A Conceptual Model of Korean University EFL Learners’ 
Writing Performance*

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Writing Performance. Linguistic Research 27(3), 475-498. This paper explored Korean 
university EFL students’ writing performance and its model, using a qualitative 
research method. Several categories or themes emerged from in-depth interviews 
with current research respondents, which were perceived to impact students’ EFL 
writing performance both inside and outside the university classroom. That is, 
results derived from the analysis of the data encompassed the following categories: 
(1) EFL learners’ cognitive or metacognitive capacity; (2) EFL learners’ overall 
English proficiency; (3) free voluntary reading in English; (4) free voluntary writing 
in English; and (5) EFL learners’ writing apprehension and attitudes towards 
writing in English. Grounded in the categories above, a conceptual model of 
Korean university EFL learners’ writing performance was eventually offered which 
could shed light on key components as perceived to have a bearing on writing 
performance in which Korean university EFL learners might engage themselves. 
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Key Words EFL writing performance, writing performance model, EFL proficiency, 
free voluntary reading and writing, EFL writing anxiety

1. Introduction

Writing has long been a familiar word in discussions of education and 
pedagogy, and has recently generated significant interest among writing 
researchers of both L1 and L2, including those language professionals in the 
field of EFL (English as a Foreign Language). In the EFL classroom setting, 
however, writing has started to acquire a new force and urgency, partly because 
a great majority of English users worldwide are non-native speakers of English 
and partly because the recent advance of the Internet has contributed to English 
as the global lingua franca, gaining greater ground than any other language. EFL

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writing has itself become an important skill to be learned in combination with other skills such as speaking, listening, and reading. Therefore, the importance of EFL writing cannot be overemphasized in this rapidly changing world.

Given the importance of writing either in general EFL settings or in task-involved academic writing settings (cf. Leki & Carson, 1997), almost all of the college-level English writing or composition courses offered throughout the nation are designed to engage their EFL students in writing, adopting the method of process writing. Process writing has become the catchword for almost every ESL/EFL writing course. This "process writing" on which EFL learners model their writing has prevailed since its inception in the EFL field. In other words, as a writing model, the process-writing model has served to reflect the current dominant trend in the practice of EFL writing.

As the most prominent model of EFL writing, the process-writing model stresses that while working through several stages of the writing process, EFL learners are engaged in creating and refining their writing instead of focusing on publishing the end product. The current model's focus of EFL learners' writing on the writing process is deemed basically cognitive. Within "a theory of the cognitive processes involved in composing," EFL learners inevitably go through a series of "distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate or organize" in a bid to perform the writing task at hand (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 366). The idea behind this cognitive model of process writing has proven to be very productive to improve EFL learners' writing proficiency. The model has been widely accepted among a great number of language professionals in the arena of EFL writing, helping EFL learners to compose their writing in a much more effective way. Research studies on process writing have proliferated in the field during the past several decades. Such research has provided detailed information on how EFL learners strive to deal with writing tasks, enabling us to get a much clearer picture of the composing process. Furthermore, subsequent research studies suggest that in addition to a cognitive aspect of EFL writing, EFL learners' writing performance was found to be affected by a variety of factors associated with affective factors or attitudes to a great extent (Pae, 2008).

Although EFL writers also need to cope with many of theses affective and attitudinal variables as they are assumed to influence their writing performance, only a few studies have reflected a shift in the research tradition which calls for an examination of these variables in association with EFL writing performance.
(Pae, 2008; Sassaki, 2000; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996). To a certain degree, these quantitative studies contributed to bringing about relatively a clear picture of the effects of various factors, discrete or combined, on EFL learners’ writing performance. However, the above studies did not alone suffice to provide a lucid picture of EFL learners’ writing performance and its models. This is particularly so because each of the research studies was intrinsically quantitative, and was therefore entirely based on correlations among factors, and because each study involved only one or a few of the factors impacting EFL learners’ writing performance and its resultant model. This could therefore be viewed as the major limitation inherent in the previous quantitative research.

In this vein, a research agenda is in order which can overcome such limitations or complement prior studies in order to capture a clearer picture of EFL learners’ writing performance and serve to refine a more precise and useful writing performance model with all possible combination of intervening variables being considered. Pursuant to this emerging call for research agenda, the present study is aimed at investigating factors which exert a significant influence on Korean university EFL learners’ writing performance and the study furthermore attempts to offer a conceptual model related to EFL writing performance than has previously been offered, using a qualitative research method.

2. Literature Review

Over the past several decades, language professionals’ research efforts have been invested toward investigating the writing process from the cognitive perspective in L2 settings (e.g., Cumming, 1989, 1998; Silva, 1993; Zamel, 1982, 1983) and toward ferreting out the factors that have been assumed to impact EFL learners’ writing performance in EFL settings (Pae, 2008; Sassaki, 2000; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996).

Since the publication of the ground-breaking article on the writing process from the cognitive perspective by Flower and Hayes (1981), numerous researchers have devoted their attention to the investigation of L2/EFL writing processes. Of particular importance in this area is the research conducted by Flower and Hayes (1980a), which served to lay the foundation for their cognitive process theory of writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981). From the cognitivists’ viewpoints, these researchers investigated the writing processes of college
students in terms of a rhetorical problem when they were engaged in the act of composing. Their research attempt led to the following striking differences between expert writers and novice writers: (i) Expert writers spent more time responding to all facets of the rhetorical problem while novice writers mainly concerned themselves with writing conventions and its features; (ii) Expert writers were more proficient in creating ideas that corresponded to the purpose of the writing at hand with their readers in mind than were novice writers; and (iii) Expert writers approached their writing and problem pertinent to the writing task in broader and deeper ways than did novice writers.

Similarly, Sasaki and Hirose (1996) examined Japanese university EFL students’ writing performance regarding expository writing. Their research findings were that expert writers were more concerned with global organization before and during their writing by paying more attention to it than were novice writers; that expert writers composed more frequently in both L1 and L2; that expert writers displayed greater confidence in terms of L2 academic writing; and that expert writers had regularly experienced composing more than one English paragraphs while in high school.

On the cognitive ground of L2/EFL learners’ writing performance, some studies were conducted to examine whether or not L2 learners’ writing performance was affected by such factors as their L1 writing expertise. Native French students with expert knowledge in L1 outperformed their native counterparts with no such expertise in terms of ESL writing performance (e.g., Cumming, 1989). Cumming reported that those who were proficient L1 writers surpassed less proficient L1 writers across three different writing tasks of letter, argument, and summary in consistent ways. Similarly, Sasaki and Hirose (1996) found that Japanese EFL student learners’ writing performance was not independent of their L1 writing proficiency. However, some research studies have been marked by conflicting research results and confusions about the relationships between L1 and ESL writing performance (e.g., Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll, & Kuehn, 1990; Pennington & So, 1993). Carson et al.’s (1990) research indicated no relationship or a weak positive relationship between L1 and L2 writing performance, using Chinese and Japanese student writers, respectively. Another subsequent study done by Pennington and So (1993) yielded an analogous finding to that obtained from Carson et al. (1990) when Singaporean college learners’ writing performance between L1 and L2 was
examined in their inquiry into a possible relationship across two different languages.

In addition to the probe into EFL learners’ cognitive processes involving writing, some writing researchers examined the metacognitive aspect of EFL learners’ strategies use in composing process (e.g., Flower & Hayes, 1980b; Leki, 1995). It is documented in the literature that more proficient writers’ composing behaviors and strategies use mark a striking difference in that they are most likely to use a wide variety of metacognitive writing strategies, focusing more of their attention on overall planning and revision both at macro and discourse levels, contrary to those less proficient writers. Similar differences are also noticed between good writers and poor writers based on L1 and L2 writers (Cumming, 1989; Raimes, 1985; Silva, 1993; Zamel, 1983). These research studies exhibited that good writers were highly concerned with focusing their writing on overall organization and the flow of ideas rather than on trivial, frequent revisits to checkings such as grammar, spelling, or conventions of a written text. Additionally, many research findings generally point to the fact that when tackling writing tasks, proficient EFL writers take advantage of various metacognitive writing strategies in efforts to develop and organize ideas, seek writing models, and draw on prior writing experience, along with feedback from the writing instructor and peers in their composing process (Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Leki, 1995; Pae, 2008; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996). In particular, such metacognitive writing strategies were reported to have been transferable from learners’ L1 to L2 (Cumming, 1989; Pae & Cho, 2007; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996). Very recently, Pae and Cho (2007) conducted a case study in order to explore potential factors associated with successful L2 writing, using two inexperienced L2 writers. Their research findings revealed that the participants’ metacognitive knowledge was one of the determinants that impacted their writing performance. Consequently, those learners with little or no metacognitive knowledge in L2 writing found it difficult to perform well.

Research studies in the literature document that learners’ overall ESL/EFL proficiency have been assumed to come into play when they are engaged in writing activities. However, mixed and confusing results have been reported on the effect of their ESL/EFL proficiency on writing performance. For instance, Ramies (1985) and Zamel (1982) concluded that the participants’ ESL proficiency did not appear to affect their writing performance, reducing the effect of L2
linguistic proficiency to an infinitesimal degree. It was maintained that their ESL students’ writing competence, not their overall L2 proficiency was the determinant for their writing performance. Given such a claim, while some learners were found to be good writers, others were not to be, irrespective of their linguistic competence in L2. Meanwhile, other researchers contended that L2 proficiency was one of the determining factors associated with L2 writers’ performance (Cumming, 1989) or that it was the sole factor that demarcated expert writers and novice writers (Pennington & So, 1993).1)

Recent research studies on ESL/EFL learners’ writing have suggested that learners’ affectives or attitudes have been assumed to influence their writing performance as well (Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999; Daly & Wilson, 1983; Lee, 1998; Leki, 1999; Zimmerman & Silverman, 1982). Depending on the extent to which EFL writers develop or perceive their anxiety reactions, the anxiety could have a detrimental impact on their writing performance.2) The level of writing anxiety EFL students develop may vary from person to person. Furthermore, when EFL students engaged in writing activities, their written products are often subject to "some perceived evaluation" by the instructors or peers (Daly & Wilson, 1983, p. 327; Nyikos & Oxford, 1993).

In the same vein, EFL learner’s attitudes towards writing tasks or writing activities within the confines of formalized instructional settings are also assumed to serve as a detriment to writing performance (e.g., Krashen, 1984; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Truscott, 1999). As regards the impacts of learners’ attitudes on writing performance, writing researchers’ efforts have given rise to mixed and conflicting findings as well. Hence, this area definitely needs to be placed under scrutiny.

3. Method

All of the interviews were conducted in order to approach the topic of EFL learners’ writing performance through the personal voices of EFL writers at a

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1) In the investigation into the effect of social cognitive ability on English writing performance by learners’ English proficiency, Ryo (2001) reported that for EFL writers with low linguistic proficiency, no significant relationship was found between EFL writers’ writing performance and social cognitive knowledge.

2) Cheng et al. (1999) claim that foreign language writing anxiety and foreign language classroom anxiety are "two related but independent constructs," differentiating one from the other (p. 417).
university setting, which would eventually be oriented toward constructing an explanatory model of EFL writing as well as toward detecting categories impacting EFL learners’ writing performance. More specifically, the current research attempts to answer the following questions: (i) What factors or categories do Korean university EFL learners perceive as influencing their EFL writing performance?; (ii) What, if any, writing performance model may be derived from EFL writers’ interview data?

3.1 Participants

A total of fifteen university EFL learners participated in the current study. The participants were all enrolled in the English composition class at a university located in the central part of Korea. Participants included 8 male undergraduates (53.3%) and 7 female undergraduates (46.7%), who were majoring in English language and literature. All participants volunteered to be interviewed by the researcher. They ranged from 19-22 years of age. None of the participants of this study had experienced studying in English speaking countries in order to improve their English. Prior to their participation in this study, participants had had at least 7 years of experience in learning English as a Foreign Language. Their writing course consisted of three 50-minute-long classes per week. EFL learners were engaged in writing for approximately two-thirds of class time. Participants’ final grades were compared between the two given categories of expert writers and novice writers, which emerged from interview data analysis. The instructor’s assessment in the form of final grades tended to be in agreement with these two categories: (1) Simple agreement coefficient = 74%; (2) Cohen’s (1960) agreement coefficient \( \kappa = .44 \).

3.2 Procedure

During the fourth week of the first semester, 2009, research participants were all informed of the purpose of the present research and of their right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time during the interview session. The researcher’s face-to-face interviews with the individual participants were undertaken during Weeks 5-7. Prior to each interview, the researcher made arrangements with the individual participants. Each interview took approximately
45 minutes to be completed. Korean was the language used in each interview with the participants. Every participant was interviewed only once unless follow-up interviews were deemed necessary. The researcher employed a semi-structured interview format (See Appendix for semi-structured interview questions). This interview format has made it possible for the current researcher to undertake interviews in order to elicit particular responses on the part of research participants (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996), given that semi-structured interviews are basically "guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, but neither the exact wording nor the order of questions is" predetermined (Merriam, 1998, p. 74). The individual interviews were recorded on tape with the prior permission of each interview participant. The researcher briefly recorded items which required further clarification or exploration of the topic or area while the respective interviews were in progress. Upon completion of each interview, in-process memos regarding the respective interviews were composed, not only from notes the researcher had taken during each of the interview sessions, but from audio-taped interviews. All interview data were transcribed for in-depth analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis

In order for the interview data to be verified and as part of an initial step involving data analysis, each interview transcript was sent to the respective participants for member checking, along with the research findings and the preliminary interpretations of the interview data. Here, member checking as "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314) was adopted for the interviewee to scrutinize data, interpretations, and research results sent back to him or her, and then to make sure if they turn out to be convincing and plausible (Merriam, 1998).

Through the examination of the first transcribed interview data, in-process memos, preliminary findings, and their interpretations, an attempt was made to identify subcategories of data which derived from the capture of information on all the possible factors influencing their writing performance when EFL learners were involved in writing activities. The process of extracting subcategories continued up to the last transcribed interview data and its in-process memo. Those subcategories extracted from all transcriptions and in-process memos were
then compared against one another. This led to the building of a structure of the research results emerging from the interview. Such a structure represented abstractions or categories stemming from the entire interview data and in-process memos. In other words, the structure reflected the emerging themes (or patterns) of the present research regarding the EFL learners’ writing and the factors perceived to affect their performance.

Additionally, frequent consultations were held by the researcher with a colleague who served as a debriefer. The debriefer who possessed extensive experience in qualitative research afforded the researcher an external check for the study involving the qualitative research process. The debriefer’s engagements with the researcher ranged from the process of subcategorizations of the transcribed interview data and in-process memos to the process of constructing categories or themes which transpired from this qualitative study. All of this was intended as part of the bid to ensure the plausibility and trustworthiness of the research findings and interpretations which the researcher derived from this qualitative study.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on the interviews with the EFL writers in the present research study, the structure of the researcher’s findings from the transcribed interviews and in-process memos will be presented and were structured as follows.

4.1 EFL Writers’ Cognitive Capacity and Writing Performance

The current university EFL learners were divided into two kinds of writers. One kind was student writers whose characteristics exactly matched those found in expert writers when they approached a given writing task. When faced with the writing topic at hand, these EFL learners, first of all, spent some amount of time thinking about what to write by creating a mind map while brainstorming ideas. They never stopped to make complete sentences until they finished brainstorming ideas. They were not concerned about misspelled words or incomplete expressions which they might use later. At this stage, nothing mechanical or trivial such as grammar, spelling, and complete expressions/sentences seemed to overwhelm these writers. Instead, they focused
on the content on which they would want their writing to be based, and upon listing as many ideas of possible use as they could come up with. The behaviors of these writers were in sharp contrast with those of group of novice writers. Contrary to expert writers, the more typical novice writers reported that they did not know what to do regarding the task at hand at first, spending a great deal of time without doing anything productive in terms of brainstorming. According to their reports, their only accomplishments at this stage of writing consisted of only a few things that did not contribute to the subsequent stage of writing to any significant degree. Rather, they tended to become preoccupied with such mechanical components of writing as checking grammar and consulting the dictionary for English words or for correct spelling. Below are representative samples from these two kinds of writers during their first encounters with the writing task at hand:

To begin with, I usually start to do writing by thinking about the topic I am supposed to write about. To do this, I need some time to think about the topic in order to prepare for my writing. At this time, I make it a rule to write down any ideas popping up in my mind on a piece of paper. I do this in English or Korean when I can’t remember English words or expressions. As a matter of fact, it doesn’t matter whether or not every idea will eventually be useful for the writing as materials. If found not useful, then they are discarded later. Discarding some of the ideas doesn’t matter, I guess. For me to make plans, I draw a tree with branches and sometimes many leaves where I put my ideas on. This really helps me a lot to select what I should include in or remove from my writing . . . I never pay attention to stuff like correct English words or grammar at this time. I know very well those things in the beginning don’t get the writing well done. (Respondent #5)

I know I always have a hard time writing in English. Practically speaking, what I learned from my writing instructor doesn’t work out when I have to write about. I just don’t know why. Come to think of it, my problem is that I do not know what to do and how to do with the writing assignment. I just spend an awful lot of time being stuck when I have to rack my brain to get ideas. I find myself at a loss for words because I do

3) Research participants' all remarks in Korean were translated into English by the researcher.
not know what to do and how to do writing. Finally, a couple ideas don’t help me start to write about. Keep focused? Why can’t I . . . ? I flip through the Korean-English dictionary for words or expressions . . . . I have been distracted by something unrelated to the writing I have to do so frequently that I just can’t have gotten myself prepared for the job (Respondent #8)

During the process of writing, the current respondents’ voices were found to corroborate the research findings of Flower and Hayes (1981), which served to differentiate expert writers from novice writers. These two kinds of writers apparently seemed to suggest one aspect of the cognitive processing capacities relative to the way each of the EFL learners approached the given writing tasks required to perform in the EFL setting, depending on their cognitive levels of expertise in EFL writing. Although writing itself was a cognitively demanding job in nature, the competent EFL learner’s initial approach to writing enabled him to get his writing started right away, since the writer has been equipped with the ability to let him smooth away any local difficulties originating from the cognitively demanding job of writing.

The present respondents also expressed another dimension of cognitive or metacognitive capacity in association with strategies use and EFL writing performance. Ten student writers revealed in the interviews that their writing was basically the product of strategies which they had come to employ during the composing process. The way that EFL learners approach a writing task with or without writing strategies use in mind appeared highly likely to determine the quality of their writing, again, distinguishing good writers from poor writers. Rather than focusing more on the writing task at hand on a macro level, less proficient writers were of the opinion that they had to constantly look up English words or expressions in the dictionary, followed by editing one sentence after another. In short, these less competent students wrote on a micro level. Meanwhile, proficient writers were shown to direct much more attention to areas such as text organization, flows of ideas, and revision by moving back and forth between paragraphs, reminding themselves of trying to be clear, writing with their possible audiences in mind. Additionally, they commented that they normally took notes of all useful or relevant things while writing a first draft; moving back and forth in it in order to make sure that they would not omit anything relevant or important to the topic. Needless to say, they were found to be good at directing and maintaining their attention on the task at hand by
ignoring irrelevant distractors. They were also more willing to take advantage of the prior writing experiences and the feedback from the instructor and peers, if needed for their writing. More importantly, they were found to try to evaluate their writing by focusing on checking the internal structure of the text they were composing from the perspectives of readers. This process of self-evaluation as part of writing strategies use definitely seemed to positively influence EFL learners’ writing performance, along with strategies of note taking and recalling from their prior writing experiences, as the following respondents narrate:

I keep checking my grammar for a piece of writing consisting of several sentences at most. Actually, I do this over and over again whenever I finish one sentence. This is the only thing that I do in order to improve my writing. Once I wrote, one more thing I have usually gone through is change some words or expressions into others with the same meanings, because I think this at least has the effect of adding a little bit of color to my work. You know, my dictionary has been a great help all the time. By doing this, I just want to get my writing assignment done as soon as possible. (Respondent #11)

I think I can say that I really enjoy writing in English. I know I am not a perfect writer and nobody is perfect, even native speakers of English are not. Whenever I have to do writing, specifically, I love the processes of writing in which I will be engaged and have to follow, which I learned in my writing . . . can focus on things relevant to my topic, trying to cross out unnecessary things. I also think whether my readers will have anything unclear or any doubts after reading my piece. To make my writing seem much clearer when they read it, I always try to read and revise my drafts several times, considering the flows of my ideas from paragraph to paragraph in an organized manner. I find it a really useful way for me to be able to gradually see my writing improved. (Respondent #3)

Taking notes while reading my writing from beginning to end helps me a lot. This way I can make adjustments much easier if necessary. I also take some writing samples as a model . . . see how good writers develop their ideas from the sample writing. Those samples help me a lot to keep me focused. No one labelled as a good writer is distracted by anything small while writing. . . . the bottom line is to recognize what makes my writing
good or hopefully excellent to the eyes of readers, and then to do my utmost to bring that effect to my writing. (Respondent # 13)

As the above respondents’ comments show, EFL learner’s use of cognitive or metacognitive writing strategies were also found to hold sway over their writing performance. Whether or not they employed any of these strategies in their encounters with EFL writing tasks would presumably determine the degree to which their resultant writing approximated the rhetoric of English. Therefore, the observation that the present respondents’ writing performance seemed to be affected by the factor of learners’ cognitive or metacognitive capacity in tackling EFL writing tasks exactly coincided with previous research findings (Leki, 1995; Pae, 2008).

4.2 Overall EFL Proficiency and Writing Performance

In terms of the current respondents’ overall EFL proficiency as being perceived to exert any influence over their EFL writing performance, nine respondents revealed that their writing has been definitely limited by their current level of EFL proficiency. The following statements made by those respondents who acknowledged the importance of EFL proficiency in connection with writing performance illustrate the point:

My English is not that bad in general, I think. That’s why I think I can also write well. My writing ability is not as good as native speakers, though. I know what I should do in my writing class when I have a chance to write in English. Being able to communicate with others in English really is an asset to me. As you know, communication is done in many modes, like speaking, reading, listening, and writing. If you think you have a good command of aural, oral, and listening to English, how can you imagine you can’t write communicatively? I guess the same is true for writing in Korean. So in my case, general English ability is absolutely important to good writing. (Respondent # 2)

Speaking of my English ability in general, I feel shameful to say about this, but I have to say that it seems to me that my English actually prevents me from doing well in my writing class. I wish I could have good knowledge of English. being fluent in everything about English. But the reality is the
other way around. . . . My poor writing seems to basically come from my lack of English ability in a broad sense. . . . However, I don’t have a particular difficulty writing in my native tongue, Korean. (Respondent #14)

The respondents’ above remarks show that they are adamant about putting their EFL writing ability, good or poor, down to their general English proficiency. This, in turn, suggests that learners’ overall EFL proficiency may determine their writing capability in educational settings. Interestingly, the present learners’ perceived effect of L1 writing on their EFL writing performance was none or infinitesimal, which contradicted the previous research findings (Cumming, 1989; Pae, 2008; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996). However, the current respondents’ comments tended to support the results from Carson et al. (1990) and Pennington and So (1993). As mentioned in the literature review, both studies by Carson et al. (1990) and Pennington and So (1993) showed either no relationship or a meager relationship between L1 and L2 writing performance. As a result, the effect of L1 on EFL learners’ writing proficiency still seems to be conflicting and mixed. Despite the confusion, responses from the present research participants seemed to imply that there is a strong tendency toward the influence of EFL proficiency on EFL learners’ writing performance. In this vein, the current EFL learners’ overall command of English appeared to exercise a decisive influence on their writing performance.

4.3 Free Voluntary Reading and EFL Writing Performance

The present respondents almost unanimously expressed the significance of reading books or articles as part of their efforts to improve their writing skills or abilities in English. Among the major advantages vis-à-vis their engagement in reading activities not directly related to EFL writing tasks themselves, they viewed the area of free voluntary English reading as the first and foremost source of diverse information they needed to obtain. They furthermore addressed another benefit of reading in English, which directly pertains to the area of writing as well. Free voluntary English reading as a contributing factor to their EFL writing performance was perceived as strong, enabling them to be equipped with instrumentation for good writing, i.e., with such increased vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, collocations, or good writing models illustrating English
rhetorical patterns and models for use in their encounters with writing tasks in EFL settings. The following is representative of the statements in this respect:

It is without a shadow of a doubt that reading books, magazines written in English, or more frequent reading in the Internet is a prerequisite for me to write better. When I have to get information on something I need, I depend frequently on reading materials written in English. Not only I can get the needed information, but I am also learning from reading a great deal of English vocabulary and idioms which are all new to me. Learning new words and expressions is very time-consuming, but it is very rewarding to brush up on my English. And when I have enough time, I would pay special attention to how the author developed ideas and etc. while reading. . . . I have tried to do this as often as possible. This way I am pretty sure I can become a better writer. Because I can get familiar with how English writing is done by reading others’ writing, reading a lot is a sure way to improve your writing. (Respondent #13)

In my case, I have say this to you. I think reading and writing in English are closely related and without reading a lot, you can never expect to become fluent in writing. That’s my firm belief. In some sense, I think how much time you make in order to read books for improving your English in general and writing skill really matters. While reading good books or articles written in English, your writing skill will gradually improve, though you may not feel instantly such an improvement in writing you make . . . . It is not too much to say that my English writing reflects the result of my reading to a greater extent. For me, this rule of thumb has become the common practice for my writing: Be willing to engage yourself in reading a lot if you really wish or need to write well in English.

(Respondent # 1)

The benefits free voluntary English reading as a whole was perceived to bring to EFL writing ran the gamut from building vocabulary to familiarizing EFL writers with English rhetoric, which exerts a determining effect on their better performance in EFL writing. This view of reading, on the parts of the current EFL writers, supported the work of Krashen (2004), who argued for the importance of free voluntary reading which serves as a vehicle to promote L2 learners’ linguistic improvements such as vocabulary acquisition, cognitive
development, and more significantly, writing style and ability. Germene to free voluntary reading as a writing model provider, the respondents’ remarks also confirmed Ferris and Hedgcock’s (1998) research as well.

4.4 Free Voluntary Writing and EFL Writing Performance

The current respondents had a unanimous voice with respect to the significance of free voluntary writing on a regular basis outside of writing class, as a way to improve their writing ability or skills, beyond the writing tasks assigned to them by their EFL writing instructor. The nature of their writing ranged from keeping a daily journal or exchanging emails, or chatting with international students or friends to occasionally writing letters and essay-type pieces of their own choice. More importantly, seven respondents mentioned that they often asked their writing instructors to read their writing in order to get feedback from, and to make sure that what they wrote made sense to them. These respondents’ free voluntary writing was then viewed as their extra, special efforts to become proficient at writing in English. Such efforts by EFL learners were apparently deemed to be worth pursuing because they strongly took free voluntary writing to be in conformity with the way they could make themselves good writers. One of the respondents narrates on this ground:

Outside the regular writing class and writing assignments, I have tried to write as much as possible, like emailing my foreign friends both at home and abroad, sometimes chatting with them. Also, I do writing a little bit longer piece under a free topic. All this practice, needless to say, is a must for me to write better. I find this worthy of trying because I really want to improve my writing in English. I know well that practice makes perfect. Because like everything else and writing in Korean, whether I write well in English or not almost certainly seems to depends on how much writing practice I have had in English. So I am absolutely convinced that having a plenty of writing practice will be a key to success in English writing. . . more than often than not, I seek my instructor’s help to see how well my writing was done from the native’s perspective. (Respondent #3)

The EFL learners’ engagements in free voluntary writing seemed to have a strong effect on their improved writing performance, as represented in the above
remark. The respondents' voice regarding the impact of free voluntary writing on EFL learners' writing performance was in congruence with previous research findings from Choi and Sung (2006) and Pae (2008). In particular, Pae stressed the necessity of including free writing in EFL writing instruction as a component of value. The current respondents' comments imply that in order to have a good command of written English, EFL learners need to be encouraged to write as much as they can on a variety of topics, that on the parts of EFL learners, they should willingly practice writing in English in an effort to meet the standards required for English writing, and that EFL learners should be provided feedback by the native instructor or capable others on their writing (e.g., essays), allowing students to check the extent to which their writing conforms to the requirements of quality English writing.

4.5 Affective and Attitudinal Impacts on EFL Writing Performance

EFL writing anxiety emerged as a category that proved pervasive while the present respondents were writing in English. As an affective impact on their writing performance, interviews with the EFL learners revealed that more than two thirds of them developed EFL writing anxiety reactions over their encounters with writing tasks in a university setting. Their reactions seemed to vary in severity, ranging from mild to very severe. One of the respondents' statements below represents how anxious or uncomfortable he felt about writing in English:

I am not nervous, worried about writing in Korean. Whenever I was compelled to write in English about some topics my writing instructor had given to me, feelings like getting antsy or uncomfortable have become a natural and perfectly normal occurrence with which I had to deal. But I know this kind of feeling has never occurred naturally to me in situations other than writing . . . might sound silly and a little bit exaggerated, but as far as English writing is concerned, it's a feeling of mine, to say the least. The thought that my writing will be read by the instructor and my classmates has constantly haunted me while writing in English. Even though I try to get rid of such a negative feeling, it's not easy at all to do that. The more I try to do without such a feeling, the more anxious and nervous I become about my writing. . . . That is very counterproductive to
write in English and has kept me from focusing on my writing task. I really wish I could do writing in English well without being torn by such an apprehensive feeling. How can I ever be expected to write well under such pressure? I'm at a loss as to how I can ever do writing in English. (Respondent #14)

The above response seemed to reflect the severity of anxiety experienced by many Korean EFL learners while they are engaged in writing in English. Such writing anxiety was perceived as an affective factor that impacted EFL writing performance in a negative way. Under the process model of writing, particularly, the EFL writers' anxieties were revealed to be closely related to potential evaluations on their writing performance by the instructor and peers. EFL writers' encounters with such evaluative situations apparently seem to result in writing anxiety reactions both inside and outside the classroom, which coincides with the assertion that "the goal of most university students is to achieve high grades, no matter what the stated or unstated goal of a class syllabus might be" (Nyikos & Oxford, 1993, p. 19).

Given that the remark above did not seem to reflect the present respondent's relatively consistent predisposition to feel anxious in every situation (i.e., trait anxiety), anxiety reactions from the present respondents are classified as situation-specific in association with their EFL writing task performance, supporting the perspectives from the previous research (Aida, 1994; Cheng, et al. 1999; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Horwitz & Young, 1991; Kim, 2002). One of the respondents (Respondent #15) further expressed that writing anxiety was also associated with a lack of the level of writing ability necessary to provide peers feedback on their writing. "I've felt so uncomfortable and uneasy about having to tell my classmates about how I read their pieces of writing. Because I am not a good writer of English and because I've had a trouble with my own writing in English, feeding something useful or valuable back to my classmates has been particularly worrisome. The pressure that my feedback should be one that will bring about the improvements they want to see was almost impossible to escape from, I guess." This remark paralleled Kim (2002), where uncertainties about their own writing in English also provoked uneasy feelings when EFL learners had to help peers to write better by providing valuable feedback on their writing during process writing practice.

However, what remains unclear about EFL writing anxiety is whether the
current learners’ writing anxiety comes from the disposition to feel anxious about English writing performance proper, from the predisposition to feel apprehensive about their exposure to evaluative situations (i.e., evaluations from the instructor and/or peers), or from a combination of both. This deserves further clarification in a future study.

Another category that emerged from the current interviews was EFL learners’ positive attitudes towards writing in English. Current respondents’ comments on the attitudinal impact on their writing performance seemed to clarify that positive attitudes towards writing in English should tend to lead them toward successful writing performance. Some of the respondents’ perspectives on this matter were captured below:

Whenever I read English books or magazines, watch TV programs or movies in English. I’ve made a point of taking notes of new words or expressions that could have potential uses for my future writing. I am pretty sure that such preparations always turned out to be very useful when I did writing in English. I really enjoy jotting down anything new in English that I do not know. I have done this to improve my writing and will do. Doing this is also a lot of fun because I can have opportunities to appreciate how English speaking people think, which is reflected in the language they use, speak or write. I also enjoy writing down some ideas in English, using those new expressions or words and I’ve tried to become a better writer of English than I am now. (Respondent #7)

I am not that good at writing in English. But I like to see my friends reading my writing, but not always. I have to say this way. The more you like English, the better chance to write well in English and do well with everything in English. This is self-evident, isn’t it? In my case, English has been always something that gives me some sort of pleasure because I can feel the joy of learning another language. . . . I can imagine how great it would be if I could talk, read, and write in English. Like I said, I am not good at writing in English. That’s my problem now. Working hard and aggressively seeking help from my instructor, I am looking forward to seeing my problem gone some day, hopefully soon enough. (Respondent #10)

Based on the statements above, EFL learners’ positive attitudes were perceived as beneficial towards success in English writing. Thus, EFL learners’ positive
attitudes were pictured as the category responsible for their improved writing performance. As Brown (2007) noted, it appears clear that positive attitudes benefit EFL students and that they may be led to increased motivation and in all probability, to successful achievement of writing ability. Positive attitudinal impacts on EFL learners' successful writing performance may be initially difficult or slow to recognize in educational settings, but the respondents' interviews and the existing research findings strongly imply that learners should be encouraged to perform more enjoyable extra-curricular (or "recreational") writing tasks in English, keeping it in mind that positive attitudes towards language learning would facilitate the sustainable development of their writing ability.

5. A Conceptual Model of EFL Writing Performance

Centered around investigating factors as perceived to impact EFL learners' writing performance, the present qualitative findings from interviews with the research participants revealed several recurring patterns or themes as the emerging categories pertinent to Korean EFL learners' writing experiences and their ability to write in English. Thus, the categories transpired from the extended interviews were extracted to influence Korean EFL learners' writing performance. From these categories, the following diagram (Figure) is proposed as a way to schematically represent a conceptual model of Korean university EFL learners' writing performance.

The current model reveals that (i) Korean university EFL writers' use of cognitive or metacognitive knowledge, which was represented as their employment of writing strategy, was one of the factors affecting students' writing performance in English; (ii) that students' EFL writing performance was influenced by their overall proficiency in English; (iii) that the presence vs. the absence of students' free engagement in writing activities beyond their regular writing classes has a bearing on their EFL writing performance as well as their free voluntary reading activities; (iv) and that as an affective and attitudinal factor, learners' writing anxiety and attitudes toward writing exerts an influence on their EFL writing performance.

Given that the model has been derived from interview data from a limited number of Korean university EFL writers, it remains conceptual in nature at this point. It may be thus premature at this stage to generalize the results of the
current research across differing populations of EFL writers. However, the present model provides a comprehensive picture of students' writing performance in Korean EFL settings. It would appear to reflect students' writing performance in terms of diverse dimensions by which their writing performance was perceived to be affected. The current model was developed with the intention of providing a basis for, and of prompting further inquiry by language professionals involved with research regarding EFL and/or L2 writing models.

![Figure 1. A Schematic Diagram of EFL Writing Performance Model](image)

**References**


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A Conceptual Model of Korean University EFL Learners' Writing Performance


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Appendix

Samples of Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. How do you generally approach writing in English?
2. What are the first things that you do when your writing instructor asks you to write in English about a given topic?
3. Do you think that your writing in Korean or practicing writing in Korean ever influences your writing in English? If it does, to what extent do you believe this to be the case?
4. What has been the most difficult part of writing in English?
5. Have you ever experienced feelings of discomfort about writing in English?
6. Have you ever been engaged in free writing about topics of your choice? If you have, how has it affected your writing in English?
7. Have you regularly read books, newspapers, magazines and/or other reading materials in order to improving your writing in English?
8. Do you think that your general English proficiency has any effect on your writing in English?
9. Are there any methods or techniques which you have found to be effective when you have been engaged in writing in English?
10. Are there any differences between writing in Korean and writing in English?