Journal of Human Sciences

Adjusting EFL Learners' Attitudes towards Writing

Djalal Tebib [1], Nacif Labed [2]

[1] *Department of Letters and English, University of Constantine 1*
[2] *Department of Letters and English, University of Constantine 1*

Abstract

Foreign language writing is unquestionably an intricate process, and many EFL learners may consequently develop an aversion to the writing skill. This paper aims at positively changing EFL learners' attitudes towards the craft of writing through a series of innovative writing activities designed by the researcher. To attain this objective, a group of EFL students have received a six-month writing training in a writing centre at the American Corner, University of Constantine. The obtained results showed that exposing students to certain type of creative writing activities and tasks can successfully change the way they perceive writing, and thus began to improve their skills accordingly.

تحسين معتقدات وسلوكيات الطلبة تجاه الكتابة باللغة الانجليزية
ملخص

ان الكتابة بلغة اجنبية عملية صعبة ومعقدة وهذا ما قد يجعل بعض الطلبة يشعرون بنوع من النفور من فكرة تعلم الكتابة. تهدف هذه الدراسة الى زرع حب الكتابة في قلوب وعقول طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية من خلال مجموعة من التقنيات والتمارين التطبيقية المبتكرة. ولبلوغ هذا المبتغى، تلقت مجموعة من الطلبة تدريبا خاصا، من خلال ورشات كتابة لمدة ستة أشهر في الركن الأمريكي بجامعة قسنطينة. جاءت النتائج إيجابية واستطعنا تغيير رأي الطلبة في الكتابة وسلوكياتهم اتجاهها وبالتالي ساهمنا في تحسين مستواهم وترقية تطلعاتهم فيما يخص الكتابة.

* *Corresponding author. E-mail: djalal.tebib@icloud.com*
Doi:

I. Introduction

With the shift towards learner-centred approaches in foreign language education, meticulous attention has been devoted to the learner as the nucleus of the learning experience. Eventually, the latter has become the target of several studies, which aimed mainly at understanding how learners learn and what would affect the way they perceive learning. Hence, the idea of investigating language learners' attitudes has gained importance and popularity over the recent decades; especially that it could yield illuminating insights about the learner. In foreign language writing pedagogy, attitudes are esteemed to provide writing teachers and researchers with assorted insights about their students' psychological dispositions. Those insights could well be exploited to boost the students' learning experience, thereby helping them attain their academic objectives. In this regard, the present paper attempts to nurture a love for writing within a group of EFL learners by convincing them that writing is both enjoyable and rewarding. In doing so, we are likely to end the learners' disinclination to the writing skill.

I.1. Attitudes Defined

In psychology, attitudes are defined as "a relatively enduring organisation of beliefs, feelings, and behavioural tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols" (Hogg & Vaughan, 2005, p. 150). This definition indicates that 'attitude' is rather an umbrella term comprising a number of other interconnected concepts. Crano and Prisilin (2006), highlighted the construct "evaluation" when they described attitudes as "the evaluative judgment that integrate and summarise (...) cognitive/affective reactions"(p. 347). This means that attitudes are often manifested through a person's mental, emotional, and behavioural reactions to a certain object, subject, idea or situation. Thus, attitudes, as Eagly and Chaiken explained them, are "tendencies to evaluate an entity with some degree of favour or disfavour ordinarily expressed in cognitive, affective and behavioural responses" (p.155). The previously stated explanations suggest that attitudes are multiplex and interdisciplinary, and thus all-important.

I.2. Structure of Attitudes

Attitudes structure can be described in terms of three components represented in what is known as the ABC Model of Attitudes or The Tripartite Model. This systematic modelling of attitudes includes three quantifiable components, namely affective, behavioural, and cognitive (Sutton & Douglas, 2012).

Affective Component: refers to a person's feelings about a given object, subject, situation or event. For example, students do not like to write essays.

Behavioural Component: denotes how a person behaves towards certain entities (e.g. a person). For example, students do not practice writing at home.

Cognitive Component: involves a person's beliefs, opinions and knowledge about an attitude object (can be a person, idea, place or item). For example, students believe that writing is a tedious task.

Overall, human attitudes can be divided into three main constituents. The first component is affective-based, and it represents how a human being would feel about a specific person, object, place, space, or concept (in psychology, each of these elements is called an 'attitude object'). The second one, behaviour-based, involves how a person would act, react or behave towards an attitude object. The third one is cognitive-based and refers to human opinions, beliefs, expectations, and knowledge about potential attitude object (Vogel & Wänke, 2016).

I.3. Function of Attitudes

Attitudes are commonly believed to serve particular functions for every human being. Those functions are key to understanding human attitudes and, more importantly, to changing them. According to Katz (1960, as mentioned in Fiske et al., 2010) attitudes suggested four functions that attitudes could perform: the adjustments function, the ego defensive function, the value expressive function and the knowledge function.

I.3.1. Utilitarian

These type of attitudes (also referred to as Adjustive) are useful for general life approaches as well as for avoidance techniques and tendencies. That is, utilitarian attitudes help an individual adjust to different

circumstances and situations that he might experience. For instance, if a student is treated with respect and friendliness in the classroom, he is likely to develop positive attitudes towards 'the teacher' or 'the classroom', and vice versa. More specifically, based on previous experiences, this type of function directs individuals towards rewarding entities, and keeps them away from unsatisfying objects (ibid.).

I.3.2. Ego-defensive

Attitudes under this heading serve at protecting the human self-esteem and views of self. What this means is, that certain attitudes serve as a protection to a person's self-esteem and in some ways justify the deeds that would make the individual feels remorseful. This type of function involves the use of defence mechanism that an individual activates to shield himself from psychological impairment. For example, if a teacher makes a mistake and a student correct him publicly, the teacher might activate certain defence mechanism (e.g. denial, repression, projection, etc.) and accuse the student of being impolite and interrupter. In this case, the teacher protected his ego by using 'denial' as a protection mechanism (Erwin, 2011).

I.3.3. Value-expressive

This category of attitudes performs as a medium of expressing one's beliefs and convictions. To put it simply, unlike the ego-defensive function, this one allows the individual to express his principles, views and persuasions, thereby showing who he really is. A Muslim father would certainly express joy if he sees his young daughter covering her head. Conversely, a European father would deem that outfit uncivilised and against the human rights. This type of function reflects our views about self (Garrett, 2010).

I.3.4. Knowledge

Such attitudes help at maintaining general perceptions and stable thoughts concerning the world around us. More precisely, this function performs a guide in a variety of situations and spaces by keeping the individual aware of what's happening and what may happen and how this can be useful or harmful to us. In doing so, this type of attitudes makes the world around us more meaningful and relatively predictable. For instance, a person who have been brought up in a conservative family might consider studying in a gender-mixed classroom is a very bad idea. Whereas, a liberal person views it as beneficial in many ways (Fiske et al., 2010).

In the main, attitudes are functional and the functions they perform are various and, at times, interconnected. These functions help us not only understand ourselves, but anyone around us as well. As teachers or researchers, this four-function taxonomy of attitudes makes it possible for us to know more about our students and decipher their equivocal reactions and adjust their attitudes.

I.4. Changing of Attitudes

Attempting to adjust or change people's attitudes is unquestionably a complicated and challenging task, for attitudes are associated with human beliefs, feelings, and psychology in general (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2005). Yet, many researchers have developed relatively useful techniques to ease the mission of changing an individual's attitudes towards certain attitude objects (Maio & Haddock, 2015; Vogel & Wänke, 2016). These techniques include changing the basic motivational function, associating products with an admired group or event, and resolving two conflicting attitudes (Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991).

Overall, the process of altering an individual's attitudes revolves around the notion of persuasion, which is a communicative act to influence others (Crano & Prisilin, 2008). That is, if EFL teachers, for instance, aspire to change their students thoughts, beliefs or behaviours towards a certain subject (e.g. academic writing), they need to successfully persuade them of the importance of the target subject.

I.5. Learner Attitudes and the Writing Skill

In social psychology, attitudes are defined as "tendencies to evaluate objects favourably or unfavourably"(Olson & Maio, 2003, p.299). On this basis, attitudes towards writing could be described as the learners' cluster of beliefs, gamut of feelings, and behaviours patterns associated with the construct 'writing'. Hence, it is through observing the learners' attitudes that teachers determine if their students favour or disfavour the process of writing (Bartram, 2018).

Firstly, many studies (e.g. Hashemian & Heidari, 2013; Komba et al., 2012; Petric, 2002) investigated the impact of students' attitudes towards writing and academic achievements, and they found a strong relationship

between the two variables. That is, students who possess negative towards writing are likely to perform poorly in a writing task. This implies that unless students hold writing in favour or are aware of its value, they are unlikely to spend time or energy in enhancing their writing skills. More than that, they are even expected to avoid it because human beings in general tend to stay away from the entities that they find psychologically unrewarding (Colman, 2016). In this respect, adjusting students' attitudes towards writing entails convincing them that writing is significant, pleasurable and rewarding (Baker, 1992). Briefly, attitudes can be a shortcut to enhancing students' writing skills and autonomous learning tendencies (Bartram, 2018).

Secondly, attitudes are argued to affect motivation as well as to determine how much involvement the students would manifest in the writing classroom (Heinzmann, 2013; Manchón, 2011). To illustrate, students who mistakenly believe that they are poor writers or that writing is a tedious activity would eventually develop a writing anxiety (Kroll, 2003). The latter would in turn cause the students' motivation to weaken and their learning process to breakdown consequently (ibid).That is to say, anxiety is likely to hold the students back from participating or taking risks in the classroom, thereby keeping them within a narrow zone of learning passivity.

Thirdly, learner attitudes, as Garrett (2010) explained, have an impact on the teacher-leaner relationship, thus on the overall pleasantness and atmosphere of the classroom. Put differently, the attitudes and behaviours that the students frequently display in the classroom influence the way in which the teacher deals with those students (e.g. tough or friendly). For instance, in a classroom where the majority of the students exhibit positive attitudes towards writing, the teacher is likely to spare no efforts to help those students excel. On their part, the students are most probably going to ease their teacher's mission by being collaborative, resourceful and autonomous.

To end with, attitudes and writing are arguably connected. Their connection, which manifests itself in a variety of situations, is deemed complex and worth exploring. In this sense, what is probably important for EFL teachers is that attitudes could be exploited in pushing EFL learners to boost their writing skills autonomously.

I.6. Statement of the Problem

Foreign language learning is oftentimes deemed a challenging and laborious mission, for it entails various mental and psychological abilities. Thus, a great number of students appear to encounter a range of hindrances while learning; some of which may cause the learner to fail within academia. These obstacles often vary in nature and degree; some are related to the curriculum, others to the cultural and social environment of learners, while other issues could be linked to the students' psychology, mental state and willingness to learn. Seemingly, the latter requires further and in-depth exploration within the Algerian context of foreign language learning.

Through extended and frequent teacher observation and based on this study's pre-test findings, a large number of students of English at the University of Constantine seem to have negative attitudes towards learning in general and writing in particular. In fact, they appear to be passive, demotivated, unconfident, disoriented, and teacher-dependent; and such unfavourable attitudes are likely to exert a huge and far-reaching impact on their overall competence and academic achievements.

II. Methods and Materials
II.1. Research Population and Sample

The target population of the present study consists of adult learners attending educational institution in their final undergraduate year at the tertiary level. The sample (N =56) represents roughly 275 undergraduate students divided into six equal groups, and are third-years of Applied Language Studies at the Department of English Language at Mentouri Brothers University in Constantine.

The sample included participants of both genders and from all social-economic classes. After that, the selected group has been divided into two equal groups: one control and the other experimental. In addition to their ordinary classes, the participants within the experimental group (N=28) have received an experimental treatment over a period of seven months in a writing centre at the American Corner Constantine, while the control group continued to attend regular classes.

II.2. The Questionnaire

Two Likert-scale questionnaires were used in this experiment to examine the students' attitudes towards English language writing prior to and subsequent to the experimental intervention. In addition, teacher-observation reports were employed to support the data to be obtained from the post-test questionnaire (i.e. after the administration of the experimental treatment).

Self-completion questionnaires, consist of a set of questions or statements, are widely employed as a data collection instrument in educational research disciplines. Easy to administer and analyse, cost effective, and relatively standardised, questionnaires have gained popularity over the long years across disciplines (Dörnyei, 2014). Questionnaires, of all types, are essentially designed to gather information about a particular subject from respondents for statistical analysis and interpretation (Gillham, 2008).

II.3. The Setting: The Writing Centre

A few years ago, a writing centre was launched at the central library of the University of Constantine in collaboration with the American Corner Constantine. The latter is a free library, established and financed by the American embassy in Algeria, in which students can attend a wide range of workshops and tutorial classes in addition to borrowing books and using the internet. The American Corner resembles the majority writing centres available in universities and colleges worldwide. This was, in fact, the main reason behind soliciting the American embassy in Algiers to authorise the writing centre to use the American Corner's reading room, resources and other materials.

The creation of the UC Writing Centre (the name represents the initials of University of Constantine) was motivated by two main objectives. Firstly, it would host the experimental treatment through which we aim to nurture a learning autonomy among EFL learners. Secondly, the writing centre is a serious attempt towards helping students become better writers/learners by adjusting their attitudes towards foreign language writing and pushing them to enhance their writing skills accordingly. And as there are thousands of writing centres around the world, and prestigious universities like Harvard University comprise a writing centre, the present researcher wanted the University of Constantine to have its own writing centre.

II.4. The Experimental Treatment

The Experimental Group has received a treatment that consists of four writing activities for a period of six months in a writing centre at the University of Constantine. To be precise, the Experimental Group received four hours of tuition every week (2 hours per session) for a period of six months (a total of 24 weeks/96 hours). The aim was to adjust students' attitudes towards English language writing. The following section presents an overview of the four activities constituting the experimental treatment, namely Alfresco Writing, Music-stimulated Writing, Video-inspired Writing, and Quote generative Writing (AMVQ). These activities, which are referred to as the AMVQ project, were designed by the researcher conducting the present study.

II.5. The Activities (The AMVQ Project)
II.5.1. Alfresco Writing

As the designation tends to suggest, this writing activity takes place outside the classroom walls –typically in the university's garden. In detail, the instructor takes the students to a garden or any other green space within the campus to enjoy an open-air writing session. Instead of using chairs and tables, the students casually sit on the grass (i.e. in almost any way they want) within a certain area to be able to see and listen to the teacher. Further and to help them relax and take delight from the event, the participant students are allowed considerable freedom. Characteristically, they are permitted to drink juice, coffee or tea, eat chocolate and the like, have refreshments, wear sunglasses if they wished to, or even listen to music (by means of ear phones) and so forth. Moreover, the teacher researcher writes alongside the students to motivate them as well as to boost teacher-learner relationship and partnership. Likewise, students are strongly encouraged to work collaboratively (e.g. exchange ideas and feedback) throughout the activity. By the end of the two-hour activity, a few students are invited and asked to stand before their classmates and read aloud what they would have written. For this reason, the students are oftentimes urged to write creative and emotional letters, speeches, poems, and similar writing materials.

Alfresco writing aims essentially to break the classroom monotony and demonstrate that writing is pleasurable, comforting, and contemplative. It also seeks to demonstrate that writing could be practiced independently and in various spaces. Furthermore, the activity attempts to place the students in a mood of inspiration and creativity, thereby push them to focus on the act of writing itself and the content without worrying much about the mistakes or the number of lines they would produce.

II.5.2. Music-stimulated Writing

This activity revolves around engaging students into writing while listening to a piece of classical music. Hence, high-quality audio equipment (laptops and HD speakers) is perquisite for the music-stimulated writing. To provoke the students' profound thoughts and emotions, the students are given an expressive topic of writing such as: 'if you are ever offered the opportunity, what would you say to a person who left you or passed away' to provoke the students' profound thoughts and emotions. Before doing so, the instructor induces the students to meditate on the music and bring out the deepest of their fears, regrets, wounds, and wishes. In this manner, the teacher places the students in the appropriate frame of mind to encapsulate their thoughts and feelings into strong, honest, and expressive chain of words.

The music-stimulated writing activity aims particularly at invigorating the students' linguistic skills and creativity by stimulating them to think, feel, and express deep thoughts. The activity seeks also to exhibit the prestigious side of writing, and demonstrate that practising writing can be truly entertaining and soothing. In this respect, the teacher highlights the self-directed nature of writing (i.e. students can do it whenever and wherever they want).

II.5.3. Video-stimulated Writing

This activity focuses on exposing the students to a set of thought-provoking short videos before asking them to produce short pieces of writing in reaction to what they would watch. More specifically, the video-stimulated writing session involves engaging the students into some kind of reflective writing after watching and discussing a short inspirational video (generally between 5 and 20 minutes long). Additionally, a few questions like 'how this is related to you?', 'what has caught your attention?' and 'what would you remember?' are often suggested to help the students reflect upon the video to be watched. Short drama films, motivational speeches, and TED talks are the major types of videos exploited during this activity. The following is a list of those videos per category.

Short Drama Films

▪ 'Gift' by Daniel Yam

▪ 'Removed' by Nathanael Matanick

▪ 'My Father is a Liar' by MetLife Hong kong

Motivational Speeches

▪ 'Can We Auto-Correct Humanity?' by Prince Era

▪ 'Living with Depression' by Kat Napiorkowska

▪ 'Mindshift' by Ping Pong Studio

TED Talks

▪ 'Do Schools Kill Creativity?'Ken Robinson

▪ 'How to Live Before You Die' by Steve Jobs

▪ 'My Stroke of Insight' by Jill Bolte Taylor

Through the above-listed videos, the researcher seeks to foster a love for writing in the students as well as to develop their knowledge, culture, and social awareness. In this regard, the video-stimulated writing activity aims to demonstrate that writing is a powerful tool of thinking, reflecting, and learning. Likewise, the activity attempts to positively change the students' beliefs about the nature and utility of writing.

II.5.4. Quote-generative Writing

In this activity, the students are encouraged to write catchy powerful short sentences or paragraphs in the form of literary quotations. That is, instead of producing essays, the students are invited to write only a few lines on a certain theme (e.g. sacrifice). Habitually, the teacher introduces the activity and emphasises its importance. Afterwards, together with the students, the instructor comes up with a series of themes (e.g. friendship, love, hope, pain, etc.). Subsequently, the students commit themselves to thinking and constructing their quotation-like sentences. Towards the end of the session, the students read their quotes and the teacher chooses the best quote; the winner is designated the writer of the week.

The foremost goal of this activity is to boost the students' self-esteem as writers, thereby pushing them to adopt a set of positive attitudes towards writing. Further, the activity sets out to give the students a voice and make them feel like real writers by appreciating and publishing their writings (e.g. posting their quotes on Facebook and similar platforms).

II.6. Analysis of the Post-test Questionnaire (Experimental Group)

Statement 1: *Writing is the most difficult of all language skills.*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
06	19	00	03	00	28
21.42%	67.85%	00%	10.71%	00%	100%

Table 01: On the Intricacy of the Writing Skill (experimental group)

The great majority of the respondents (67.85% & 21.42%) selected writing as the most laborious of the four language skills. The rest of the informants (10.71%) had different estimations.

Statement 2: *I can succeed at university even though my writing is poor.*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
00	02	00	09	17	28
00%	07.14%	00%	32.14%	60.71%	100%

Table 02: Good Writing Skills and Success at University (experimental group)

The vast majority of the surveyed students (60.71% & 32.14%) appeared to be cognisant of the fact that writing is perquisite for academic achievements. No more than (07.14%) of the respondents seemed convinced that poor writing skills would not cause them to fail at university.

Statement 3: *Writing is of great importance in my academic world.*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
20	07	00	01	00	28
71.42%	25%	00%	03.57%	00%	100%

Table 03: The Importance of Writing in Students' Academic Life (exp. group)

Almost all the respondents (N =28) (71.42%) & (25%) expressed an awareness about the worth of writing in their educational sphere. Only one student (3.47 %) thought that writing is not very important in academia.

Statement 4: *Writing will no longer be important when I graduate from university.*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
00	00	02	11	15	28
00%	00%	07.71%	39.28%	53.57%	100%

Table 04: The Significance of Writing Skills beyond Academia (exp. group)

Nearly all the respondents (53.57%) & (39.28%) showed that they were convinced that the importance of writing transcends the academic world to the professional one. Solely two informants (07.71%) had no definite answer.

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
00	04	00	13	11	28
00%	14.28%	00%	46.42%	39.28%	100%

Statement 5: *I do not practise writing outside the classroom.*

Table 05: Practising Writing beyond the Classroom Walls (experimental group)

The mainstream of the respondents (46.42%) & (39.28%) confirmed that they often practice writing beyond the classroom walls, against 14.28% who said they do not.

Statement 6: *I only write when I am obliged to do so.*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
00	02	00	16	10	28
00%	07.14%	00%	57.14%	35.71%	100%

Table 06: On Writing Voluntarily (experimental group)

   The vast majority of the surveyed students (57.14%) & (35.71%) asserted that they sometimes produce written products without being asked to do so. Conversely, few of them (07.14%) said they only write when it is mandatory, i.e. a classroom task, an assignment or examination.

Statement 7: *I like to write.*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
14	12	01	01	00	28
50%	42.85%	03.57%	03.57%	00%	100%

Table 07: Thinking Well of Writing (experimental group)

   Of all the respondents (50%) & (42.85%) expressed that they enjoy writing, against only one student, representing 3.57%, who professed that s/he does not like writing. Another informant (03.57%) ticked the 'undecided' box.

Statement 8: *I am bad at writing.*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
00	05	03	09	11	28
00	17.85%	10.71%	32.14%	39.28%	100%

Table 08: The Students' Self-evaluation as Writers (experimental group)

   As shown in table 08, the majority of students (32.14% & 39.28%) deemed themselves good writers, opposed to a few respondents (17.85%) who thought themselves to be bad writers. A small number of students, making up 10.71%, expressed neutrality concerning this statement.

Statement 9: *I like to share my written products with others (e.g. classmates).*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
09	14	03	02	00	28
32.14%	50 %	10.71%	07.14%	00%	100%

Table 09: On Sharing the Students' Writings with Others (experimental group)

   The mainstream student respondents, represented by 50% & 32.14%, confirmed that they often share their writing with others such as their friends and family members. Yet, 10.71% of the informants (N= 28) refused to reveal their feelings regarding this matter or perhaps they felt indifferent. Accordingly, only a tiny minority (07.14%) said that they dislike sharing their written materials.

Statement 10: *My teachers do not like what I write.*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
00	02	02	14	10	28
00%	07.14%	07.14%	50%	35.71%	100%

Table 10: Teacher Feedback on the Students' writings (experimental group)

   The bulk of the surveyed students (50% & 35.71%) asserted that their teachers often like their writings. Only 07.14% of the respondents confessed that their teachers seem to dislike what those students write. An equal number of students (07.14%) opted for the undecided option.

Statement 11: *In general, I prefer expressing my ideas through speaking.*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
00	07	03	10	08	28
00%	25 %	10.71%	35.71%	28.57%	100%

Table 11: Writing vs. Speaking as Mediums of Communication (exp. group)

A large number of the students (63%) implied that that they favour writing over speaking as a medium of expression. Other students, making up 25%, seemed to prefer speaking when it comes to expressing their thoughts. Conversely, few students (10.71%) showed no preference.

Statement 12: *I worry when my teachers evaluate my writing.*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
00	04	02	14	08	28
00%	14.28%	07.14%	50 %	28.57%	100%

Table 12: On the Students' Self-esteem as Writers (experimental group)

The figures in table 12 indicate that 79 % of the respondents confirmed that they do not feel worried when their teachers assess their written products; against (14.28%) who seemed to have concerns regarding this matter. Two informants (07.14%) appeared to be indifferent.

Statement 13: *I would love to take part in a writing club.*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
13	14	00	01	00	28
46.42%	50%	00%	03.57%	00%	100%

Table 13: The Students' Willingness to Join Writing Institutes (exp. group)

As table 13 exhibits, almost all the surveyed students (96%) showed eagerness for joining a writing club, against only one informant (3.57%) who expressed opposition to this idea.

Statement 14: *I think I need roughly ten year to learn how to write well in English.*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
00	00	01	14	13	28
00%	00%	03.57%	50 %	46.43%	100%

Table 14: The Students' Expectations concerning their Development (exp. group)

The vast majority of respondents (96, 43 %) refuted the assumption that they would need a decade of training to enhance their writing skills. Only one student (03.57%) showed agreement with the statement.

Statement 15: *Writing is boring by nature.*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
00	05	04	15	04	28
00%	17.85%	14.28 %	53.57%	16%	100%

Table 15: The Students' Opinion on the Nature of Writing (experimental group)

Table 15 indicates, the bulk of the respondents (53.57% & 16%) affirmed that they do not think of writing as boring, opposed to (17.85%) who associated writing with boredom. Other informants (14.28%) did not express neither agreement nor disagreement with the statement.

Statement 16: *Some teachers make writing more boring.*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
06	14	02	06	00	28
21.42%	50%	07.14%	21.42%	00%	100%

Table 16: Some Teachers Make Writing Seem Tedious (experimental group)

As table 16 illustrates, the mainstream of the surveyed students (50% & 21.42%) approved the assumption that some teachers make the writing class uninteresting. Other respondents (21.42%) seemed to think otherwise. Two students, representing 07.14%, were undecided.

Statement 17: *Writing in Arabic (L1) is more enjoyable that writing in English (FL).*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
02	10	02	06	08	28
07.14%	34.61%	07.14%	21.42%	28.57%	100%

Table 17: Writing in Arabic vs. Writing in English (experimental group)

Nearly half of the respondents (21.42%) & (28.57%) implied that they deem writing in Arabic is less pleasurable when compared to composing in English, against (34.61%) & (07.14%) who showed preference to Arabic. Only (07.14%) of the surveyed students appeared to have no definite inclination.

Statement 18: *Those who write well are gifted.*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
04	02	00	18	04	28
14.28%	07.14%	00%	64.28 %	14.28%	100%

Table 18: On Writing Being an Inborn Skill (experimental group)

The majority of the informants (64.28 %) & (14.28%) did not support the claim that good student writers are talented by nature. Conversely, (14.28%) & (07.14%) considered good writing skills to be innate of nature.

Statement 19: *Academic writing is not enjoyable.*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
00	06	07	15	00	28
00%	21.42%	25%	53.57%	00%	100%

Table 19: The Students' Views on Academic Writing (experimental group)

The figures in table 19 shows that more than half of the respondents (53.57%) regard academic writing as interesting, against 21.42% who deemed it tedious. On the other hand, 25% of the informants opted for 'undecided' as a reaction to the statement.

Statement 20: *Creative writing is not boring.*

S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
00	00	01	11	16	28
00%	00%	03.57%	39.28%	57.14%	100%

Table 20: The Students' Perception of Creative Writing (experimental group)

As table 20 shows, all most all the surveyed students (57.14%) & (39.28%) esteemed creative writing to be pleasurable. Solely, one respondent (03.57%) seemed to have no clear opinion pertaining to the nature of creative writing

IIII. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the pre-test and post-test questionnaires along with the teacher observation reports yielded significant insights pertaining to the surveyed students' attitudes towards English language writing. The findings of both questionnaires confirmed that it is possible to nurture a love for writing in Algerian EFL students. One way to do so is to engage them into a variety of innovative writing activities as an extracurricular project. To see more into the issue, it is important to explore and compare the results obtained prior and subsequent to the experimental treatment (i.e. the AMVQ Project.) employed in the second experiment of the present study.

The pre-test findings pertaining to both the control and experimental groups revealed that of the total respondents (N=56), 86% exhibited some of an aversion towards writing. In detail, 89.28% of them confessed that they do not like to write and that they, 85.71%, do not commit themselves to writing unless their teachers oblige them to do so. Moreover, 89.28% of the participants deemed writing tedious and exhausting. They associated this tediousness with the nature of the writing craft as well as with the teaching styles and methods of some teachers. Likewise, 77% of the respondents appeared unaware of the significance of writing as a skill; they assumed that writing is only important within academia and that it would become irrelevant to them when they graduate. Furthermore, the analysis of the pre-test data showed that 74% of the students hold low esteem for themselves as student writers; they consider their writing skills poor and ineffective. In fact, they affirmed that their teachers hardly ever like what they write. Accordingly, the mainstream of the students experience anxiety whenever their teachers attempt to assess their writings.

The students' overall negative attitudes towards writing could be linked to several factors, including the students' psychology and beliefs, the teaching methods or curriculum, and the students' past learning experiences. More precisely, the students' misguided beliefs that writing is boring by nature and that it would take them at least a decade to learn how to write well could be the reason behind the students' aversion towards writing. In addition, the teaching methods and styles adopted by some teachers and the curriculum dedicated to writing could cause the students to hold writing in disfavour. That is, foreign language students in general are unlikely to esteem a laborious undertaking such as writing unless they find pleasure, meaning and value in it. In fact, 100% of the surveyed students asserted that some teachers make the writing enterprise feel 'more' boring. This tends to imply that the teaching style and methods adopted by some teachers are seemingly inadequate or at least not good enough to meet the students' expectations, needs, and weaknesses. Furthermore, it is quite common for students, and people in general, to dislike the things and events that are associated with their unpleasant past learning experiences (Hamblen, 2012). To simplify it, some of the surveyed students might have developed negative attitudes towards writing in particular and learning by large after being harshly criticised or publicly 'humiliated' by a [writing] teacher or so.

It is noteworthy that the above-discussed factors and others have all been taken into consideration during the design of the four writing activities constituting the experimental treatment (i.e. The AMVQ Project).Indeed, to nurture a love of writing in students, we should build their awareness, capture their attention, add pleasure to their learning experience, treat them with kindness and respect, appreciate their efforts and tolerate their weaknesses, give them a voice and listen to them attentively, and so gain their trust. Perhaps, this is what teaching is all about: making a difference.

In light of the proceeding discussion, the post-test findings showed that the subjects within the control group, who have not received any particular treatment in addition to their ordinary classes, held tight to their unfavourable attitudes towards English language learning. Conversely, as the findings corroborate, 94.42% of the experimental group members, adopted positive attitudes towards the writing skills. This conclusively demonstrates the effectiveness of the AMVQ Project (i.e. the four writing activities together) in ending the students' aversion and misconceptions regarding English language writing. Hence, the second hypothesis of this study−engaging the students into an extensive creative writing project would change their attitudes towards writing -is confirmed. Such a major conclusion is supported by the following results.

Unlike the case of the control group, the analysis of the post-test data pertaining to the experimental group revealed that 92.85% of the subjects asserted that they like to write, especially the creative one, and they often

practise writing both inside the classroom and independently. This major change at the level of the students' attitudes is clearly linked to the experimental treatment, which focused on providing the students' with pleasurable learning experiences. Alfresco writing which involves taking the students to the universities garden to enjoy an open-air writing session is an example of those gratifying learning situations. The teacher-observation reports showed that the students had fun during alfresco sessions. Furthermore, based on the post-test findings, 90.85% of the subjects displayed awareness of the value of writing and its implications on their lives as learner and as professionals later on. Before receiving the research treatment, 77% of the students believed that they could advance in their academic pathway without necessarily possessing good writing skills. If such an assumption is valid, then attention must be directed to the assessment techniques and practices adopted by the teachers. In this respect, an important question had to be answered: 'How could students succeed with poor writing skills, knowing that the overwhelming majority of their examination are written of nature?

Furthermore, the results obtained from the experimental group's post-test indicated that 79% of the students deem themselves competent writers and expect their writing to impress any potential readers. Thus, 75% of the students asserted that they enjoy sharing their writings with others. This is also a possible outcome of the AMVQ Project (i.e. the experimental treatment), which advocated the idea of sharing to reinforce the students' self-confidence and motivation. For instance, the members of the experimental group were often engaged in peer-reviewing tasks to urge them to compare their written products to those of their classmates and learn a great deal in the process. Self-esteem and self-confidence have a great influence upon the students overall attitudes towards writing, as the findings of the present study revealed. That is, if the students feel weak and underestimated, they are likely to hold back and dwell in a narrow zone of comfort.

To end with, it is important to note that students, as this study attested, would not abandon old habits and attitudes until new ones are instilled in them. It is equally important to point out that learner attitudes are a potential shortcut to enhancing the students' writing skills. In fact, without a set of positive attitudes towards the writing skill, the learning process of any learner is expected to breakdown and exhibit a battery of shortcomings, which, if not well addressed, diminish the learners' overall competency.

IV. Conclusion

The results confirmed the premise that engaging the students in a series of well-designed and innovative writing activities, would adjust the students' attitudes towards writing. Hence, teachers are invited to employ similar activities to nurture a love of writing in their students, thereby pushing them to develop their writing skills autonomously. Indeed, when students love something truly, they would devote their lives to it.

References

[1]- Baker, C. (1992). Attitudes and language. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

[2]- Bartram, B. (2018). *Attitudes to modern foreign language learning:*

[3]- Colman, A. (2016). *What is psychology?* Routledge.

[4]- Erwin, P. (2011). *Attitudes & persuasion*. Psychology Press.

[5]- Garrett, P. (2010). *Attitudes to language*. Cambridge University Press.

[6]- Hashemian M., Heidari A. (2013). The relationship between L2 learners' motivation/attitude and success in L2 writing. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 70, 476-489.

[7]- Heinzmann, S. (2013). *Young language learner's motivation and attitudes.* Bloomsbury Publishing.

[8]- Komba, S.C., Kafanabo, E.J., Njabili, A.F. and Kira, E.S. (2012), "*Comparison between students' academic performance and their abilities in written English language skills*: A Tanzanian perspective", International Journal of Development and Sustainability, Vol. 1 No. 2, pp. 305–325.

[9]- Kroll, B. (2003). *Exploring the dynamics of second language writing.* Cambridge University Press.

[10]- Maio, G. & Haddock, G. (2015). *The Psychology of attitudes and attitude change*. Sage Publications.

[11]- Manchón, R. (2011). *Learning to write and writing to learn in an additional language.* John Benjamins Publishing Company.

[12]- Olson, J.M., & Maio, G. (2003). Attitudes in social behaviour. In T. Million & M. Cerneer (Eds.), Handbook of Psychology: Personality and Social Psychology (Vol.5, PP.229-325). New York: Wiley.

[13]- Petric, B. (2002). *Students' attitudes towards writing and the development of academic writing skills.* The Writing Center Journal, 22 (2). pp. 9-27.

[14]- Rumsey, N. & Harcourt, D. (2005). *The psychology of appearance*. Open University Press.

[15]- Vogel, P. & Wänke, M. (2016). *Attitudes and attitude change*. Routledge.

[16]- Zimbardo, P. G., & Leippe, M. R. (1991). *The psychology of attitude change and social influence.* Mcgraw-Hill Book Company.

[17]- Crano, W & Prisilin R. (2008). *Attitudes and attitude change*. Psychology Press.

[18]- Dörnyei, Z. (2014). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge University Press

[19]- Eagly, A. H., & Chaiken, S. (1993). *The psychology of attitudes.* Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.

[20]- Fiske, S. et al (2010) (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (pp. 353–393). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

[21]-Gillham, B. (2008). *Developing a questionnaire* (2nd Ed.). Continuum.

[22]-Hamblen, B. (2012). *Emotional fitness: A counselor's perspectives*. Inspiring Voices Publishing.

[23]-Hogg, M., & Vaughan, G. (2005). *Social psychology* (4th edition).Prentice-Hall.

Insights from comparative education. Bloomsbury Publishing.

[24]- Katz D. (1960). *The functional approach to the study of attitudes*. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 24, 163–204.

[25]-Mackey, A. & Gass, S. (2012). *Second language research: Methodology and design*.3rd Ed. Routledge.

[26]- Petty, R. E., Wheeler, S. C., & Tormala, Z. L. (2003). *Persuasion and attitude change*. In T. Millon & M. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of psychology*: *Personality and social psychology* (pp. 353-382). Wiley.

[27]-Sutton, R. & Douglas, K. (2013). *Social psychology*. Palgrave MacMillan.

[28]-Whitley, B. E., Jr., & Kite, M. E. (2012).*Principles of research in behavioral science* (3rd Ed.). Routledge.