



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***ENGLISH WRITING MOTIVATIONAL ORIENTATION AND  
APPREHENSION AMONG URBAN AND RURAL MALAYSIAN SCHOOL  
STUDENTS***

**NAJEHAH SHAMMODIN**

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STUDENTS**

**By**

**NAJEHAH SHAMMODIN**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in  
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts**

**July 2018**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

## **ENGLISH WRITING MOTIVATIONAL ORIENTATION AND APPREHENSION AMONG URBAN AND RURAL MALAYSIAN SCHOOL STUDENTS**

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**July 2018**

**Chairman : Vahid Nimehchisalem, PhD**  
**Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication**

Geographical background can influence the Malaysians' English language acquisition. The Malaysian school students' English writing motivational orientations and apprehension levels based on urban-rural background differences were examined. The correlation between both psychological states was also examined in this study. A total of 264 Malaysian school students (134 urban, 130 rural) participated and responded to the bilingual instruments English Writing Self-Regulation Questionnaire (EWSRQ) and English Writing Apprehension Scale (EWAS). Data were analyzed using SPSS (version 20) through Independent Samples T-test and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient analyses. Findings from this study is contrary with results from past literature with regards to urban and rural background differences in Malaysian school students' English writing motivational orientations and English writing apprehension levels. Urban-rural background caused no significant difference in the scores of Extrinsic, Introjection, and Intrinsic, while there were significant differences in the scores of Identification and Apprehension. These results indicated that the urban-rural categorization of the learning background has influenced the respondents' motivation to write for own better future (Identification) and in being abnormally anxious when writing in English (Apprehension). The significant relationship between motivational orientations and apprehension suggested that the more reduced autonomy or the more externalized in the students' orientation of English writing motivation, the more apprehensive they are when writing in the language. Educators and curriculum developers can benefit from this study on the importance of creating student-centered learning climate as a way to reduce students' detrimental feeling towards English writing. Recommendations for further study are also proposed as a way to improve English language curriculum in Malaysia.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Sarjana Sastera

## **ORIENTASI MOTIVASI DAN KEBIMBANGAN BAGI PENULISAN BAHASA INGGERIS DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR BANDAR DAN LUAR BANDAR DI MALAYSIA**

Oleh

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Latar belakang geografi telah banyak mempengaruhi pemerolehan Bahasa Inggeris dalam kalangan rakyat Malaysia. Kajian ini meneliti perbezaan antara bandar dan luar bandar dalam orientasi motivasi serta tahap kebimbangan dalam kalangan pelajar sekolah di Malaysia. Hubungkait antara kedua-dua keadaan psikologi juga diteliti dalam kajian ini. Seramai 264 orang pelajar sekolah di Malaysia (134 bandar, 130 luar bandar) telah mengambil bahagian dan memberi maklumbalas bagi instrumen dwibahasa English Writing Self-Regulation Questionnaire (EWSRQ) dan English Writing Apprehension Scale (EWAS). Data telah dianalisis dengan menggunakan SPSS (versi 20) melalui analisis Independent Samples T-Test dan Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. Penemuan kajian ini mendedahkan bahawa kedua-dua responden dari bandar dan luar bandar mempunyai tahap Pengenalan (Identification) bagi orientasi motivasi dan pada masa yang sama, mereka juga menunjukkan tahap kebimbangan yang tinggi dalam penulisan Bahasa Inggeris. Latar belakang bandar-luar bandar tidak menunjukkan perbezaan yang signifikan dalam skor Extrinsic, Introjection, dan Intrinsic, sementara terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan dalam skor Identification dan Apprehension. Keputusan analisis hubungkait melaporkan hubungan yang signifikan antara orientasi-orientasi motivasi dan kebimbangan, di mana semakin kurang autonomi dalam sesuatu motivasi, semakin meningkat tahap kebimbangan semasa menulis dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Penemuan kajian ini adalah bertentangan dengan hasil dari kesusasteraan lepas berkaitan dengan perbezaan latar belakang bandar dan luar bandar pelajar sekolah dalam orientasi motivasi serta tahap kebimbangan dalam penulisan Bahasa Inggeris. Para pendidik dan pembangun kurikulum akan mendapat manfaat melalui dapatan kajian ini dalam kepentingan mewujudkan kelas yang berpusatkan pelajar sebagai salah satu cara memperbaiki prestasi pelajar-pelajar Malaysia dalam penulisan Bahasa Inggeris. Kajian lanjut juga telah dicadangkan bagi memperbaiki kurikulum Bahasa Inggeris di Malaysia.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on July 3, 2018 to conduct the final examination of Najehah Shammodin on her thesis entitled “English Writing Motivational Orientation and Apprehension among Urban and Rural Malaysian School Students” in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be rewarded the degree of Master of Arts. Members of the Thesis Examination Committee were as follows:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SDT	Self-Determination Theory
MOE	Ministry of Education
JPN	<i>Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri</i>
SMK	<i>Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan</i>
EWSRQ	English Writing Self-Regulation Questionnaire
EWAS	English Writing Apprehension Scale



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This study aims at characterizing school students' psychological orientations towards English writing. As the beginning part of this thesis, this chapter elaborates on how a person's writing regulation can be influenced by complementary elements that are internal (the self) as well as external (the surrounding) to the individual. Gap in the existing literature is also addressed, and in attempts to bridge this gap, three objectives are proposed to be achieved from this study. At the end of this chapter, research variables; motivation, apprehension, and urban-rural background, are operationally defined.

#### **1.2 Background of the Study**

Learning and mastering writing skills require not only knowledge of a target language, but also an individual's favorable psychological orientation towards writing (Powers, Cook, & Meyer, 1979). Individual differences of cognitive and psychology complements one another in shaping various ways in which English writing are performed and regulated. Regulation refers to actions that are performed in a manner towards goal attainment (Binswanger, 1991). In the study of writing, cognitivists (e.g. Scardamalia, Bereiter, & Steinbach, 1984; Flower & Hayes, 1981) have emphasized on knowledge about language components and its functions as predictors of writing performance. Meanwhile, psychologists (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978; Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997) have placed the concern for one's internal states throughout writing regulation and theorized that writing goals can be achieved by fostering elements that maintain one's psychological wellbeing. In this present study, Malaysian school students' English writing regulation in school is examined through identification of motivational orientation and level of writing apprehension, and whether both of these variables significantly correlate.

Writing is driven by an underlying reason that leads to how well it is performed and towards achieving writing goals. What moves one to write involves an element that leads to completion of writing task (Olinghouse & Graham, 2009) and this element which Hayes (2012) referred as motivation controls one's willingness to initiate and to stay engaged throughout the recursive process of writing. Motivation that is autonomous has played robust role that boosts students' academic achievement (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Taylor et al., 2014). On the contrary, motivation that is controlled by external contingencies has instead contributes to the increment of detrimental feelings and has further disrupted the process of mastering writing skills (Al Sawalha & Chow, 2012). The analysis of autonomy in writing motivation is a way to identify the degree of control one has and the effort one puts in order to achieve writing goals.



Quantification of extrinsic-intrinsic and instrumental-integrative orientations of motivation have been widely used as measures of English learning motivation. In this study, the analysis of resourcefulness, initiative, and persistence, or simply known as autonomy in English writing motivation can provide deeper insights into the quality of English writing regulation. By doing such analysis, the quality of a writing regulation can be identified based on its continuum of autonomy, from the outermost of externally regulated, introjection, and identification, to the most internalized orientation or also known as intrinsic motivation. As an agent that nurtures creativity, effort, and persistence of acts (Noels et al., 2000), an individual is characterized to be autonomous when having personal control (volition), is challenged (competence), and is engaged (relatedness) in the regulation of the acts (Ryan & Deci, 2000). On the other hand, a 'controlled' regulation is when one is obliged by compliance of others' demands rather than one's own, which in turn, triggers detrimental feelings towards learning (Wei, 2007).

Writing is often used to assess what students have learnt in the classroom and typically, it is initiated by teachers for the students to do their writing tasks (Nelson, 2007). The expectations in the written products have influenced the control students have in their writing regulation. Through certain ways, the writing regulations are controlled, and thus, students would feel tensed or apprehensive (Masny & Foxall, 1992). This is because the recursive process and demands of writing may have reduced the autonomy in students' writing regulation, which in turn may also contribute to the increment of this detrimental feeling. Apprehension, which has been identified as one of the psychological factors that interrupts writing behavior, diverges one's attention, and interferes with the development of writing skills (Smith, 1984; Wong, 2009). Regardless of the apprehension source, apprehensive individuals may still be motivated to write and acknowledge the importance of writing, but may still choose to avoid writing (Daly, 1978; Masny & Foxall, 1992). Situations in the classroom that provoke one's anxiety may originate from the strategies used when writing, and this can be experienced regardless of the students' backgrounds.

The abnormal level of anxiety and stress towards certain writing strategies may impede the quantity, quality, and time to write (Alnufaie & Grenfell, 2013). For instance, paying too much attention to grammar and structure increases levels of writing apprehension affecting both high and low achievers (Masny & Foxall, 1992). Other than being overly emphasized as a way of evaluating students' work (Masny & Foxall, 1992), completing writing tasks by producing grammatically and structurally correct sentences is among approaches mostly preferred among the teachers as they are easier and lesser time consuming (Sarala@Thulasi et al., 2014). The reduced autonomy in which these writing practices have been overemphasized further contributes to the increase of writing apprehension level (Al Sawalha & Chow, 2012). Learning writing by focusing on its process through strategies that promote idea generation allows students to maintain low level of writing apprehension (Alnufaie & Grenfell, 2012; Masny & Foxall, 1992; Tangpermpoon, 2008). Examining the correlation between the orientations of English writing motivation with the levels of writing apprehension is therefore one of the main objectives of this study.

From another perspective, a discussion of matters pertaining to students' writing regulation ought to also consider the geographical background where learning takes place. This is because a learning condition is not only influential in one's epistemological development (Vygotsky, 1978), but also psychological wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In Malaysia, English was once regarded as the language of the colonizers and the 'urban elites', and this influenced the naturalization of English learning in this context (Hazita, 2006). Nowadays, the usage of English has been extended as a transnational experience between countries (Akinturk, 2011), and therefore, the need to be proficient users of English is no doubt important among Malaysians. Despite attempts to implement authentic and globalized English learning experience, the urban-rural background differences remain a great influence on the students' psychological orientations towards English learning (Rosnah, 2014).

Rural students typically posit negative attitude and senses of unimportance towards English learning (Kanjira, 2008), while urban students are rather interested and personally value the importance of learning and communicating in English (Gobel, 2013). Access to information technology is among modern day privileges that provide interactive and engaging English learning experience. Despite that, its applicability in Malaysia is far from mature due to deficiency of learning materials especially in rural settings (Rosnah, 2014). Prior to that, regardless of the learning materials used, it is the way the students are allowed to take charge of their own writing development that fosters psychological wellbeing throughout English writing regulation in school. In this light, this study also seeks to examine the urban-rural background influence on the differences in Malaysian school students' English writing psychological orientations.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

Malaysian students are highly motivated and acknowledge the importance of being proficient English writers (Muneera & Shameem, 2013; Sharifah Nor Puteh et al., 2010; Siti Sukainah & Melor, 2014; Thang, Ting, & Nurjanah, 2011). The strong extrinsic or instructional oriented motivation to learn English demonstrated by these students could be attributed to the emphasis on complying examination demands. This is because in Malaysian context, learning English writing aims mainly for examination purposes or as termed by Tan and Richardson (2006) as 'writing within school sanctions'. Despite being highly motivated, the students demonstrate lack of inherent interest, determination, and persistence when writing in English (Parilah et al., 2011). At some point, the students will leave their writing unfinished especially when the activity turns difficult (Hiew, 2012). This study mainly concerned for in-depth analysis of extrinsic-intrinsic motivation towards English writing among Malaysian school students.

According to Self-Determination theory, the pressure exerted from external contingencies such as grade, rewards, or punishments either by parents or teachers caused students to have limited control or autonomy over their own academic acts (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Hence in the case of Malaysian school students' English writing regulation, lack determination and persistence in learning and mastering the writing skills as in the aforementioned studies are among the characteristics of extrinsically

motivated students which have also been reported in the studies. To add to the concern of this study, having to comply teachers' expectations or examination demands rather than one's own can further contribute to the increment of detrimental writing affect called apprehension (Alnufaie & Grenfell, 2013; Masny & Foxall, 1992; Wei, 2007). When apprehensive, the time spent on writing, the writing behavior, and the writing quality will also be affected (Alnufaie & Grenfell, 2012; Ibrahim & Nor Hashima, 2011; Abdel Latif, 2012).

Both motivation and apprehension are influential writing affects that have been widely researched (Noor Lide, Nuraihan, & Nor Shidrah, 2013). However, the emphasis has been mainly placed on the measure of motivational intensity especially in English learning in general. The focus of this study is on students' motivation based on the degree of its autonomy, which has been identified as the gap in the literature. The orientation of writing motivation which can further influence the level of writing apprehension has also hardly been examined among school students. To date, studies have also placed little concern in the urban-rural differences on Malaysian school students' English writing motivation and apprehension levels. In order to provide deeper insights into Malaysian school students' English writing regulation, this study addressed the aforementioned gaps in the literature and propose the need to identify English writing motivational orientations based on the continuum of autonomy instead of motivational intensity, and to analyze the students' English writing apprehension levels as a situational feeling. Correlational analysis on motivation and apprehension may also unveil the roots of the difficulties faced constantly by Malaysian school students in learning English writing skills.

Related to this is the environment in which learning takes place, which is one of the factors that plays an important role in learning a language (Babikkoi & Noor Zainab, 2014). The scarcity of technology and infrastructure in remote or rural areas may limit the students' access to learn and to practice using the language (Rosnah, 2014). Unlike students in urban areas with the luxury of diverse community and learning facilities, rural students rely mainly on instruction from school in order to become exposed to the language (Siti Masayu Rosliah, 2008; Siti Norliana, 2008). Urban students also demonstrate higher self-belief in their own writing ability unlike their rural counterparts (Gobel, 2013). Belief of one's own ability or self-efficacy is an element that fosters motivation and at the same time, contributes to apprehension when lacking within an individual (Abdel Latif, 2009; Gobel, 2011). As another concern of this study, gap pertains to urban-rural background differences in Malaysian school students' English writing motivational orientations and apprehension levels are addressed as a part of this study's analysis. Several objectives are proposed as outcomes of this study.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

The following research objectives were proposed in the present study:

1. To examine the difference in English writing motivational orientations of urban and rural Malaysian school students;

2. To examine the difference in English writing apprehension levels of urban and rural Malaysian school students; and,
3. To examine the correlation between English writing motivational orientations and English writing apprehension scores of urban and rural Malaysian school students.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

In order to achieve the proposed research objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the levels of urban and rural Malaysian school students' English writing motivational orientations?
2. What is the difference between urban and rural Malaysian school students' English writing motivational orientations scores?
3. What are the levels of urban and rural Malaysian school students' English writing apprehension?
4. What is the difference between urban and rural Malaysian school students' English writing apprehension scores?
5. What is the significance of correlation between English writing motivational orientations and English writing apprehension scores of urban and rural Malaysian school students?

### **1.6 Research Hypotheses**

Based on the research questions addressed in subsection 1.4, there were 3 research hypotheses proposed to be tested in attempts to achieve the purposes of this study;

1. There are significant differences in urban and rural Malaysian school students' English writing motivational orientations scores;
2. There are significant differences in urban and rural Malaysian school students' English writing apprehension scores; and
3. There are significant correlations between English writing motivational orientations and English writing apprehension scores of urban and rural Malaysian school students.

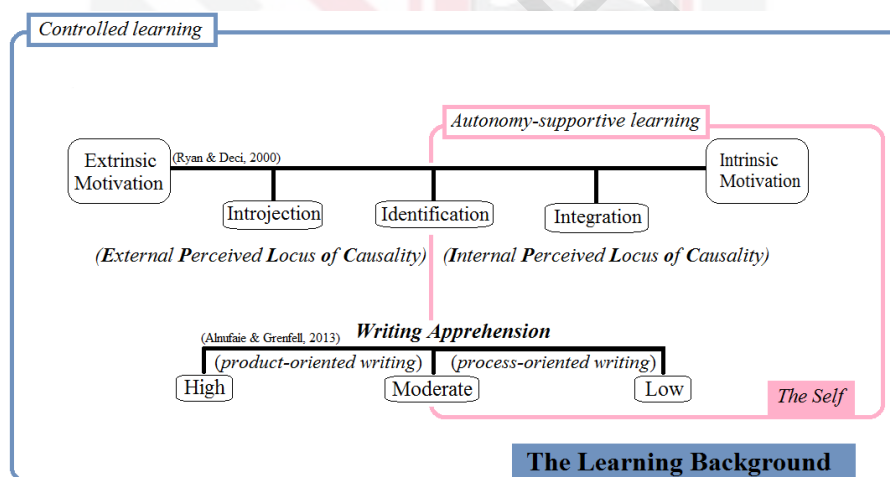
### **1.7 Significance of the Study**

Identification of English writing motivational orientations and English writing apprehension levels based on school students' urban-rural background is an attempt to eradicate English education divide caused by the geographical differences in Malaysia. To add, correlational analysis proposed in this study can provide deeper understanding on whether the degree of autonomy in students' English writing motivation will contribute to the levels of writing apprehension. According to Parilah et al. (2011), learning English in a classroom ought to foster interest and persistence for students to write as a wonderful, lifelong learning experience. Therefore, outcomes from this study will benefit educators especially among Malaysian teachers to achieve comprehension

of the students' psychological states throughout the process of learning English writing. This will help the teachers and curriculum developers to improve curriculum design and pedagogical approaches implemented in school.

## 1.8 Theoretical Framework

The study's theoretical underpinnings of person and environment variables as determinants of human behavior were based on Self-Determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The hypothesized differences in Malaysian school students' English writing motivation and apprehension were proposed to be depended on the urban-rural categorization of the learning background, hence the hypothesized effect of urban-rural background on both of the psychological orientations. The classification of areas in Malaysia based on their socioeconomic status and population size has created a varying learning climate in urban and rural schools. Thus, the degree of autonomy in the students' motivation as well as their apprehension levels may vary. The proposed theoretical framework of this study is as per illustrated in Figure 1.1.



**Figure 1.1: Theoretical Framework** (adapted from Deci & Ryan, 1985)

Based on Figure 1.1, the conditions of a background will create whether a learning climate is autonomy-supportive or controlling. Due to the conditions of rural schools which are unconducive to communicating in English language, learning have been controlled to fulfill examination requirements and achieving certain grades. English writing may have been emphasized on the written products rather than its communicative values. When writing is merely driven by external contingencies, the act is extrinsically regulated and is also hypothesized to be accompanied with high level of apprehension. Writing may also be Introjection-regulated, in which the writing act is accompanied with ego-fulfilment in search for self- or other- approvals. Individuals may experience slight decrease in the apprehension level since the drive has been slightly internalized.



The gradual internalization of externally-oriented motivations is possible when a learning environment fosters students' needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. It is also hypothesized that the experience of apprehension may further diminish as one is gradually autonomous. Identification is when one has adopted the sense of self and has positive perceptions in the importance of English writing for one's future, unlike Introjection-oriented individuals. Meanwhile, Integration when one is accompanied with sense of belonging and assimilation with coherent sense of self. At the most autonomous motivation, Intrinsic is a drive based on the pursuit of inherent interest and hence, apprehension is unlikely to be experienced at this state. Intrinsically motivated individuals experience personal sensation to learn and to develop, leading one to self-regulate towards achieving writing goals.

## **1.9 Operational Definitions**

In any empirical study, it is crucial to firstly operationally define the variables included in this study. The operational definition of the independent variable; urban-rural background, is provided first, followed by those of the dependent variables; motivation and apprehension.

### **1.9.1 Urban-Rural Background**

Urban-rural background was operationally defined based on the criteria of population size, socioeconomic status, and urbanization rate as presented in Malaysian Census 2010 (Malaysian Department of Statistics, 2010). Areas categorized as urban are locally known as '*bandar*' or town, while rural areas are locally known as '*kampung*' or village.

### **1.9.2 Motivation**

Motivation in this study refers to the underlying reasons that drives Malaysian school students' academic acts of English writing in school. Operationally defined, the varying drives or orientations of the students' English writing motivation were analyzed with reference of the continuum of autonomy as proposed in the Self-Determination Theory (SDT); external, introjection, identification, integration, and intrinsic (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

### **1.9.3 Apprehension**

Apprehension in this study refers to the feeling that Malaysian school students experienced when doing their English writing tasks. Operationally, apprehension was defined as a situational construct of anxiety, nervous, agitated or stress when engaged with certain English writing strategies, regardless of blocking and evaluation (Alnufaie & Grenfell, 2013).

### **1.10 Summary**

This chapter has presented background knowledge that raised issues pertaining to Malaysian school students' acts of English writing in school. The issues emerged due to certain areas concerning the students' psychological states when performing English writing act in school which have yet being emphasized by past researchers. Presentation of theoretical framework illustrates how a learning context shapes students' motivation and apprehension levels, in which in this study, the emphasis is placed on urban-rural categorization of a learning context. The proposed variables were then clarified as to how they are measured or their operational definition prior further theoretical and empirical review in the subsequent chapter.

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