

# Influence of First Language on Learning English as a Second Language from Teachers' Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the influence of first language (L1) on learning English as a Second Language (ESL) from the teachers' perspective of their students. The study employed a questionnaire to obtain data from ESL teachers about the influence of first language in ESL writing, the flow of thoughts, and how students process their thoughts in writing during English lessons. The discussion also included questions related to students' involvement in writing activities during class time, teachers' perspectives on explicit teaching, task types and approaches/ strategies students use in ESL learning, and difficulties encountered by students in writing. The interview consisted of 25 structured questions. The data obtained from the interview responses were analysed using thematic analysis. The coding method by Saldana (2021) was used as the analytical guide. The results indicated that teaching writing has become challenging due to various complexities encountered in the classroom. Teachers often find their students to be disengaged in writing tasks. Students face challenges due to limited reading skills and low motivation. Teachers have observed that students who are emergent writers often struggle with learning a second language (L2) due to processing difficulties in the target language. Common concerns relate to vocabulary retrieval, grammar and syntax, fluency and speed, comprehension, and idiomatic expressions. L2 students resort to using their first language (L1) in L2 writing to overcome these challenges and processing difficulties in the target language.

## 1. Introduction

In general, the first language or mother tongue refers to both the speaker's dominant and native language and the language they acquire from their mother. The process of learning a mother tongue happens naturally. The first language is also called the native language. Native language and culture play a significant role in Second Language learning. Regardless of the nation, first language (L1) becomes the primary resource for a second language learner to comprehend how a language functions. For young learners in the concrete operation phase who tend to track language acquisition, L1 provides steady guidance in learning a second language (L2). It is interesting to note that learning foreign languages aids in students'

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comprehension of their tongue, and they use their L1 systems to relate to the L2; it is vital to emphasise the significance of L1 in learning L2 or a foreign language. This paper presents and analyses the data from the focus group interview with English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. The focus group interview with the teachers was conducted after analysing all the data obtained from the three written tests and focus group discussions conducted for students.

According to Denizer (2017), first language or mother tongue influence is a transfer that can have both beneficial and detrimental effects on learning. Though less sophisticated in linguistic analysis and limited in scope, the study conducted by He (2012) disclosed some attempts to make systematic use of the first language to develop the target language. He further mentioned that , "instead of viewing L1 use as an issue of teaching technique in the classroom, the Chinese language in their work is employed as a mediating tool and a rich resource pool for possible positive cross-lingual transfer"(p.14). Furthermore, Izsak and Gréta (2023) stated that the negative effects of the first language are "incorrect pronunciation, grammatical errors, and limited use of vocabulary"(p.36).

In terms of the students in this research, most of them rely on the translation method from their first language in writing. The simple sentence structure of their first language is Subject + Object + Verb, whereas in English, it is Subject+ Verb + Object. When the sentences become more and more complex, the students find them to be more challenging. I have observed that students' English writing is influenced by their L1, which was the motivation behind undertaking this research study on English writing skills.

## **2. Method of the Study**

The focus group interview consisted of 25 structured questions (see Appendix A), and it was designed to obtain information on the influence of the first language in ESL writing, the flow of thoughts, and how students process their thoughts at the drafting stage in the target language. The interview also included questions on students' involvement in writing activities during class, teachers' perspectives on explicit teaching, task types practised in the classroom, the engagement of the students in ESL class, and difficulties encountered by students in writing.

### **2.1. Sample**

The focus group interview was held with 10 ESL teachers at the university, and their teaching experience ranged from six months to more than 20 years.

### **2.2. Analytical Guide Used for the Focus Group Discussion**

Saladana (2021) on coding manuals for qualitative researchers guided the data analysis collected through the focus group discussion with the teachers.

### **2.3. Analysis of the Data Collected from the Focus Group Discussion with ESL Teachers**

Below are some of the focus group interview scripts. The data in the scripts were coded for analysis.

Table 1. Teachers' responses

Question and answers	Codes
<p>A. In their writing samples, did you observe specific examples of first language influence, i.e., word-to-word translation/ direct translation/ sentence formation/ structural issues/ ambiguity of expression in target language</p> <p>Teacher A: Even though, L1 influence definitely presents itself when they write, since I have not conducted any research on this, specific examples do not come into mind. However, it can be noted that the most prominent 1.L1 influence is present in the form of</p> <p>Word-to-word translation</p> <p>Use of the SOV pattern</p> <p>Lack of the use of the BE verb</p> <p>Ambiguity of expression</p> <p>Teacher B: There were issues in sentence formation, structural issues and ambiguity. They wanted to maintain the standard in the thoughts they have in Sinhala when they 2.translate them into English.</p> <p>Teacher C: Yes, most of the time 3.1st language affects in their writing.</p> <p>Teacher D: Yes. Most of the time they try to directly 4. translate from Sinhala to English and form sentences according to the order of their first language</p> <p>Teacher E: 5. Yes. Word to word translation was seen quite often</p> <p>Teacher F: 6. Yes, I have noticed those.</p> <p>Teacher G:</p> <p>1. My father was very happily</p> <p>2. This memory every time give me to happy</p> <p>3. I have been doing education since young (instead of studying)</p> <p>4. I was exited</p> <p>Teacher H: Very few stunts were observed with first language influence. Compared to Art Faculty students, Music faculty students performed better. Most of the Art Faculty students were observed with first language influence, with the mentioned 7. direct translation errors in target language usage.</p>	<p>1. L1influence</p> <p>2. L1influence</p> <p>3.L1 influence</p> <p>4.L1 influence</p> <p>5.L1 influence</p> <p>6.L1 influence</p>

<p>Teacher I: 8. Yes, in their writing samples, I observed specific examples of 9. first language influence. These included instances of word-to-word translation, direct translation, sentence formation that mirrored patterns in their 10. first language, structural issues related to the target language's grammar rules, and occasional ambiguity of expression arising from the influence of their native language.</p> <p>Please provide three example sentences</p> <p>1. When they wrote, "He gave me a cold shoulder," they used word-for-word translation from their native language, resulting in an idiomatic expression that may be ambiguous in the target language.</p> <p>2. In the line "She has a heart of gold," a literal translation from their native tongue was used, which could lead to ambiguity in the intended meaning.</p> <p>3. In sentence formation, they wrote, "Despite the rain, we went for a picnic," demonstrating a structural difficulty influenced by the grammar rules of their first language.</p> <p>Teacher J: 11. Yes</p>	<p>7.L1 influence</p> <p>8.L1 influence</p> <p>9.L1 influence</p> <p>10.L1 influence</p> <p>11.L1 influence</p>
<p>B. In your view, do the students have processing difficulties in the target language?</p> <p>Teacher A: Yes</p> <p>Teacher B: 1. Yes they have. They find it difficult to understand when the teacher explains something only in English.</p> <p>Teacher C: The students come with basic knowledge of grammar 2. can manage in processing the language in greater extent but students coming with poor backgrounds without basic knowledge face lots of 3. difficulties in processing the target language.</p> <p>Teacher D: Yes they do. The main reason is aesthetic subjects except for western music is done in the native language. So the students' exposure to English is very limited. Most of their proficiency level is below the average as they have not taken learning English seriously. So they always have 4. difficulties dealing with all the</p>	<p>1. Perception</p> <p>2. Perception</p> <p>3. Challenges</p>

<p>four skills</p> <p>Teacher E: I think so. They try to 5. think in Sinhala and try to convert the same thought into English. Hence the word order, vocabulary can be very confusing to them</p> <p>Teacher F: Yes, in my opinion, some students have processing 6. difficulties in English. They tend to 7.translate word-to-word before they write a sentence. Sometimes they even ask me for the particular English word to complete their translation before writing sentences. As I have noticed, they are not used to thinking in English, for years they have been directly translating their thoughts from Sinhala/their mother tongue to English.</p> <p>Teacher G: Yes, most of the students. They lack sufficient vocabulary in order to write what they actually mean.</p> <p>Teacher H: Yes, In my point of view they had processing 8.difficulties in target language mainly due to fossilised errors which are difficult to change. If they are given more time for language learning these errors could have been resolved.</p> <p>Teacher I: Yes, some students do have processing 9. difficulties in the target language. These difficulties can manifest in various ways, such as challenges in understanding complex sentence structures, idiomatic expressions, or nuanced vocabulary usage. However, with support in practice, many students gradually improve their language processing skills</p> <p>Teacher J: Yes, they have processing difficulties</p>	<p>4. Challenges</p> <p>5.L1 influence</p> <p>6. Challenges</p> <p>7. Generating ideas in L1</p> <p>8. Challenges</p> <p>9. Challenges</p> <p>10. Challenges</p>
<p>C. Do you believe that these students struggle with thinking in English/ the target language?</p>	

Teacher A: 1. Yes, their limited L2 proficiency is the reason for this.	
Teacher B: They are 2. comfortable in and used to think in Sinhala, so they don't often even try to think in English.	1.Challenges
Teacher C: Obviously, they use to 3. think in their 1st language and then try to translate to the target language.	2.L1 influence
Teacher D: Yes. Even we have been nurtured to 'think in English' which is something 4. impossible. But since they were told to do so they try to do it but fails. When we do not have English as the first language or even in our immediate environment, it is unfair to ask anyone to think in English.	3.L1 influence
Teacher E: Yes. From school, they were not guided to think and produce something in English. Also the utmost weakness in English have 5. refrained them from thinking in the target language.	4. Challenges
Teacher F: Yes, I believe so. I think they have 6. not been trained to think in the target language. I always encourage them to think in English and I try to make them realize the importance of thinking in English because in real life contexts we hardly have any time to translate our thoughts into English. Further, I encourage them to give English language labels to the objects and activities that they come across in their daily life and also I always encourage them to talk to themselves in English to overcome the issue of translating.	5. Challenges
Teacher G: Yes they do. It is observed that most of the students 7.tend to write first in Sinhala and then they turn the words in to English and make sentences. Also, when they do not know words and how to form sentences, instead of asking the teacher, they use Google translate by typing the Sinhala sentence. So, basically the majority of the students do not think in the target language.	6. Challenges
Teacher H: Thinking in target language was a very difficult concept for most of them. Majority of the 8.students thought in first language and translated that before using the target language.	
Teacher I: Yes, some students do struggle when thinking directly in English/the target language. They may find it more natural to 9. think in their first language and then translate their thoughts into the target language when writing. This can be a result of limited language proficiency or a preference for using familiar linguistic patterns.	7. Generating ideas in L1
Teacher J: Yes, they struggled with think in English as they don't have the proper exposure to the target language	8. Generating ideas in L1

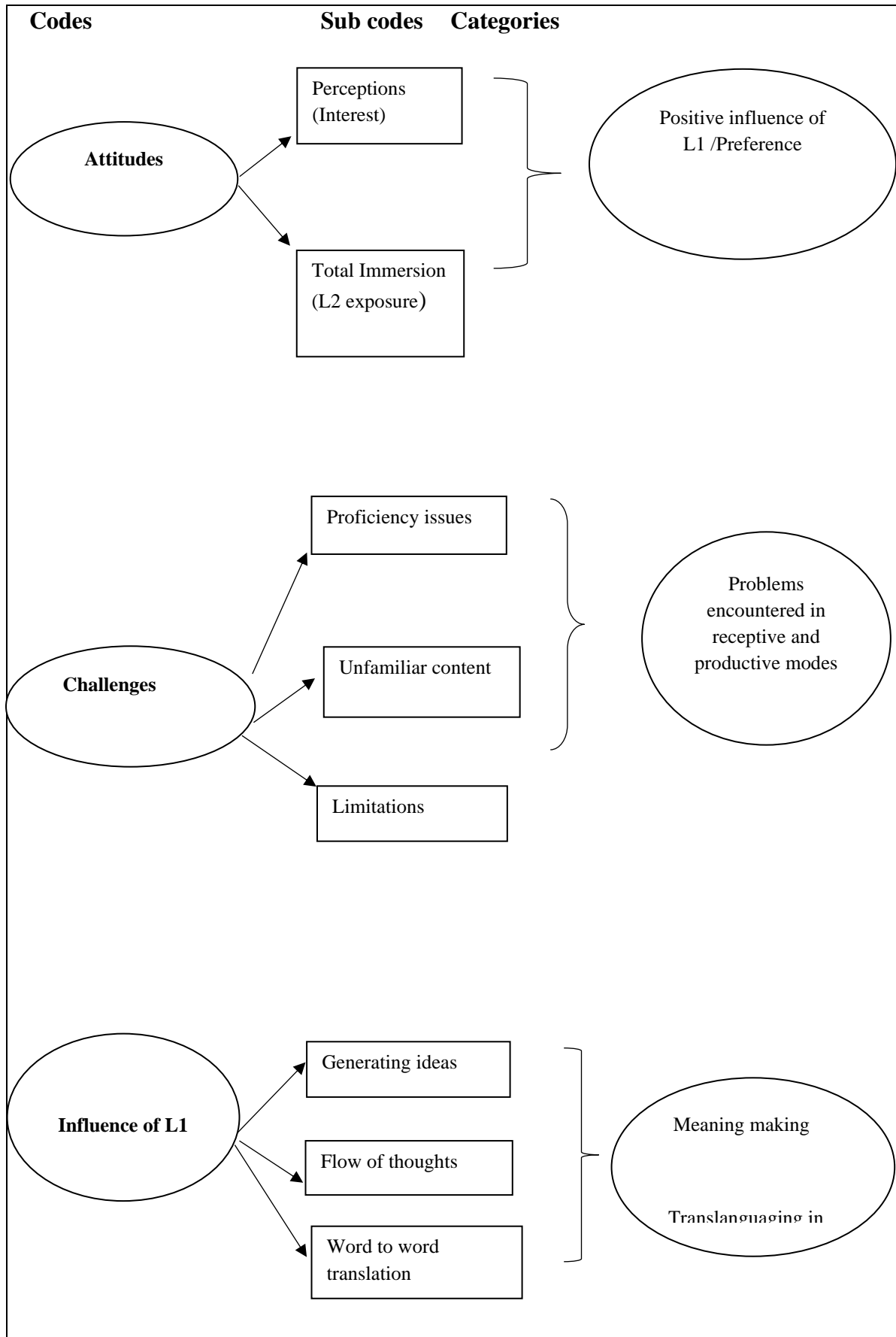
	<p>9. Generating ideas in L1</p> <p>10. Challenges</p>
<p>D. Are they naturally gravitating towards thinking in their first language and then translating their thoughts into the target language?</p> <p>Teacher A: Yes, it would seem so. Since they are mostly poor in their use of the L2, they could be 1. thinking in the L1 while attempting to produce utterances in the L2. However, at the onset, students are introduced to the English sentence types/ structures and told not to think in the L1 and directly translate their thoughts to produce L2 output.</p> <p>Teacher B: Yes, they are. They are much more comfortable in 2. using Sinhala and since they had done most of their subjects in Sinhala, they always first think in Sinhala and then try to translate in it into English.</p> <p>Teacher C: 3. Most of the students use to do so.</p> <p>Teacher D: Yes. But sometimes it is a successful method to learn vocabulary and the difference between concepts in the first language and the second.</p> <p>Teacher E: Yes they do. A lot. Due to the Availability of devices such as paraphrasing tools and translating apps, they always engage in 4. converting the same thought to English</p> <p>Teacher F: Yes, some of them try to 5. translate their thoughts into the target language.</p> <p>Teacher G: Yes.</p> <p>Teacher H: Yes</p> <p>Teacher I: Yes, many students 6. naturally gravitate towards thinking in their first language and then translating their thoughts into the target language when</p>	<p>1. Influence of L1</p> <p>2. Influence of L1</p> <p>3. Influence of L1</p> <p>4. Support (obtained /received)</p> <p>5. Influence of L1</p> <p>6. Influence of L1</p>

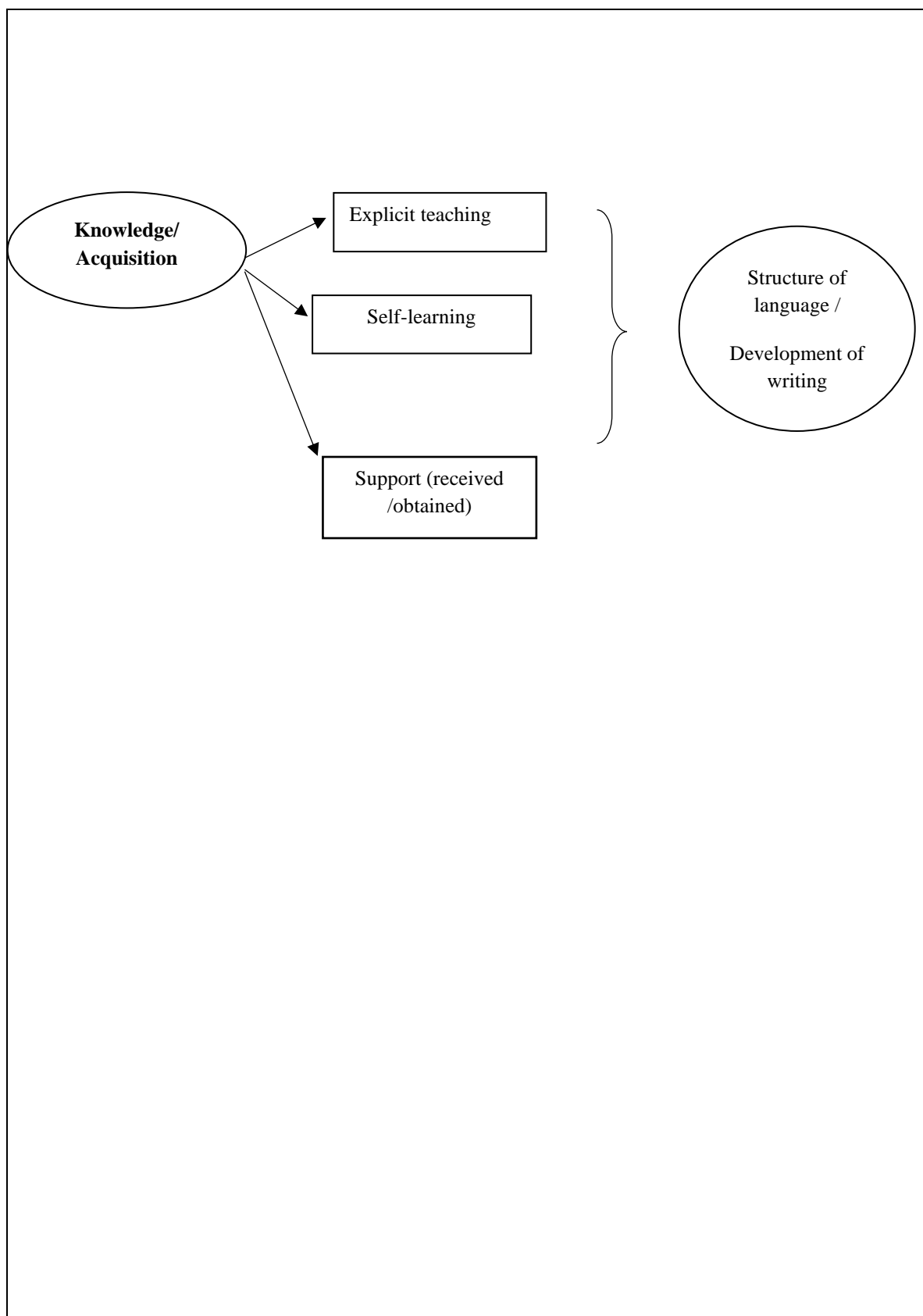
<p>completing writing tasks. It can be a common tendency, especially for learners in the early stages of language acquisition or those who have a strong connection to their first language.</p> <p>When asked to write about their favourite childhood memories in English, students naturally thought about them in 7. Sinhala first, then translated their ideas onto paper.</p> <p>Teacher J: Yes</p>	<p>7. Influence of L1</p>
<p>Moderator: If so, what is the process they use to put these generated ideas into writing?</p> <p>Teacher A: No idea.</p> <p>Teacher B: They 1.1st think in Sinhala and then translate that into English. Sometimes they do direct translation.</p> <p>Teacher C: If they don't have basic knowledge about word order or sentence structures, they attempt writing sentences without any grammar rules. They put words come to their minds and try to convey their thoughts. So less accuracy and clarity can be found in their writing.</p> <p>Teacher D: They normally use dictionaries to find the words in English. We have also introduced google translation in the classroom but with the knowledge that the translation is not 100% accurate.</p> <p>Teacher E: First they type what they want in 2.Sinhala, and write the exact thing in English. Sometimes it doesn't make sense and student do not understand that these are insensible</p> <p>Teacher F: They use word-to-word translation. With my observations, they focus 3. more on the words rather than focussing on the tense and the grammatical structure.</p> <p>Teacher G: Word-to-word translation. First, they 4.write the sentence in Sinhala and translate the words and make the sentence. Not every student but the majority.</p> <p>Teacher H: 5. Translation</p> <p>Teacher I: The process students use to put their generated ideas into writing involves 6.first brainstorming or reflecting on the topic in their first language. Then, they make a conscious effort to 7. translate and transfer those ideas into the target language. This process often includes organizing their thoughts, selecting</p>	<p>1. Generating ideas in L1</p> <p>2. Generating ideas in L1</p> <p>3. Perception</p> <p>4. word to word translation</p> <p>5. Generating ideas in L1</p> <p>6. Generating ideas in L1</p>



The data obtained from the focus group interviews were further analysed and codified, as presented in Chart 1.2. The codes derived from the data helped identify the categories.

Table 2. A streamlined codes-to-theory relevant to the study





The following categories were derived after codifying the data from the focus group discussions.

- (i) Influence of L1
- (ii) Problems encountered in receptive and productive modes
- (iii) Structure of language / Development of writing
- (iv) Meaning-making/ translanguaging in writing

Therefore, the above four categories derived from the data are the “themes” from the focus group interviews, and they are further analysed below.

**(i) Influence of L1**

According to the deconstructing of information, when a writing task is assigned to the students, they first think or write the content in their first language (Wang & Wen, 2002) and later translate it to L2 or English. All the teachers interviewed reported that their students naturally gravitated towards thinking in their first language and then translating their thoughts into the target language. The thought process in L1 provides a fundamental base (Singh & Maniam, 2020) for the students to rely on. The teachers have also observed the influence of L1 in the arrangement of words in their L2 writing while adhering to the patterns of sentence structure of their first language. Some teachers highlighted that the L1 influence was prominent among those students with limited writing skills (Farooq et al., 2020; Wang, 2003). Accordingly, the L1 influence was significantly seen in word order, use of prepositions, or the placement of adjectives, reflecting the linguistic patterns of their first language.

**(ii) Problems encountered in receptive and productive modes**

Teachers perceived writing as a challenge for most students regarding complexities encountered in receptive and productive modes. As Moses and Mohamad (2019) stated, the variabilities that impacted the students were individual writing skills, interest, motivation, specific assignments, prior experience, and confidence. Writing plays a significant role in language production. However, it was observed that L2 learners face many challenges in this learning context. In terms of individual writing skills, students needed to gain better command over grammar, vocabulary, and syntax (Fareed et al., 2016), which could be categorised as insufficient linguistic proficiency. According to the responses of written activities and interviews, the influence of thinking in L1 before writing in L2 was clearly evident.

Furthermore, these L2 learners seemed to lack interest and motivation to learn writing as they were unclear about the purpose and significance of the writing tasks given in the class. Since these L2 learners were pursuing degrees in dance and drama, music, and visual arts, some thought English was not required. Moreover, most of these students limited exposure to reading and writing practices, which affected them in the ESL classroom.

According to teachers' perceptions, the maximum time taken to complete a writing task varied depending on the task's complexity, length, and familiarity. The teachers shared that the students take an hour to write an essay and 15 -30 minutes for shorter tasks, e.g., comprehension activity, a response to a question, and writing a note. The teachers were also questioned about the students' engagement in the task. They observed that for most of the students, writing was a challenging task due to the difficulties they encountered with grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, and issues with personality traits, attitudes, and the language proficiency level of the students. According to Krebt (2017), role plays, group

discussions and project-based tasks motivate the students in the classroom. Teachers mentioned that some students in the ESL class showed positive engagement in real-life experiences and practical experiences (providing a model and working together with other students when attempting writing tasks), and some students showed reluctance to approach the tasks.

Moreover, teachers were asked about the students' motivation and engagement towards the set tasks in the classroom. The teachers' responses were a mixture, and it was reported that some students liked the tasks and some did not. Furthermore, the students' engagement depended on gender, topics aligned with their interests, different levels of enthusiasm depending on their personal preferences, individual writing skills, and perceived relevance of the tasks. Some students preferred writing tasks during online classes because it provided a learning platform to incorporate digital technology into their learning by inserting pictures into their pallets and Google jam boards (Okmawati & Tiarina, 2022).

### **(iii) Structure of language/development of writing**

The teachers were asked about the students' ability to formulate a simple sentence without any difficulty, i.e., a sentence with S+V, S+V+O, and S+V+A pattern, and 80% of the teachers said that their students were able to form a sentence in L2 with minor errors and mistakes. Accordingly, the teachers were cross-examined to see whether students were more inclined to use primary morphological processes in constructing words or whether they were combining these structures with syntax and semantics. Half of the teachers said that the students seemed to combine sentences with syntax and semantics without considering the context. Some teachers said their students relied more on primary morphological processes in constructing words, especially unfamiliar vocabulary.

### **(iv) Meaning-making/ translanguaging in writing**

Concerning meaning-making and working methods, the teachers were asked about examples of first language influence, i.e., word-to-word translation/ direct translation/ sentence formation/ structural issues/ ambiguity of expression in the target language. The teachers believed that while some students succeeded in meaning-making in L2, others struggled as they made significant grammatical and stylistic errors and had a limited bank of vocabulary to express their thoughts unambiguously.

The teachers were asked about their beliefs about students' challenges/ difficulties with thinking in English in the classroom, and 90% of them said that it varied depending on their language proficiency, prior exposure to language skills, and individual learning styles. Some students encounter challenges in thinking and expressing themselves directly in English or the target language, especially if they primarily think in their first language and then translate their thoughts. According to the many research findings, one of the most popular strategies used by L2 learners is switching to L1 regularly while writing for various purposes. However, with consistent/ regular practice and increased language proficiency, students gradually improve their ability to think and express themselves more naturally in the target language, reducing processing difficulties over time.

Furthermore, the teachers were questioned to see whether there was a natural gravitation towards thinking in their first language and then translating their thoughts into the target language. Most teachers believed there was a natural gravitation since the students had limited exposure to using the L2; they could think in L1 while attempting to produce utterances in L2. Consequently, a question was raised about the students processing these generated ideas in writing, and 70% of the teachers revealed that the students attempted to

write sentences without following grammar rules. They use words that come to mind and try to convey their thoughts. Below are some examples from the students' writing provided by teachers.

Table 3. Students' writing

First language influence	Sentences from students' writing
Word-to-word translation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I had small proud of me.</li> <li>2. if you hard work you can win.</li> <li>3. She hobby is painting.</li> <li>4. I rain like so much because the environment is beutiul when rain.</li> <li>5. Sri Lanka is a beautifully island so lot of tourists visit to Sri Lanka.</li> <li>6. I can success my future and for do that I want to go to abroad soon.</li> <li>7. You from Galle ,I also Galle</li> <li>8. I thought you told me I want to speak</li> </ol>
Reduplication	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Father was very kindness.</li> <li>2. I am a villagable middle class girl.</li> <li>3. I was calmful those days.</li> </ol>
Influence of L1 in their arrangement of words in their writing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Because it very cold in the morning she did not liking to go to the school.</li> <li>2. We are no any small children any more there fore we should behaving good as elderly.</li> <li>3. I want to work hardly to achieving my goals and then to finally enjoy my parents.</li> </ol>
Use of primary morphological processes in constructing words or structures with syntax and semantics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. My small sister has very very beautiful eyes that I love to them so much and she has a big black hair.</li> <li>2. Kandyan dance is one of the main traditional type dance style in Sri Lanka and it born in Kandy.</li> <li>3. Mr Jackson Anthony sir is a great actor, director, singer as well as dancer in Sri Lanka who had many talent skills and abilities.</li> <li>4. Some nations achieve international sports build up for athletes games.</li> <li>5. This essay will be discussed the both view points.</li> <li>6. Sri Lanka famous in world one of the sports is cricket.</li> </ol>

When teachers were questioned about their observations on the influence of L1 on the arrangement of words in their students' writing, 90% said that L1 influence is always

present and occurs due to the basic S+O+V structure of a Sinhala (L1) sentence. As such, there seems to be confusion when constructing simple sentences that carry the S+V+O pattern in English (L2).

Teachers were also interviewed about their students' language structure and writing development knowledge. They were asked if their students understood the concept of print. In English, we read/write from left to right (directionality) /put spaces between words, and use punctuation, letters, and words to convey meaning/ a message. 80% of the teachers said that their students understood the concept of print and that they had been exposed to various printed materials throughout their academic journey. They comprehend that print refers to written text or images produced through techniques like typesetting or digital printing. Furthermore, these undergraduates frequently engage with printed materials such as textbooks, research articles, and lecture notes, enhancing their familiarity and comprehension of print. However, they commented that students did not use it correctly regarding capitalisation. It is not totally due to their unawareness of this rule, but they do not consider punctuation significant to achieving clarity and accuracy in writing.

The next question asked by the teachers was about their observations on maintaining a daily journal for their students. Even though journal writing was not required in the class, 50% of the teachers had encouraged their students to maintain a journal. Some teachers reported that some students were very creative and could write about anything related to their lives in their blog/ journal entries. However, few students would directly copy-paste descriptions from various internet sources and be penalised for plagiarism. Many scholars have identified journal writing as a productive practice where L2 learners can engage and progress with their writing. It promotes the habit of thinking while providing the students with ongoing inspiration for writing. Journal writing also encourages students to think of journal writing as a means of cultivating habits of incorporating ideas on paper and viewing journal writing as a means of improving accuracy and proficiency in writing.

According to teachers, some students have said they were planning to continue writing their blogs as they may find value in journaling as a means of personal reflection, self-expression, or documenting their experiences. Teachers were questioned whether they taught writing explicitly to their students, and 90% said they did. Concerning explicit teaching, the teachers were also asked about their approach to teaching writing for a purpose. I.e., specific strategies they used and the activities they set for their students. Most teachers said they engaged students in brainstorming, mind mapping, or outlining to generate ideas, organise their thoughts, and plan their writing. As for the activities, teachers engaged their students in paragraph writing, writing various essays and blog entries, and developing e-portfolios. Blogging has been identified as an effective instrument for writing by many researchers.

Furthermore, teachers have provided specific tasks such as letter writing, summary writing, descriptive writing, memos, emails, and report writing. Some teachers have engaged the students in producing creative statements to describe the intellectual underpinning of their artwork and/or composing monologues or performance scripts. Moreover, writing introspective articles or criticisms on performances or exhibits and drafting research papers on arts-related themes were also practised in the classrooms.

#### **4. Discussion**

This section discusses the findings in three main areas: L1 influence and challenges in ESL writing, students' dependency on the structure of the L1 and meaning-making and translanguaging and students' preference for tasks in the classroom.

#### **4.1. L1 Influence and Challenges in ESL Writing**

Teachers believed that their L2 learners struggled during the writing process for various reasons observed during classroom observations. According to them, the students have processing difficulties in the target language. Most teachers claim that the students have processing difficulties as language acquisition involves learning vocabulary and grammar and developing the ability to process information in L2 and express thoughts in real-time. Some common processing difficulties that students may have encountered include:

- i. Vocabulary retrieval: Students may struggle to recall appropriate words or expressions in the target language during speaking or writing tasks, leading to pauses or circumlocution /periphrasis.
- ii. Grammar and syntax: Students may find applying the correct grammatical structures and sentence patterns of the target language challenging, resulting in errors or awkward sentence structures.
- iii. Fluency and speed: Students may need additional time to process information in the target language, leading to slower speaking or writing speeds than in their first language.
- iv. Comprehension: Students may have difficulty understanding spoken or written language due to unfamiliar vocabulary, complex sentence structures, or cultural references.
- v. Idiomatic expressions and collocations: Students might struggle with comprehension and using idiomatic expressions or collocations, which can affect their overall fluency and naturalness.

When these L2 learners were confronted with these issues in the classroom, they benefitted from translation from L1 to L2. The scope ranges from style, content, and organisation. Since most of these L2 learners belonged to the emergent learner category, a heavy dependency on L1 was observed.

#### **4.2. Students' Dependency on the Structure of the Language, Meaning-Making and Translanguaging**

Some teachers reported that students generally had a higher proficiency level in L1, which allowed them to express their thoughts and ideas more effectively. However, since they belong to the category of emergent writers, learning L2 is challenging for them. In this context, the students' L1 and L2 differ in several ways. Due to the challenges in ESL classrooms, they depend on their L1 in writing. Though this phenomenon could be seen as a natural inclination, due to the dissimilarities in the two languages, the L1 and L2 differ in the way the word order is arranged in a sentence. Thus, their L2 writing can be pictured as deviations. However, their effort to make meaning in their writing requires to be looked at from a different perspective. Translanguaging may influence teachers to see these deviations as students' efforts to use English to reflect their cultures, identities, and thought processes—sometimes drawing from their first languages.

#### **4.3. Students' Preference for Tasks in the Classroom**

Most teachers expressed that their students were not interested in engaging in writing tasks, while some mentioned that only a few students wanted to present their ideas through writing.



The teachers further claimed that students preferred speaking over writing, and sometimes, personal inclination, context/ mode of communication, and the faculty influenced their preference. During the interview, the teachers reported that students were motivated by role-play activities in the classroom.

In terms of the students' approach to the tasks, the proficient learners approached the tasks confidently, but the majority needed significant support (peer and teacher) to complete the task. Furthermore, students are interested in group work and prefer speaking activities over writing skills. With all, teachers observed that their students gradually learn to combine these morphological structures with syntax and semantics to create more nuanced and contextually appropriate expressions as their language skills develop. The task approaches depended on individual personalities and the levels of their respective writing skills.

## 5. Conclusion

Teaching writing has become challenging due to various problems encountered in the classroom. Teachers often find their students uninterested in writing tasks and display limited writing skills, resulting from a lack of reading and low motivation. Teachers have observed that emergent writers often struggle with learning a second language (L2) due to processing difficulties in the target language. Common difficulties include vocabulary retrieval, grammar and syntax, fluency and speed, comprehension, and idiomatic expressions. Despite these challenges, students continue to use their first language (L1) in writing due to difficulties experienced in thinking in English. A learner's first language can influence second language learning by providing a source of understanding or causing interference if the two languages differ. Proficient learners confidently approach tasks, but most require significant support from peers and teachers. They also show an interest in group work and prefer speaking activities rather than writing. As their language skills develop, and with practice, they gradually learn to combine morphological structures with syntax and semantics to create more nuanced and contextually appropriate expressions.

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