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THE RELATIONSHIPS OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY,
PERCEPTIONS OF WRITING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE
AND WRITING EXPERIENCES TO THE COMPOSING
PROCESSSES OF 22 FILIPINO ESL WRITERS:
A CASE STUDY OF ESL COMPOSING

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the composing processes/ behaviors of 22 Filipino basic student writers enrolled in English for academic study at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines in relation to their language proficiency, perceptions of writing in English language, and writing experiences.

The study made use of descriptive-normative and case analytical approaches mainly utilizing protocol analysis. Through protocol analysis, identification and description of the various composing dimensions or behaviors--including time spent and rate of composing--were arrived at. In addition, observations and in-depth structured interviews were employed.

Seven kinds of data were analyzed in this study: 1) scores on the ESL Composition Tests; 2) scores on NCEE and PUPCET Verbal Ability Tests; 3) responses to the questionnaire items; 4) responses to the interview on writing perceptions and writing experiences taken from the tapes; 5) student-written product or drafts; 6) student think-aloud protocols; and 7) responses to the post composing interview questions.



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Group as well as case analysis revolved around the identification of writing behaviors which were studied in relation to language proficiency, perceptions of writing in the English language, and writing experiences. The correlational and comparative aspects of the study involved the composing processes of the subjects, according to the variables mentioned above.

The results reveal that for the samples, the mean composing time is 57 minutes for an average length of 23 sentences or 444 words per essay--or a composing rate of eight words per minute. The mean pre-writing time for this group of college writers was eight seconds and the mean pre-writing activity took one second. On the average, these subjects engaged in planning 20 times per composition. On the average, five sentences were written without interruption, while three sentences were written immediately--that is, with no activities after the previous sentence. The sample group had two occurrences of reading and rescanning of the topic. Furthermore, reading/rescanning of words and phrases, sentences or parts of sentences were done at an average of 140 times per essay. Only about one third of the subjects reread/read the whole draft after sentence 4, as shown in the mean of .32 obtained for



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these factors. The average occurrence of rehearsing was 63 times. The mean total editing operations was seven: a mean of two for editing within sentences; a mean of five while reading over; and a mean of .23 or less than one while editing between sentences. The mean total revising operations was five: a mean of two for revisions within sentences; and a mean of four while reading over. On the average, the group utilized the native language (Filipino/Tagalog) only three times per essay. With regard to awareness of audience and purpose, the subjects in the study obtained a mean of four indicators. The subjects did not engage in concluding the composition activity at all, as was evident in the obtained mean score of .363--only six or about one third of the subjects actually concluded the composition activity.

In summary, a mean of 237 composing strategies, exclusive of awareness of audience and purpose indicators, was exhibited by the subjects during their composing; while a mean of 244 composing strategies, inclusive of awareness of audience and purpose indicators, was reached.

It was further revealed that these Filipino ESL writers predominantly composed in a recursive manner.



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Of all the composing dimensions employed by the beginning writers, it is reading and rescanning of words, phrases, sentences or parts of sentences which sustained them throughout the essay. Revision, in varying frequencies and forms, was a strategy utilized by the subjects to correct instances of error while reading over and while completing individual sentences.

The study revealed that the three language characteristics were not significant with regard to Total Composing whether exclusive or inclusive of Awareness of Audience and Purpose Indicators and each of the composing dimensions except in the cases of two composing variables, namely Revisions While Reading Over and Total Revisions.

It was gathered that the computed r-values between Language Proficiency and Total Composing, whether exclusive ($r=.129$, $P.>.05$) or inclusive ($r=.106$, $P.>.05$) of Awareness of Audience and Purpose and each of the composing dimensions failed to reach the tabular r-value at the .05 level. The computed r-values between Perceptions of Writing in English language vs. Total Composing, whether exclusive ($r=.169$) or inclusive ($r=.144$) of Awareness of Audience and Purpose Indicators and each of the composing dimensions failed



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to reach the tabular r -values at the .05 level, ranging from .116 to .921), except in the cases of two composing dimensions, namely: Revisions While Reading Over ($r = -.424$, $P. > .05$) and Total Revisions ($r = -.459$, $P. > .05$). The inverse relationship between Perceptions of Writing in English Language and Total Revisions and Revisions While Reading Over indicates that basic ESL writers with less positive perceptions engaged in more revisions, while those with more positive perceptions engaged in less revisions. More in-depth analysis shows that the revisions engaged in by the less positive perception group involves only surface structures, and not content. While the computed r -values between Writing Experiences and Total Composing whether exclusive ($r = .219$, $P. > .05$) or inclusive ($r = .249$, $P. > .05$) of Awareness of Audience and Purpose Indicators and each of the composing dimensions failed to reach the tabular r -value at .05 level.

The multiple correlation (R) of the combination of the three language characteristics vs. Total Composing Process Exclusive of Awareness of Audience and Purpose Indicators, and the multiple correlation (R) between the combination vs. the Total Composing Process inclusive of Awareness of Audience and Purpose



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Indicators, are .340 and .337, respectively--that is with corresponding F-ratios which are insignificant at .05 level.

Additional findings in the study revealed that there is no significant difference in the composing processes of the subjects when grouped on the bases of language proficiency, perceptions of writing in English, and writing experiences.

The computed t-values for the significance of the difference in the mean scores of the high proficient group and less proficient group across the 28 variables did not reach the level of significance. The t-test obtained for the significance of the difference in the mean scores of the more positive and the less perceptive group across the 28 variables did not reach the level of significance, except in the cases of Revisions While Reading Over and Total Revisions; while the t-test obtained between the more extensive and less extensive group across the 28 variables did not reach the required level of significance.

The above findings clearly reveal several implications for the teaching of ESL writing: 1) That it has been reconfirmed that writing is predominantly recursive and irregular, and requires reexamination



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among composition teachers--thus teachers must consider this recursiveness; 2) That basic writers should not have the misconception that writers know the form before they know the content, nor the impression that writers know exactly what they are going to say before they say it; 3) That the mean prewriting time for the 22 ESL writers was very brief and the mean prewriting strategies or techniques were too limited to facilitate student composing processes--thus students need to be taught how to explore a topic, develop ideas, and discover relationships before writing; 4) That with regard to other composing strategies which were found to be limited in frequency, there is a need for the students to better understand the process of writing; 5) That since there were no major reformulations made in the students' draft, the subjects did not have a full understanding of what elements constitute good writing--so there should be a reformulation of ideas for ESL basic writers to be trained along this aspect; 6) That the use of L₁ builds students' self-confidence, and there is a need to provide basic ESL writers opportunities to use L₁ in their L₂ writing; 7) That consideration of purpose and audience by ESL writers indicates a need for most beginning composition



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students to adopt another frame of reference in composing essays; 8) That very limited occurrences for editing and revising activities imply that students lacked knowledge about these dimensions of composing, and must be taught how to behave along these writing dimensions; 9) That basic ESL writers, similar to native speakers of English, demonstrated a variety of composing behaviors differing in frequency while they also exhibited recursive writing--this implies that Filipino ESL students can be taught more effective writing strategies such as planning, rehearsing, rescanning, editing and revising; 10) That language proficiency did not correlate significantly with any of the composing dimensions, implying that syntax, vocabulary, and rhetorical forms, though important features of writing, are not ends but rather means with which to better express one's meaning, and that the aspects of linguistic competence need not be given much consideration to the point of neglecting the writing process itself; 11) That similar to language proficiency, perceptions of writing in the English language and writing experiences did not correlate significantly with the composing process--thus, these three variables need not be considered as criteria for



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success in composing, but a uniform approach for teaching composition and a single set of instructional materials is required; and, 12). That since no significant differences in the composing behaviors of ESL writers when grouped on the bases of language proficiency, perceptions of writing in English language and writing experiences were noted, handling classes in composition writing need not call for heterogenous classroom groupings.

Conclusions:

The following conclusions can be drawn regarding the preceding findings: 1) The very brief span of time the subjects spent for total composing and pre-writing might suggest the students' lack of commitment to the writing; 2) Planning is either mental or verbal; 3) The subjects did not exert considerable efforts to produce satisfactory essays and did not have a full understanding of what elements constituted good writing; 4) The occurrences of reading, rescanning and rereading, though few, served the subjects as "breathing space" for revisions and for creating, organizing and clarifying structure; 5) Rehearsing behavior occurred either verbal or written, though with



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few occurrences; 6) Editing done by the subjects, though not occurring often, took the form of checks on syntax or lexicon, especially with word choice, while revisions like editing, though done less by the subjects, suggest that revising was a familiar writing strategy; 8) The use of L₁, though very limited, hastened the composing process in L₂; 9) The subjects considered purpose and audience—which partly characterized them as "good writers"; 10) Concluding and submitting the essay was also done quite rapidly, which suggests that the subjects were glad the task was over and they were eager to leave.

It may further be concluded that: 1) The degree of recursiveness differs among ESL basic writers; 2) The genre dictated by the topic or title, and the interest of the writer in the topic, determine the kind of composing strategy the basic ESL writers use and the frequency with which they employ certain composing dimensions; and 3) The use of L₁ and consideration of audience and purpose facilitate ESL writers in their composing.

The following generalizations can likewise be made: 1) That the variable, Language Proficiency has a very low predictive validity for total composing and



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other writing strategies; 2) That the variable, Perceptions of Writing in the English language is not a reliable predictor for total composing and other writing dimension except in the cases of revisions while reading over and total revisions; 3) That the variable, Writing Experiences is not an effective predictor for Total Composing and other writing behaviors; and 4) That language proficiency, perceptions of writing in English language and writing experiences, taken as a team, does not contribute significantly to the determination of the composing process.

Furthermore, the following hypotheses are accepted: 1) That there is no significant difference in the mean scores of the high and low proficient groups in Total Composing and in the various composing dimensions; 2) That there is no significant difference in the mean scores of the more and less positive perception groups in Total Composing and in the various composing dimensions, except in the cases of Total Revisions and Revisions while Reading Over; and 3) That there is no significant difference in the mean scores of the more extensive and the less extensive writing experiences groups in Total Composing as well



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as in any of the composing dimensions.

The following recommendations are therefore provided by the researcher: 1) Basic ESL writers need to spend ample time in composing, and if they are given more time to spend on the composition, they should focus on the content rather than on minor aspects of form; 2) Students of basic writing need to be motivated to spend more time in pre-writing for them to make certain decisions, especially if they have not accumulated information on the topic assigned; 3) Beginning student writers need to be given opportunities to do considerable planning, both mental and verbal; 4) Similar basic ESL writers should be taught to engage in major reformulations to aid them in composing, not only for them to engage in mere addition of ideas but also for them to have a smoother transition from rough draft to final draft; 5) Students of basic writing need to be taught reading/rescanning of topic as a means for them to generate ideas; 6) Basic ESL writers should be given an opportunity to rehearse and verbalize ideas before putting them into writing; 7) Basic ESL writers should be taught not to misinterpret editing or revising—they need to be taught how to make major and minor revisions



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in the text; 8) Basic ESL writers need not be discouraged in the use of L₁ in composing in English, but must be provided with a more ample vocabulary and sufficient ideas to be able to compose better--more research on the influence of L₁ to L₂ writing is needed; 9) Awareness of Audience and Purpose needs to be reinforced among basic ESL writers; 10) Basic ESL writers should be taught to conclude and compose in a relaxed manner, their belief that writing for school assignments as something which must be done for others needs to be corrected, and the tension they feel during writing should be remedied; and 11) Basic ESL writers need to be motivated to engage in numerous, as well as efficient, composing strategies.

Other recommendations from this study are that: 1) Individual writers need to be motivated to express their individuality in the assigned writing task; 2) They should be encouraged to get involved in writing as a continuing attempt to discover what they want to say; 3) They need to be taught about certain identifiable steps associated with writing which are recurring and can be repeated in the same or different order.

It is further recommended that: 1) Language proficiency, perceptions of writing in the English



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language, and writing experiences, whether taken individually or collectively, should not be used as a basis for determining the basic ESL writers' composing processes; 2) Further exploration into the potential predictors of total composing due to efficient strategies, not only to the extent of the process involved, is necessary; 3) The validity of individual descriptions within categories in the three predictor variables makes the identification of related factors to the composing process and various dimensions impossible--hence, there is a need to determine the true bases for measuring language proficiency, perceptions of writing in English language, and writing experiences; and 4) Techniques and instruments for certain possible correlates of the composing process are still in the infancy stage--hence, further refinement regarding this aspect needs to be done.

Finally, this researcher suggests the following:

- 1) Factors that are highly significant in predicting the composing process should be looked into for further refinement, and an objective assessment of dependent variables with respect to composing processes and dimensions needs to be delineated in future research;
- 2) Findings that basic ESL writers with less positive



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perceptions of writing in English language engaged in more revisions, while those with more positive perceptions of writing in English language engaged in less revisions, needs further research. The researcher's belief that more positive perception groups have developed confidence and consistency in the use of L₂ requires a more scientific basis, and hence a need for more in-depth linguistic investigations.

