A STUDY OF ELL STUDENTS’ WRITING DIFFICULTIES: A CALL FOR CULTURALLY, LINGUISTICALLY, AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the difficulties ELL students experience in their writing development from the perspective of twenty ELL students. Through the use of questionnaires and in depth interviews, this study attempted to explore the writing needs or difficulties of ELL students. The findings indicated that ELL students perceived their highest writing difficulties in linguistic/cognitive deficiencies (M=3.89;SD=.50), next highest in psychological/emotional deficiencies (M=2.77;SD=1.18) and the third in sociocultural aspects of writing difficulties (M=2.48;SD=1.10). In addition, this study discussed some of the influences of those writing difficulties on ELL writing and some implications for ELL teaching.

Introduction

Writing Difficulties of English Language Learners in the U.S.

Writing instruction of English Language Learners (ELLs) has become one of the most urgent issues in today’s educational practice. As the pace of immigration to the U.S. has accelerated in recent years, increasing numbers of children in U.S. schools come from homes in which English is not the primary spoken language. According to the 2012 Census, there were over 49 million adults aged 18 or older who reported speaking a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Among those 49 million adults, more than 22 million did not speak English very well (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In other words, about 22 million adults would need ELL instruction to help them become English proficient. As a result, in recent years, enrollment figures for adult ELLs in higher educational settings have increased dramatically. This trend has created a huge demand for English language instruction for these non-native adult ELLs.

Needs assessment is fundamental to the design of a good curriculum. Reid (2001) advises that writing courses for English as a second language students should be thoughtfully designed to integrate their immediate needs with institutional values, disciplinary goals, and professional expectations. In Reid’s recommendation, there is mention of immediate student needs, indicating that in order for the student to benefit from instruction, instructors must tailor instruction to meet student needs. While the success of writing instruction depends on establishing student needs, establishing authentic student needs depends on collecting and analyzing authentic data. Authenticity of data depends on the source and methods used in obtaining the data.

Generally speaking, ELL writers differ
from native English writers in several ways (Nelson, 1991). Native English writers acquire English grammatical and linguistic patterns naturally from their own language and culture. On the other hand, ELL writers must acquire these writing skills deliberately, usually as a result of direct instruction. This means that ELL writing samples will probably have more surface-level errors in grammar, spelling, mechanics, vocabulary and other linguistic features than native English-speaking writers. ELL writers also tend to transfer their native language patterns from first language to second language when they are learning to compose in academic English, especially in the beginning stages (Nelson, 1991).

ELL writing also differs from native writing in the ways the ELL writer’s primary language and culture may influence the second language student’s rhetorical styles, organization, and expression of ideas. These ELL learners must purposely unlearn their native language writing patterns in order to compose in the expected academic American writing styles. This re-learning process is a complex and difficult task for many adult ELL learners (Swales, 1990).

The second language writer’s ideas may be presented in quite different organizational patterns and rhetorical modes than the essential linear style that characterizes most English writing (Connor, 1996). The adult ELL student’s unique form or style of written expression may not easily conform to the expected format, explanation, and organization that American ELL writing classes require. As a result, second language writers’ writing samples may be misunderstood, undervalued or poorly evaluated by writing teachers who are unfamiliar with ELL students’ different styles of rhetorical expression (Hamp-Lyons, 1991).

Another important distinction between first language and second language writers lies in their experience and exposure to academic reading and writing tasks throughout their lives. Native-born English adult writers with at least a high school education have been exposed throughout their lives to written English texts and have practiced academic English writing in some form from elementary school to young adulthood. Second language writers, while literate in their native languages, may not have developed a strong literacy background and experience in writing academic tasks in their native language or in English. This puts adult ELL learners at a definite disadvantage when they are trying to acquire good English writing skills in a short period of time (Leki & Carson, 1997).

In conclusion, ELL students have different writing needs. It is necessary to establish the writing needs of students for whom English is a second language; therefore, composition teachers can design teaching activities that address ELL students’ writing needs and enhance ELL students’ writing process and writing performances. Therefore, this study asks, what difficulties do ELL students commonly experience in their writing development?

**Method**

**Setting**

The sample for this study comprised twenty volunteer ELL students enrolled in a spring 2011 composition class at an American Midwest University’s Center for English as a Second Language (CESL) program. The CESL offers an intensive English language program designed for students who wish to master English quickly and thoroughly. Overall, CESL offers seven-week sessions in the spring semester, with twenty-five hours of instruction per week.

**Sources of Data**

**The researchers**

The researcher herself is an ELL writer. She has always struggled for better English writing. Since she came to the U.S. to study,
most of her instructors had learning objectives for the courses they taught. Most instructors assumed that since ELL students come to the U.S. to study, they have to learn the language in order to meet the academic English writing standard. As a result, most instructors set up their learning objectives and learning activities based on their curricular standards without consulting their ELL students' writing needs. As an ELL writer and teacher, I began to question this approach to teaching ELL writing, especially with regard to the learning needs of ELL students. Through this study, the researcher sought to explore the difficulties ELL students experience in their writing development and how teachers can tailor their teaching to ELL students' learning needs to improve their ELL students' chances of success in English writing.

Data sets

This study combined both qualitative and quantitative methods. The instruments for data collection included online questionnaires (see appendix 1) and hour-long semi-structured personal audio-taped interviews (see appendix 2). The first study's data set included the online writing difficulties survey, and this instrument was composed of 48 items. The first 6 items related to demographic information and the second 42 items measured each student's self-perception of his/her writing difficulties. The demographic items elicited participants' ages, gender, countries of birth, native languages, and the number of years spent learning English composition. The 42 items measuring self-perception of writing difficulties consisted of three different scales: (a) cognitive/linguistic dimension of writing difficulties, (b) sociocultural dimension of writing difficulties, and (c) psychological/emotional dimension of writing difficulties. Cognitive and linguistic dimensions are different; but, for many second language adult learners, writing in a new language involves combining cognitive and linguistic aspects of writing simultaneously, making a clear distinction between linguistic and cognitive dimensions problematic. There were 25 items measuring the cognitive/linguistic dimension of writing difficulties, five items measuring the sociocultural dimension of writing difficulties, and 12 items measuring the psychological/emotional dimension of writing difficulties. The 42 items used a six-point Likert-scale, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Items were structured so that the highest score (6) indicated the greatest difficulty with an aspect of writing and the lowest score (1) indicated the least difficulty.

The second data set consisted of semi-structured interviews with ELL writers. In-depth personal interviews, approximately one hour in length, were conducted with ten participants to explore more deeply the writing difficulties and strategies of dealing with writing difficulties identified in the online questionnaires. The research tape recorded the interviews and they were transcribed. To further insure validity, the researcher returned to contributors when points needed clarification.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of twenty adult ELL students who were taking ELL college composition classes. Among the 20 participating students, 11 were male (55%) and 9 female (45%). Participating students originated from seven countries, including China (n=8, 40%), Taiwan (n=4, 20%), Saudi Arabia (n=3, 15%), Angola (n=2, 10%), Cameroon (n=1, 5%), Thailand (n=1, 5%), and Korea (n=1, 5%).

Data Analysis Procedures

Prior to scoring the questionnaire items, the researcher put all items on the same scale by reversing all positively worded statements. This questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequency, means,
and percentages, and inferential statistics. The writing difficulty was represented by summing up the frequency, percentages, and the average of all item mean scores from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' on the Likert-scale.

Online questionnaires provided general information about what difficulties adult ELL students experience in their writing process. Interviews supplied more in-depth information because the ELL students' perceptions were articulated. The researcher transcribed the interviews. Next, the researcher coded the interview narrative by writing key words or phrases that related to the study question in the margin. These codes were grouped into themes to discern patterns among ELL students' perceptions.

Results

Most Difficult Aspects of Writing

The mean was measured by the average score for the total 20 participants in each item on the questionnaire. The standard deviation was defined as the measure of the dispersion of the scores from mean for the total 20 participants in each item. In this study, the primary criteria used to define items into most and least difficult categories were mean scores (M=3.54) and standard deviations (SD=.44). The mean score of each item larger or equal to 4 (3.54+.44≈ 4) constituted placement in the most difficult item category. Table 1 reports descriptive data to show the rank of questionnaire items from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Over all, 14 items were ranked as the highest writing difficulties.

Participants agreed that word choice (M=5; SD=.97) was the chief writing difficulty. Participants indicated in their open-ended questions that when they were not sure about certain English words, they usually looked up those words in the bilingual dictionary. However, translations from a bilingual dictionary frequently came out as a jumble of words to the students. ELL writers found it very difficult to choose the most appropriate one in a given sentence (context). One participant stated:

I had problems of choosing the right words to express my ideas. When I had difficulties and uncertainties, I always looked up those words in my bilingual dictionary. But there were so many translational words coming out from my dictionary, I found it was very hard for me to choose the most appropriate one in a sentence to express my thoughts correctly. (Sue, Self-Perception of Writing Difficulties Questionnaire, Open-Ended Question 1)

Adjusting to American thought patterns (M=4.96; SD=1.08) was the second greatest writing difficulty. Many participants indicated that they had problems adjusting their ways of writing in their first language to American thought patterns. Students still thought in their first language and used the rhetorical patterns of their first language to write English essays. Many students expressed that they had difficulty switching from their first language rhetorical patterns to English linear rhetorical patterns. Because writing patterns or styles are not only cognitively but also culturally embedded, many ELL writers in this study found it takes a significant amount of time to adapt to different thinking patterns when communicating through written English. Two participants expressed their concerns about adjusting to American thought patterns:

I had difficulty adjusting my way of writing from my native language writing to American thought patterns. For example, I still had tendency to let my readers to infer from my writing and I had problems of using direct, concise, to the point type of American thought patterns. (Megan, Self-Perception of Writing Difficulties Questionnaire, Open-Ended Question 1)
I think I had a lot of problems in organizing my ideas in American logic and reasoning. I got used to use my first language way of writing many fancy words to repeat ideas. I usually wrote more philosophically and I forgot to provide examples or statements. (Jack, Self-Perception of Writing Difficulties Questionnaire, Open-Ended Question 1)

Writing fluency (M=4.79; SD=.88) was the third ranked writing difficulty. Students stated that they stop many times to think about what to write when they write English essays. They often think for extended periods of time but find only a few words to express a quite complicated idea; therefore, they have serious problems with fluency. For instance, one participant said:

I usually plan and thought my ideas in my first language and it was not difficult. But once I have ideas, I stopped many time to think how to translate my ideas and meaning into American style of organization, logic, and sentence structure. I often ended up struggling to think for a long period of time but could only find simple and few sentences to express my comprehensive and complicated ideas. I felt I had serious problems in writing fluency and I felt I was handicapped to express my ideas fully and fluently. (Nancy, Self-Perception of Writing Difficulties Questionnaire, Open-ended Question 1)

Anxiety (M= 4.58; SD=1.18) was the fourth-ranked writing concern. All participants felt anxious about English writing. This anxiety often manifested itself in low self-confidence in writing, whether in regard to how they organized their ideas or whether they could adequately detect their own grammar errors. Sometimes they emphasized the mechanics of writing, sacrificing meaning and creativity. One participant expressed such anxiety:

The more I prepared for the paper, the more confused I got with so many things going on in my head. How could I organize my ideas in English in a limited time! But if I couldn’t make it in time, I would get lower grade and my efforts would be totally ruined! (Wendy, Self-Perception of Writing Difficulties Questionnaire, Open-Ended Question 1)

Idioms (M=4.50; SD=1.69) were the fifth most cited writing difficulty. Participants indicated that they used few idioms in their English writing, often using knowledge of their first language to understand and construct English idioms. In essays they found it hard to be able to memorize and use those idioms whose meanings were not figuratively transparent but opaque. In addition, participants stated that they had problems in using idioms appropriately; therefore, they used fewer idioms to avoid slang or colloquialisms in their writing. Two participants reported:

I was used to use my first language to help me to understand and memorize English idioms. When writing English essays, I had problems with memorizing and using those idioms whose actual meanings were very different from their literal meanings and my first language expressions. (Andy, Self-Perception of Writing Difficulties Questionnaire, Open-ended Question 1)

I had hard time figuring out which English idioms were academic writing and which idioms were just colloquial expressions. Also I had difficulty in using right idioms at the right place and at the right time in my sentences; therefore, I tended to use few idioms.
to avoid mistakes. (Jenny, Self-Perception of Writing Difficulties Questionnaire, Open-ended Question 1)

Low self-confidence (M=4.25; SD=1.69) in English writing was the sixth writing difficulty. Most of the participants expressed a deep concern about their low self-confidence in their English writing proficiency. Participants felt that their lack of confidence made them somehow inferior to native speakers and only added to the nervousness they felt when writing English essays. In addition, quite a few participants said they lacked confidence in English writing proficiency in comparison to their native language writing proficiency. For example, one participant expressed:

If I could write in the same way as in Arabic, I would feel more confident in my writing. Now even if I know quite a lot about the topic that teachers give us to write for my class, I still struggle very much about how to organize my ideas into English essays. I tend to be worried about my sentence structure, grammar, transitional words, and word choices. After long hours of writing, I still write fewer sentences, few paragraph in my essay and I feel so bad about my writing. (Mark, Self-Perception of Writing Difficulties Questionnaire, Open-Ended Question 1)

Both thesis statement (M=4.21; SD=1.47) and spelling (M=4.21; SD=1.18) were ranked seventh among writing difficulties. In terms of thesis statements, several participants indicated that writing a thesis statement was difficult in English essays. Some of them linked the reason why it was difficult to write a thesis statement to their inability to summarize their ideas into one sentence. Thesis statements were also considered by participants to be unnecessary requirements. Participants felt that writers needed to have freedom to write and to express the meaning they wish to convey in a way they deemed appropriate. Participants think thesis statements limit their expression. One participant said the following:

I have difficulty writing thesis statements. I don’t see the importance to have a thesis statement. Summarizing my ideas in just one sentence is tough for me. (Garry, Self-Perception of Writing Difficulties Questionnaire, Open-Ended Question 1)

With regard to the difficulty about spelling, a few participants indicated that English is not always spelled as it is pronounced. The rules are complex and there is always an exception. The following statement was made:

I learn English from listening to native speakers. When I spell a word, I try to match letters with pronunciations. However, in English you often pronounce in one way, then you write it the other way. That’s why I always spell wrong. (Hannah, Self-Perception of Writing Difficulties Questionnaire, Open-Ended Question 1)

Summarizing a large argument into a conclusion (M=4.17; SD=1.13) was the ninth greatest writing difficulty. Participants felt that it was difficult to summarize their whole essay in just one paragraph. They said that putting a larger piece into a short, concise paragraph was difficult for them. One participant said:

My problem is how to summarize the long essay I write into conclusion and how to make it shorter to fit into just one paragraph. That is the most difficulty that I have. (Lucy, Self-Perception of Writing Difficulties Questionnaire, Open-Ended Question 1)

Using prepositions (M=4.08; SD=1.10) was the tenth-most cited writing difficulty. Prepositions were presented as one of the most troubling aspects of writing in English.
Most participants had difficulty using prepositions correctly because the participants felt that every preposition has a number of possible meanings and only vague definitions. It is sometimes tremendously difficult for participants to decide on a preposition. One participant expressed:

It was always hard for me to decide appropriate prepositions. When I look up a preposition in a dictionary, I often find about ten or twenty meanings. To me, all are very vaguely and confusingly defined. I don’t know which one the right choice is. (Mickie, Self-Perception of Writing Difficulties Questionnaire, Open-Ended Question 1)

Organization, generating ideas, and paragraph conclusion (M=4.04; SD=1.08) tied for a ranking as the 11th greatest writing difficulty. First, with regard to organization, all participants expressed their problems with having to follow a specified organizational pattern in presenting their ideas in English writing. Participants shared that they did not have experience in following specific American organizational patterns in their first language writing. Therefore, they felt it unnatural to conform their writing to a specific organizational design. The following are two participants’ statements about organization:

I usually just write whatever comes to my mind about a topic. However, when I have to do introduction, body, conclusion, and all that, that part bothered me very much. (Sissy, Self-Perception of Writing Difficulties Questionnaire, Open-Ended Question 1)

It is very hard for me to follow a certain structure. I usually spend more time organizing my ideas to show what is cause and what is effect. When it comes to structure, I have to separate my ideas to go in different place (like different paragraph). Most of the time, I end up losing my ideas when I try to think the structure. In the end, I usually write less paragraphs and less sentences in my essays. (Nina, Self-Perception of Writing Difficulties Questionnaire, Open-Ended Question 1)

Making grammatical mistakes in sentence fragments (M=4.04; SD=1.16) was the 14th ranked writing difficulty. Many participants indicated that when they wrote, they tended to think in their first language. Then they translated those ideas word-by-word into English; therefore, they often ended up writing incomplete sentences and forgetting to follow the rules of English sentence structure. For example, Mark expressed:

When I wrote English essays, I often had a tendency to think my ideas in my native language first. Then I translated my ideas and meaning word-by-word into English and I usually forgot to follow the rules of English sentence structure and boundary. As a result, I often ended up writing many incomplete sentences. (Mark, Self-Perception of Writing Difficulties Questionnaire, Open-Ended Question 1)

Linguistic, Psychological, and Sociocultural Aspects of Writing

The mean for linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural aspects of writing was measured by the average score for the total 20 participants on items categorized on each of these specific aspects of writing. The standard deviation was defined as the measure of the dispersion of the scores from mean for the total 20 participants in items categorized in each of these certain aspects of writing. Further analysis of the data collected from the questionnaires showed that ELL students had the most writing difficulty in cognitive/linguistic aspects (M=3.89; SD=.50) of writing. The
psychological/emotional dimension (M=2.77; SD=1.18) of writing was the second writing difficulty, followed by the sociocultural aspect (M=2.48; SD=1.10) of writing.

Conclusions and Discussions

Over all, the 14 highest ranked writing difficulties items fell within all three dimensions. The linguistic/cognitive dimension of writing difficulties included word choice, stopping many times to think, idioms, writing skills, thesis statements, organization, spelling, conclusion, paragraph development, preposition, and sentence structure. The psychological/emotional dimension of writing difficulties consisted of anxiety, and adjusting to American thought patterns represented the sociocultural dimension of writing difficulties. The findings of this study are consistent with the previous studies about ELLs' writing difficulties. Most ELLs thought they had the most writing difficulties in cognitive/linguistic deficiencies. However, this study also suggests that ELLs had second-level concerns/needs in psychological/emotional writing deficiencies, and third in sociocultural writing difficulties. There were few previous studies focusing on ELLs' writing difficulties in psychological/emotional or sociocultural areas. Even where some studies exist, there is no order or ranking between the two dimensions (psychological/emotional and sociocultural) or three dimensions (cognitive/linguistic, psychological/emotional, and sociocultural). In this study there are some possible explanations for having the highest perceived writing difficulties in cognitive/linguistic dimension, next highest in psychological/emotional area, and the least as in easiest in sociocultural aspects. First, most ELLs' essays are scored and given feedback based on linguistic/cognitive aspects of writing; therefore, ELLs are more likely to look at writing from a linguistic/cognitive lens. Generally speaking, ELLs' experiences and perceptions of writing are more focused on performance and product writing. Psychological/emotional or sociocultural factors of writing may be ignored by, or be invisible to, most ELLs because these two areas do not show as scores on their compositions, tests, or assignments, nor are students given feedback on these two areas on writing tests/assignments. For example, among the 14 highest writing difficulties, ELLs thought most of their writing difficulties were in cognitive/linguistic dimensions. There were 10 cognitive/linguistic writing difficulties identified in the present study, including word choice, stopping many times to think, idioms, spelling, paragraph development, preposition usage, and sentence structure. Second, the questionnaire in this study was a self-reported type of survey. There were some items regarding psychological/emotional dimensions of writing and those items may prompt ELLs to start thinking about the emotional aspects of their writing, such as anxiety and confidence; therefore, they began to be aware they had the second most serious concerns in psychological/emotional writing deficiencies. Third, a majority of ELLs were used to sharing their writings with English teachers (the third least writing difficulty) and native English speakers (the fourth least writing difficulty); therefore, they had least difficulties in sociocultural writing deficiencies. In fact, some of the difficulties could overlap across dimensions. For example, word choice and idioms were seen as linguistic/cognitive writing difficulties, but selecting appropriate words and idioms that best expressed the meaning intended in a written context went beyond linguistic/cognitive difficulties to include cultural dimensions of knowledge. Thesis statements, organization, and paragraph development were in the linguistic/cognitive dimension of writing, but following an American linear writing style that required a thesis, supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion also included culturally engendered rhetorical issues. Besides the linguistic/cognitive dimension of writing
difficulties, these rhetorical writing difficulties seemed to have their origin in cultural and traditional differences.

The major issue addressed in this study was the significance of identifying writing difficulties (needs) from students' perspectives (Reid, 2001). Previous studies had concentrated more on surveying faculty and analyzing documents to establish student learning needs.

**Implications**

ELL students have learning needs that are ELL student-specific. The writing difficulties expressed by participants in this study show that ELL students have to overcome some difficulties in order to write effectively. These are cognitive/linguistic difficulties, sociocultural differences, and psychological/emotional concerns. To meet ELL students' writing needs, instruction strategies in ELL composition classes would need to differ from those in mainstream English composition classes. ELL composition teaching activities should include not only linguistic/cognitive aspects of writing but also psychological/emotional and sociocultural aspects of writing. ELL composition instruction should call for linguistically, culturally, and psychologically responsive teaching, including:

- **Word choice.** For the ELL writing classes, teachers need to model word-choosing strategies that can help to select the words appropriate to express the meaning intended in the communication situation. This word selection takes into consideration not only the meaning of the word, but also the purpose of the communication, and the audience. This requires English conventional and cultural knowledge that may be completely new to the ELL students; therefore, teachers should provide ELL students with a variety of opportunities to practice the use of these words. In addition, teachers can add the confusing words and usage examples to the student's word book as a resource for the next paper.

- **Adjusting to American thought pattern.** ELL composition teachers can model English thinking and writing to teach English sentence structure. Teachers can use an anonymous student's writing sample papers to explain the grammar errors caused by the linguistic differences between an ELL student's first language and English so that ELL students can be aware that the English structure differs from their first language sentence structure. Teachers should continue to teach systematically those aspects of grammar that are still problematic. In addition, teachers can use sample writings to teach organization, including linearity in discourse development, thesis statements, and unity. ELL students need much practice in organization to switch from their first language discourse tradition to the American discourse tradition. Students should be led to see thesis statements as a statement of the paper's argument or assertion about the subject. Because stating theses and organizing main points around them may be a new concept for ELL students, plenty of learning exercises may be required to help them master and apply that concept in their writing.

- **Writing fluency.** To help ELL students to write fluently and automatically to express their ideas, they need a functional repertoire of vocabulary. Teachers can use a variety of fun vocabulary activities to engage students and help them to expand their
vocabulary in order to improve their writing fluency. Teachers can also encourage students to pick up new words and to clarify the meanings of new words by reading a lot of good writing in diversity of topics. Then students can practice trying out their new words in writing in their in-class free writing.

• Cultural needs/rhetoric conventions. Teachers can pair ELL students with an American “writing buddy” or assign them to work with American small groups to practice revision and editing strategies so that ELL students can learn more about English rhetorical conventions. Moreover, ELL students should be given the opportunity to learn more about American culture and the crafts of English writing by connecting students with reading mentor texts and writing journals. The more that ELL students read and write, the more likely they will understand and learn American culture and rhetorical conventions. In addition, teachers can guide students to discuss and understand the differences among quoting, paraphrasing, and plagiarizing.

• Emotional needs. Teachers need to understand the affective needs of ELL writers. ELL students need their teachers not only to accept their emotional concerns, but also to provide them with an encouraging and supporting writing environment. Teachers can encourage students to focus more on ideas and to use writing process approach to write. The process of brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing may relieve ELL students from ruminating over mechanical/grammatical errors.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study had a number of limitations. First, the study did not intend to test a hypothesis, but rather to explore the perceptions of students on their learning difficulties. As a result, the finding can only be seen as tendencies that must be further verified and tested. Second, the sample was drawn from a very restricted population. The population was small relative to the high number of students for whom English is a second language, and who are currently enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States. This further makes it unreasonable to generalize the findings to a large population of ELL students in the USA. The perspectives of ELL students expressed in this study can only be attributed with some degree of certainty to ELL students in the particular Midwest University’s ESL program. Further research could be done to include more ELL population and more institutions to establish the consistency of the needs expressed by these ELL students.

References

Appendix 1:

**Perception Toward English Writing Survey**

**Personal Information**
Name: 
Age: 
Gender: (M: Male, F: Female)
Country of Birth: 
Native Language: 
How long have you been writing in English:

**Perception about English Writing**
This questionnaire is designed to help us get a better understanding of the kinds of difficulties you experience during your English writing process. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the statements listed below by circling the number that corresponds to your opinion.

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<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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<td>Somewhat Disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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1. I like to write English essays ............................................. 1 2 3 4 5 6
2. It is easy for me to get started writing an English essay... 1 2 3 4 5 6
3. It is easy for me to keep my English writing going and write smoothly ...... 1 2 3 4 5 6
4. I write short and simple English sentences ......................... 1 2 3 4 5 6
5. It is easy for me to write my ideas into English paragraphs...... 1 2 3 4 5 6
6. I have difficulty writing closing sentences for my paragraphs.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6
7. I have difficulty using articles (such as “a”, “the”, “an”)................. 1 2 3 4 5 6
8. I have difficulty using prepositions (such as “on,” “in,” “at”)................. 1 2 3 4 5 6
9. I have difficulty using verb tenses within a paragraph (such as “say”, “said”, “will say”)..... 1 2 3 4 5 6
10. I have difficulty with word order in English sentences (such as “How are you?”), “How you are?”)......................... 1 2 3 4 5 6
11. I have difficulty with word choice (such as choosing “quarrel” or “debate”)1 2 3 4 5 6
12. I have difficulty using punctuation (such as ., ?)................. 1 2 3 4 5 6
13. I use few idioms (such as “Butterflies in my stomach” or “Hit the road”) .... 1 2 3 4 5 6
14. I have difficulty spelling correctly.......................... 1 2 3 4 5 6
15. I have difficulty generating ideas for writing ................. 1 2 3 4 5 6
16. I have difficulty adjusting my way of writing in my native language writing to American thought patterns............... 1 2 3 4 5 6
17. I am aware of what sentence fragments are, **but I still use them** (for example, My school offers many majors in engineering. Such as electrical, chemical, and industrial engineering.)

18. I am aware of what sentence fragments are, **and I don't use them**

19. I know what run-on sentences are, **but I still use them** (for example, The boy showed us his tickets someone gave them to him)

20. I know what run-on sentences are, **and I don't use them**

21. I find it difficult to go from one paragraph to another with smooth, well-connected transitions (such as "As a result", "In addition", or "In fact")

22. I feel that I have trouble writing logically and systematically in English

23. I have difficulty writing a thesis statement

24. I have trouble focusing ideas (arguments) that are related to the points that I am trying to make

25. I have difficulty organizing ideas

26. I have difficulty summarizing my larger argument into a conclusion

27. When writing an English essay, I have trouble writing an introduction, some paragraphs to make my points, and a conclusion

28. Sometimes I start writing something, then in the end I write something else

29. When I write in English, I stop many times to think about what to write

30. I have anxiety about writing in English

31. I am confident in my writing in my native language writing (such as Chinese, Korean, or Arabic)

32. I have low confidence in English writing

33. I don't have enough time to finish my English writing exams or assignments in a limited time period

34. I feel comfortable revising my writing in English

35. I like to use computer technology (such as e-mail, online discussion or internet) in my writing class

36. I am a skillful English writer

37. I feel comfortable with sharing my English writing with other ELL students

38. I like to share my English writing with my English teachers

39. I feel comfortable with sharing my English writing with native English speakers

40. I like to give feedback and suggestions to other people's English writing

41. I feel my writing assignments are interesting and meaningful

42. I am motivated to learn English writing in the future
Appendix 2

Interview Questions

1. What do you find most difficult in writing English composition? Why?
2. What are some examples of your writing difficulties?
3. When you have problems with writing, what do you usually do to solve the problems?
4. Do other people (for example, classmates, friends, family, instructors) help you write? How?
5. Explain how you feel about yourself writing English composition?

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
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<th>SD</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>11. I have difficulty with word choice (such as choosing “quarrel” or “debate”).</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>16. I have difficulty adjusting my way of writing in my native language writing to American thought patterns.</td>
<td>Socio/cultural</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29. When I write in English, I stop many times to think about what to write.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>30. I have anxiety about writing in English.</td>
<td>Psych/Emo</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>13. I use few idioms (such as “Butterflies in my stomach” or “Hit the road”).</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>36. I have low confidence in English writing</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>14. I have difficulty spelling correctly.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>23. I have difficulty writing a thesis statement.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>26. I have difficulty summarizing my larger argument into a conclusion.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>8. I have difficulty using prepositions (such as “on,” “in,” “at”).</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>6. I have difficulty writing closing sentences for my paragraphs.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>15. I have difficulty generating ideas for writing</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>27. When writing an English essay, I have trouble writing an introduction, some paragraphs to make my points, and a conclusion.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>17. I am aware of what sentence fragments are, but I still use them.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>2. It is easy for me to get started writing an English essay.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>22. I feel that I have trouble writing logically and systematically in English.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>33. I don’t have enough time to finish my English writing exams or assignments in a limited time period.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>24. I have trouble focusing ideas (arguments) that are related to the points that I am trying to make.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>3. It is easy for me to keep my English writing going and write smoothly.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>4. I write short and simple English sentences.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Survey Item</td>
<td>Dimension</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>25. I had difficulty organizing ideas.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>20. I know what run-on sentences are, and I don’t use them.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>21. I find it difficult to go from one paragraph to another with smooth, well-connected transitions.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>5. It is easy for me to write my ideas into English paragraphs.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>32. I have confidence in English writing.</td>
<td>Psycho/Emo</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>18. I am aware of what sentence fragments are, and I don’t use them.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>28. Sometimes I start writing something, then in the end I write something else.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>7. I have difficulty using articles.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>19. I know what run-on sentences are, but I still use them.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>12. I have difficulty using punctuation.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>34. I feel comfortable revising my writing in English.</td>
<td>Psycho/Emo</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>10. I have difficulty with word order in English sentences.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>9. I have difficulty using verb tenses within a paragraph.</td>
<td>Cog/Lin</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>1. I like to write English essays.</td>
<td>Psycho/Emo</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>41. I feel my writing assignments are interesting and meaningful.</td>
<td>Psycho/Emo</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>35. I like to use computer technology (such as e-mail, online discussion or internet) in my writing class.</td>
<td>Psycho/Emo</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>37. I feel comfortable with sharing my English writing with other ELL students.</td>
<td>Socio/Cult</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>40. I like to give feedback and suggestions to other people’s English writing.</td>
<td>Socio/Cult</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>39. I feel comfortable with sharing my English writing with native English speakers.</td>
<td>Socio/Cult</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>38. I like to share my English writing with my English teachers.</td>
<td>Socio/Cult</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>31. I am confident in my writing in my native language writing (such as Chinese, Korean, or Arabic).</td>
<td>Psycho/Emo</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>42. I am motivated to learn English writing in the future.</td>
<td>Psycho/Emo</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>