, and filled with grammatical mistakes. Thus, the data aligns with Saavedra and Barredo's (2020) that elementary students' poor English and Filipino writing skills can be linked to a lack of vocabulary in the target language, trouble organizing ideas, and difficulty spelling, grammar, and sentence construction. This contradicts



Department of Education (DepEd)'s (2016a) presumption that students will be equipped with L1 writing skills by the end of third grade when they use their mother tongue as the mode of instruction from kindergarten to grade 3, which benefits their L2 acquisition. Apparently, based on the results, students failed to improve their writing ability in both languages even though they were already fifth graders. This opposes UNICEF's (2019) and Cummins' (1986) assertion that it takes five to six years for CALP in L1 to mature and be fully used by pupils for language acquisition, as the findings suggest that the participants failed to acquire the necessary writing skills in L1 and L2 at this level. Language proficiency development, particularly in establishing CALP in both the native language (L1) and a second language (L2), might differ significantly between individuals. While their assumption provides a general timeline, it may not universally apply to all pupils due to individual differences and various factors that influence the development of writing skills in both languages. Their timeline may not adequately portray the wide range of language learning experiences since limited exposure or unsupportive learning contexts might impede language development. Furthermore, it is critical to examine skill transferability across L1 and L2, as proficiency in one language does not guarantee proficiency in the other. The challenges that learners face in developing writing skills in both languages may be due to restricted skill transferability, putting into question the idea that CALP in L1 is a prerequisite for CALP in L2.

This study supports DepEd Undersecretary Umali's (2018) (as cited in Montemayor, 2018) argument that learners should strengthen their mother tongue before studying another language. Several experts and institutions are also emphatic that learners should first master the language they already know, for it functions as a bridge for students to acquire L2 and improves their ability to go back and forth between L1 and L2 without leaving L1 behind (Department of Education (DepEd), 2016a; Ball, 2011; Cummins, 1986). DepEd implemented the MTB-MLE through DepEd Order No.16, s.2012, to strengthen the mother tongue of Filipino learners in the transition to and boost L2 learning. The MTB-MLE program recognizes the importance of using a learner's native language as a means of teaching and learning. It promotes the development of language skills in the mother tongue and other languages, which is crucial for quality education (Trammel, 2016). The findings of this study support the need for continued emphasis on MTB-MLE, particularly in developing students' writing skills in their first language, Tagalog. Providing instruction, materials, and assessments appropriate to the mother tongue can facilitate language learning and development (Namanya, 2017).

According to López Urdaneta (2011), L1 influences L2 writing processes, while Stapa and Majid (2012) stated that using L1 gave a higher quality of ideas for L2 writing and improved written work performance. However, in this study, the data indicate that the writing examination in Tagalog did not positively affect their L2 performance, which opposed the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between the participants' L1 and L2 writing skills. The students' poor writing performance in L1 and L2 may mean that the participants do not have a solid foundation for their L1, which is why their L2 did not develop. Department of Education (DepEd) (2016a) believes that implementing the MTB-MLE program ensures that students have a strong command of their L1, as it facilitates L2 acquisition. With this, students' L1 learning should not be stopped in grade 3 and should be continued at higher levels until they are ready and have acquired the necessary skills to learn another language. Domantay and Ramos (2018); Pablo and Lasaten (2018) claimed that improvement in the overall quality of L2 academic writing and writing components happens in higher-level students.



Conclusion and Limitation

This study examined the MTB–MLE effects on learners’ writing skills in L1 and evaluate if L1 contributes to L2 learning to determine whether the Department of Education has successfully achieved its language goals. Based on the gathered data, it was found that students did not perform well in their writing assessments in both Tagalog and English, implying that MTB–MLE did not effectively enhance their proficiency in writing in their first language after three years of participating in the program from Grades 1 to 3. The results revealed that students obtained the lowest average scores in writing conventions, which included spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar, in both languages. This indicates that students faced challenges in controlling these writing conventions and suggests that they have limited knowledge of these aspects, leading to errors in their writing. Teachers must prioritize explicit instruction and practice in spelling, capitalization, punctuation rules, and grammar conventions in both Tagalog and English. Additionally, providing students with regular feedback and opportunities for revision can help improve their proficiency in these areas. Furthermore, the results indicate that proficiency in students’ first language did not contribute significantly to their improvement in the second language, as there was a moderately significant difference between their performance in the Tagalog and English examinations. Consequently, students failed to meet the basic writing curriculum standards under the MTB–MLE program. However, it is essential to note that the study identified challenges in developing English writing proficiency within the MTB–MLE context. This is primarily due to the program’s limited emphasis on writing instruction in English and the students’ restricted exposure to authentic writing tasks, which may hinder the program’s effectiveness in enhancing English writing skills. To address this issue, educators should ensure that writing instruction in English receives appropriate attention and that students have ample opportunities to engage in authentic writing tasks. This can involve writing for different purposes and audiences, incorporating peer feedback and revision, and exposing students to various writing genres. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this study. It could not identify the specific factors that hindered students’ improvement in writing skills in both languages. In addition, given the presence of numerous regional languages, it did not determine whether the situation observed by the study’s participants is representative of students across the country. Therefore, it is recommended that other researchers gather data to analyze the factors influencing students’ writing improvement in different regions with varying L1 and L2 languages.

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