

TEFL Teachers' Conceptions of Writing: A Case of China*

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Abstract—In teaching writing in English as a foreign language (EFL) context, a little information is known about teachers' knowledge base of writing. The current study, therefore, used the case of Chinese context to explore how TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language) teachers understand writing and what impacts their conceptions. A questionnaire containing the natures, functions, and development of writing, and text features of good writing were developed to collect data online; items had 5-point Likert scales. 490 (female 76.3%) participants were engaged in the sample. Respondents generally identify linguistic, cultural and cognitive natures of writing, but many question its social nature, and a few are in trouble with recognizing the multifaceted concepts of writing. Participants highlight writing functions related to the self and self-expression but fail to note those targeting the addressees. The majority accede to the facilitation of other language skills and writing instruction to the development of writing, but lay the greatest stress on the transfer effects of reading. When evaluating texts, they do not seem to focus on linguistic features more relevant to foreign language learning (e.g. vocabulary, grammar). Demographic components (gender, teaching experience, school level, class size, and frequency of writing instruction) do not influence their conceptions systematically. These findings may be of interest for in-service teacher trainers.

Index Terms—EFL writing, Conceptions of writing, Chinese TEFL teachers

I. INTRODUCTION

In the educational system, it has been widely approved that teachers' professional knowledge directs the effectiveness of instruction and impacts student achievement. According to Schulman, pedagogical content knowledge is the key issue of the teacher knowledge base for teaching (Shulman, 1987). Its constituent element, subject matter knowledge, referring to what teachers know, is the core and prerequisite component of teacher knowledge base. In teaching writing in EFL contexts, however, limited information is known about teachers' knowledge base of writing (Lee, 2010). In the past few years, a variety of studies emerged in responding to Hirvela and Belcher's (2007) advocate of more attention to writing teachers' preparation and development. These studies encompass several research themes: Writing teacher education and training (e.g., Crutchfield, 2015; Ene & Mitrea, 2013; Lee, 2010; Lee, 2013), teachers' beliefs and practice in writing instruction (e.g., Ferede, Melese, & Tefera, 2012; Fu & Matoush, 2012; Khanalizadeh & Allami, 2012; Koros, Indoshi, & Okwach, 2013); Melketo, 2012; Yang & Gao, 2013; Yang, 2015), and other teaching behaviours (e.g., Farrell, 2006; Min, 2013). However, there still seems to be a paucity of research on teachers' knowledge base of writing. In order to address this issue, the current study used the case of Chinese context where exams are predominant regarding teaching and learning to explore how TEFL teachers understand writing. The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What are teachers' concepts of writing?
- How do they perceive the multiple functions of writing?
- How do they view the interventions to develop writing?
- How do they evaluate the features of a good text?
- How do their backgrounds influence their conceptions of writing?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Either learning or teaching writing in an EFL context is complex and challenging. A synthesis of literature is conducive to understanding comprehensively the research consensus on writing and recent studies on writing teachers' knowledge. In this section, a discussion about writing and teachers' learning about writing will be conducted.

A. Research Consensus on Writing

In studies of writing, a great deal of research has defined writing as linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural act. Gelb (1963) in his long immensely cited book *A Study of Writing* regarded writing as "a system of human intercommunication by means of conventional visible marks" (p. 12). This concept clarifies the communicative tool of

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 15th Conference on Educational Assessment, Szeged, Hungary, April 6-8, 2017.

writing with its linguistic, social and cultural nature. Decades later, writing was viewed as product-oriented or text-focused, i.e., writing was considered as an ultimate and perpetual written product (Coulmas, 1996). It has been commonly agreed that effective writing is an integration of the writer, the text product, and the audiences (Osterholm, 1986). Therefore, writing involves the cognitive process through which a writer expresses ideas in a text to address specific readers. Hyland (2015) perceived writing as linguistic product that a written text is logically organized with its coherent utterance of language and grammar for specific meaning-making. Accordingly, effective writing requires the mastery of knowledge of orthography, morphology, and syntax.

Undoubtedly, writers play the key role in achieving goals of constructing good texts and addressing specific audiences. Therefore, many studies have attached importance to writing activity as a cognitive process. For a long period and even till now, the most influential model of the writing process was coined by Flower and Hayes (1981). Their model gave a whole picture of the recursive process of writing: purpose, goals, audience, generating and translating ideas, evaluating and revising texts. As a self-improvement of the model, Hayes (1996) added environmental and personal factors and emphasized motivation, cognition, and working and long-term memory in writing. Afterwards, a large quantity of research has pursued the cognitive processes of writing, targeting phase-focused writing strategies. For example, Tankó (2005) treated the complex writing activity as a recursive process: pre-writing, writing and reviewing.

Apart from the individual and interactional understanding of writing, research has also shed light on writing from perspectives of social and cultural aspects. Hyland (2002) claimed that writing serves culture-bound purposes, reflects specific relationships and acknowledges an involvement in a particular community. Therefore, writing is “socially and culturally shaped and individually and socially purposeful” (Sperling, 1996, p. 55).

In general, the research community has reached a consensus on writing that learners and instructors need to bear in mind that writing involves linguistic, cognitive, social, and cultural aspects for particular communicative purposes in a specific context.

B. Recent Studies on Writing Teachers

As mentioned earlier, we know little about teachers’ knowledge of writing. An overview of research on writing teachers particularly in recent years helps to find out the new findings and tendencies, so as to contribute to the research and development of teachers in EFL contexts. Here, recent studies will be discussed from three aspects: writing teacher education and training, teachers’ beliefs and practice in writing instruction, and teaching behaviors.

Writing teacher education and training

Lee (2010) explored four EFL teachers’ perceptions of what they learned from an in-service writing teacher training programme by using qualitative research method. She found that questioning traditional approaches, teachers as inquirers, research literature as a valuable learning resource, the role of writing in teacher learning, writing teacher identity, and blending idealism and realism helped teachers to enrich their learning about writing. Further, Lee (2013) attempted to understand writing teachers’ development through the ‘identity’ lens. She conducted a qualitative research to investigate four EFL teachers’ construction of their identities as writing teachers. Her findings show that teachers constructed their new identities through shifting from language testing to writing instruction, from teacher-centered to teacher-student learning community, organizing new instructional activities and being conscious of changing. She also reported that teacher education, teachers’ reflection, and roles mediated teachers’ development of identity. Ene and Mitrea (2013) sought to examine how Romanian EFL teachers frame their knowledge base of writing. They employed a semi-structured survey to collect information from 41 teachers. Their findings indicate that self-regulated learning, participating conference and workshops are the dominant means to learn about writing.

Teachers’ beliefs and practice in writing instruction

Melketo (2012) used interviews and observations to explore three university teachers’ beliefs and practices in writing instruction. He found that teachers described writing as an intellectual, cognitive and creative activity, but their teaching practices did not echo their beliefs regarding the whole writing processes. For pre-writing, teachers believed in reading and student-oriented ideas generating but took actions in imitating and teacher-directed modeling. While writing, teachers changed scaffolding and co-working to individual composing final text for assessment. And for revision, teachers basically stepped aside for helping students with the edition. For error correction, teachers themselves simply corrected students’ errors instead of organizing peer work.

Likewise, Yang and Gao (2013) used interviews, class observations, and courses materials to examine four Chinese EFL university teachers’ beliefs and practices in teaching writing. They found that teachers believe in an integrated model of process and product of writing instruction, but they perform differently in the entire stages of teaching students to learn to write. They also found that teachers experience respectively development in beliefs and practices concerning product-oriented and process-focused views, expressive view, and a hybridization of the process- and product-oriented view of writing instruction.

Khanalizadeh and Allami (2012) investigated 122 Iranian EFL teachers’ beliefs on writing instruction through a questionnaire. They found that most teachers believe in the form-based pattern of writing among process-based, form-based, and social-based views of writing. Fu and Matoush (2012) used a survey to understand EFL teachers’ perceptions of writing instruction in China. The 123 responses from teachers in their study show three issues: a language focus on writing instruction, short of training and support for writing teachers, and an exam-focused orientation of writing

instruction. Ferede, Melese, and Tefera (2012) employed a questionnaire to examine 19 preparatory school teachers' perceptions of EFL writing and writing instruction. Their findings show that teachers generally believe that writing can be acquired by learning and instruction and intense practice. But the findings show a mismatch between teachers' claimed beliefs and practice in a real class that they put more efforts to speaking, reading, etc., but teach little writing. Yang (2016) did a small scale survey (25 participants included in a questionnaire) to investigate Chinese teachers' and students' attitudes toward writing in grades 7-9. The results show that writing instruction is neglected in English classes, but both teachers and students consider writing to be difficult and important and it can be improved.

Teaching behaviours

Farrell (2006) aimed to understand how a female writing teacher reflected her beliefs about and practice of writing. In this case study, the participant used classroom observations and oral recall to mull over her writing practice. The participant viewed writing as intellectual, communicative and social act. When reflecting her teaching, she focused on interaction in class, feedback by peers, and language medium. The findings show that the participant knew well about how to regulate her teaching to match her changing beliefs about writing. They also reveal that the methods of observation and oral recall are inductive to teachers' self-consciousness of their beliefs and practices.

In a case study, Min (2013) explored an EFL writing teacher's practice in giving written feedback. Entries of log and journals were used by the participant to reflect on her practice. Identifying students' purposes, recognizing and interpreting problems, and providing particular advice are directive principles for her giving constructive feedback. The participant experienced a change of her precedence of making feedback over one semester. She moved her preference of recognition of students' problem at an early stage of a semester to clarifying the latent intentions at the end of it.

In conclusion, recent studies have extended research realm on writing teachers. They present various facets of the contribution of an in-service training programme for teachers' learning about writing and development, multidimensional beliefs about writing, and diverse practices in writing instruction. They also report the issues in teachers' classroom actions of teaching writing. Nevertheless, these studies have primarily utilized qualitative research methods based primarily on interviews, observations, and case studies; few quantitative studies only targeted relatively small samples, even including university teachers. However, teachers' more systematic knowledge about writing is still veiled. Therefore, it merits a further survey with a larger sample to gain a more generalized picture of teachers' understanding of writing in EFL contexts.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

Due to the exploratory research of the current study, snowball sampling was used to approach respondents. In total, 490 Chinese TEFL teachers participated in this survey, 23.7% of them are male, and 76.3% are female. The more detailed features of the sample are shown in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

Components	Statistics
Gender	Male 23.7 %, female 76.3%
Age	M = 34.03, SD = 7.82; Min. 21, Max. 55
Work experience	M = 11.66, SD = 8.31, Min. 1, Max. 36
School level	Primary 13.3%, junior 39.4%, senior 47.3%
Class size	> 61 students, 19.6%; between 46 and 60, 51.6%; between 31 and 45, 21.2%; < 30, 7.6%
English lessons per class/week	M = 6.39, SD = 2.73; Mode = 6
Teaching time devoted to writing instruction (%)	M = 18.8, SD = 14.04
Lessons of teaching writing per class/week	M = 1.22, SD = 1.20; Mode = .60

B. Instrument

For the purpose of answering the research questions, a self-developed questionnaire was employed to gather information. The questionnaire had twenty-six items with 5-point Likert scales. It targeted writing concepts (4 items), writing functions (6 items), interventions to develop writing (4 items), and features of a good text (12 items). Background variables were also contained. The questionnaire was developed in English but was translated into the participants' mother tongue, because an English questionnaire didn't work well in an earlier study though respondents were English teachers themselves (cf., Kong, 2017).

C. Procedures

Data collected was finished in January 2017. All participants answered the questionnaire online. SPSS V 24 was used to code and analyze the data. Based on the research questions, numerous analyses were conducted, and relevant results are presented in the next section.

IV. RESULTS

A. Concepts of Writing

Writing was considered as linguistic product a century ago; then from the 1960s to 1980s, shifted to as cognitive activities (c.f., Flower & Hayes, 1981); later on, it has been regarded as a social communicative tool, and further extended to cultural understanding (e.g., Chapman, 1999; Ellis, 2016; Grabe & Kaplan, 2014; Hyland, 2003; Kucer, 2014; Miller, 1984; Norris & Damico, 1990; Prior, 2006; Swales, 1990). These natures of writing strongly correlate to each other (see Table 2). Do teachers share with them? In order to show the possible distinctions more clearly, the original five-point scales were transformed into two-point scales. That is, “strongly disagree, disagree, and uncertain” were recoded into “disagree”, and “agree and strongly agree” into “agree”. Frequencies of respondents’ acceptance of every single nature of writing are elicited (see Figure 1).

TABLE 2
CORRELATIONS AMONG THE MULTIFACETED CONCEPTS OF WRITING

	2	3	4
1. linguistic nature	.71**	.53**	.68**
2. cognitive nature	–	.62**	.65**
3. social nature		–	.63**
4. cultural nature			–

** $p < .01$

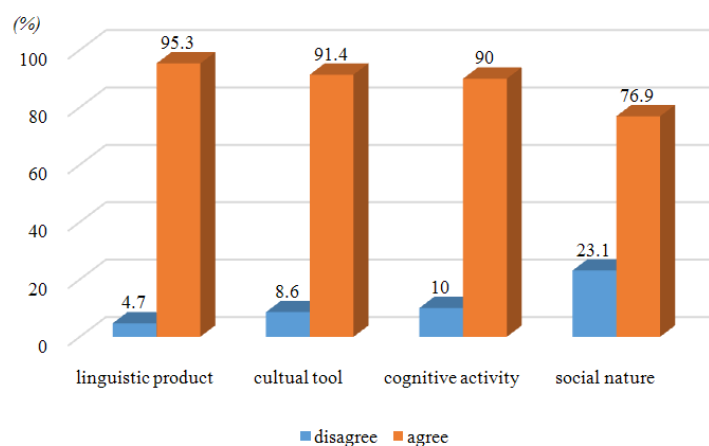


Figure 1. Frequencies of respondents’ acceptance of the individual nature of writing

One can find that the majority of participants had concepts of writing consistent with the research community. Teachers basically consider writing to be a linguistic (95.3%), cultural (91.4%), and cognitive tool (90%), however, 23.1% doubt its social nature.

Besides, Paired Sample T-tests found that the mean score for participants’ recognition on the variable of ‘writing is a linguistic activity’ ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .79$) is respectively significantly higher [$t(489) = 4.51$, $t(489) = 10.29$; $p < .05$] than that on ‘writing is a cognitive activity’ ($M = 4.21$, $SD = .78$) and ‘writing is a social activity’ ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .91$); the mean of ‘writing is a cultural activity’ ($M = 4.28$, $SD = .80$) is respectively significantly higher [$t(489) = 2.31$, $t(489) = 9.89$; $p < .05$] than on ‘writing is a cognitive activity’ and ‘writing is a social activity’; the mean of ‘writing is a cognitive activity’ is significantly higher [$t(489) = 7.83$, $p < .05$] than that of ‘writing is a social activity’; no statistically significant difference was found between the variables ‘writing is a linguistic activity’ and ‘writing is a cultural activity’.

In addition, it is also important to know how many participants accept writing as a multifaceted concept. Results are exhibited in Table 3. It is clear that most respondents (71.4%) are fully aware of the multiple natures of writing. Nevertheless, around 10% of the participants may have very different concepts of writing from the academic fields. Therefore, it would merit further effort to explore their relative neglect of certain writing natures.

TABLE 3
FREQUENCIES OF TEACHERS’ ACCEPTANCE OF THE MULTIFACETED NATURES OF WRITING

Facets of writing	Acceptance (%)
4	71.4
3	18.0
2	6.3
1	1.4
0	2.9

B. Functions of Writing

Research has shown that writing is multifunctional and can suffice diversified aims (cf., Clark, 1990; Hyland, 2013). The possible multi-functions of writing may be used as a vehicle for creation, communication, thinking, exams, career, and addressing people. What are teachers' perceptions of the functions of writing? Likewise, the original 5-point scales were recoded into 2-point as above. Results are demonstrated in Figure 2. It is obvious that respondents agree more with its function for creation, communication, and thinking, much less with addressing people, compared to their acceptance of writing for exams and career. It indicates that participants emphasize writing functions related to the self and self-expression but fail to note those targeting the addressees.

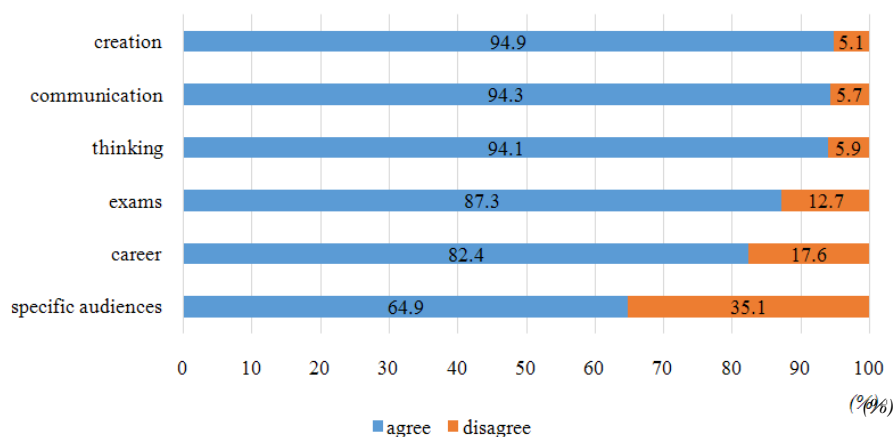


Figure 2. Frequencies of teachers' acceptance of possible functions of writing

Moreover, it is also interesting to unearth the proportion of teachers' favored functions of writing (see Table 4). It is explicit that only five out of ten of the respondents agree with the whole writing functions involved in the study, slightly more than one-fourth accept five functions, marginally over one-tenth favor four functions. It seems that a small number of participants are in trouble with accepting the possible multi-functions of writing, namely, 3.5% of the respondents accept three functions, 1% accept two functions, few participants accept one function, and 2.9% are aware of none of these functions.

TABLE 4
PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS' ACCEPTANCE OF MULTIPLE FUNCTIONS OF WRITING

Number of functions	Recognition (%)
6	54.1
5	27.3
4	11.0
3	3.5
2	1.0
1	0.2
0	2.9

So far, the findings above have suggested that teachers hold divergent concepts and functions of writing. The expectation is that participants' concepts of writing impact their acceptance of writing functions. The relationships are presented in Table 5. It is clear that writing concepts strongly relate to its function for creation, communication, and thinking ($.48 < r < .71$); moderately correlate with exams and career ($.43 < r < .55$). However, as could be expected, writing for addressing specific audiences has a weaker positive correlation to any facet of writing ($.30 < r < .42$).

TABLE 5
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CONCEPTS AND FUNCTIONS OF WRITING

	Linguistic product	Cognitive process	Social nature	Cultural tool
tool for creation	.71**	.63**	.52**	.65**
tool for communication	.70**	.65**	.54**	.66**
tool for thinking	.65**	.61**	.48**	.57**
proving one's knowledge at exams	.55**	.53**	.43**	.52**
contributing to one's career	.49**	.54**	.51**	.48**
addressing specific audiences	.35**	.42**	.39**	.30**

** $p < .01$

C. Interventions to Develop Writing

Writing could be developed through direct and indirect interventions. Direct interventions include writing activities and writing instructional activities, and indirect interventions contain reading and speaking activities (cf., Bereiter & Scardamalia, 2013; Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000; Fullerton, McCrea-Andrews, & Robson, 2015; Scott & Windsor, 2000; Silverman, Coker, Proctor, Harring, Piantedosi, & Hartranft, 2015; Whiteman, 2013). Are teachers aware of this

relationship? Similarly, the 5-point scales were recoded into 2-point. Frequencies of respondent' acceptance of the interventions to develop writing are presented in Figure 3. In general, respondents agree with the four interventions to develop writing. They hold similar opinion toward interventional activities directly related to writing but agree more with the transfer effects of reading activities compared to that of speaking activities. It reveals that addressing people gets less attention than the others.

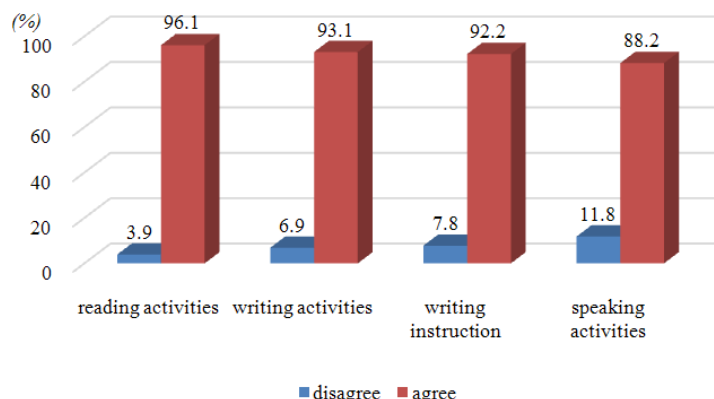


Figure 3. Frequencies of participants' agreement with the intervention to develop writing

Furthermore, Paired Sample T-tests showed that the mean for 'reading activities' ($M = 4.53$, $SD = .76$) is significantly higher [$t(489) = 7.17$, $p < .05$] than that for 'writing activities' ($M = 4.36$, $SD = .77$), higher [$t(489) = 10.41$, $p < .05$] than that for 'writing instruction' ($M = 4.25$, $SD = .76$), higher [$t(489) = 11.25$, $p < .05$] than that for 'speaking activities' ($M = 4.20$, $SD = .84$); and the mean of 'writing activities' is significantly higher [$t(489) = 4.47$, $p < .05$] than that of 'writing instruction', higher [$t(489) = 4.97$, $p < .05$] than that of 'speaking activities'. Therefore, among the four facilitators, participants attach the greatest importance to reading activities.

D. Features of a Good Text

So far, I have discussed writing as an activity (or process). Now, I will move to writing as a text (or product). A large amount of research has demonstrated that content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, style, semantics, spelling, punctuation, and so on, are basic components of good writing (e.g., Cho, 2003; Knoch, 2011; Lee, 2007, 2011). These aspects constitute the conceptual, linguistic, and coding features of a paper, which are also frequently used in evaluating a text. What is teachers' weight when evaluating a piece of EFL text?

Based on the above components of writing, a composite index was created and used as the dependent variable in a regression model with the conceptual, linguistic and coding elements of texts as independent variables. The regression analysis with the 'enter' method found that each of the items in the three levels contributes almost equally to the features of good writing, i.e., each explained nearly equivalent variance ($r^2 = .06 - .09$); while the 'stepwise' method found that 'the structure of a text, spelling, style, and punctuation' ($\Sigma r^2 = .903$) explained cumulatively more than 90% of the variance. Thus, it seems that the participants consider the structure of a text, style, and conventions as the primary characteristics of a well-written paper.

E. Influence of Demographic Information on Teachers' Conceptions

I will discuss the influence of demographic information on teachers' conceptions of writing in this section. In the study, participants' personal background encompasses gender, teaching experience, school level, class size, and lessons of teaching writing per class per week.

Effect of gender

An Independent Samples T-test analysis found that only the mean of the male participants on the variable 'Writing is for proving students' knowledge at exams' ($M = 4.32$, $SD = .86$) is significantly higher [$t(488) = 1.97$, $p < .05$] than that of female respondents on the same variable ($M = 4.14$, $SD = .88$); the means for both genders on all of the other variables are not significantly different ($p > .05$). It seems that male and female teachers have similar conceptions of writing, except male teachers are more inclined to the function of writing for checking students' knowledge at exams.

Effect of teaching experience

It is assumed that teaching experience impacts teachers' conceptions of writing. There is a common classification of phases of teachers' professional development, i.e., one to five years of teaching experience: novice teachers, 6-15 years: experienced teachers, and 16 and more years: more experienced teachers (c.f., Fraga-Cañadas, 2010). The frequency of participants' work experience shows that 33.5% of them have 1-5 years of teaching experience, 35.7% have 6-15 years of teaching experience, and 30.8% have 16 or more years of teaching experience. Then, for the convenience of analyzing, participants were divided into three groups by teaching experience: Group 1: 1-5 years; Group 2: 6-15 years, and Group 3: 16 years and above.

Analyses of variance (ANOVA) found that there were significant differences among groups with different teaching

experience on several items of writing development and features of a good text. The mean for individual teacher group is presented sequentially in Table 6 and 7.

TABLE 6
MEAN FOR TEACHER GROUPS' RESPONSES TO DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING

Development of writing	1-5 years group (Mean)	6-15 years group (Mean)	16+ years group (Mean)
Engagement in speaking facilitates writing	4.04		4.38

On the construct of development of writing, a One-way ANOVA with the factor 'teaching experience' yielded a significant effect [$F(2, 487) = 6.85, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$] between participants with 1-5 years of teaching experience and those with 16 or more years on the variable 'Engagement in speaking facilitates writing'; the Tukey test found that the mean for the latter (4.38, $SD=.72$) is significantly higher than that for the former (4.04, $SD=.85$).

TABLE 7
MEANS FOR TEACHER GROUPS' RESPONSES TO FEATURES OF GOOD WRITING

Features of good writing	1-5 years group (Mean)	6-15 years group (Mean)	16+ years group (Mean)
Length of a text	3.35	3.62	
Handwriting	3.97	4.29	4.26

With respect to features of a good text, ANOVA with the factor 'teaching experience' showed a significant effect [$F(2, 487) = 3.63, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$] between participants with 1-5 years of teaching experience and those with 6-15 years regarding the item 'Length of the text'; the Dunnett's T3 test showed that the mean for the latter (3.62, $SD=.86$) is significantly higher than that for the former (3.35, $SD=1.03$). A One-way ANOVA with the factor 'teaching experience' showed a significant effect [$F(2, 487) = 8.25, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$] between participants with 1-5 years of teaching experience and those with 6-15 and 16 or more years on the variable 'Handwriting'; the Dunnett's T3 test found that the mean for 6-15 years (4.29, $SD=.71$) and 16 or more years (4.26, $SD=.72$) is respectively significantly higher than that for the 1-5 years (3.97, $SD=.94$).

Effect of school level

It is well known that language instruction is supposed to be flexible and adaptive to meeting learning needs of students at different language proficiency levels. For the teaching of EFL writing, it is possible that teachers teaching different grade levels have diverse understandings of writing. In this study, 13.3% of the teachers teach grades 1-6, 39.4% teach grades 7-9, and 47.3% teach grades 10-12. ANOVA revealed difference on features of a good text. The means for teachers at different school levels are shown respectively in Table 8.

TABLE 8
MEAN FOR GROUPS OF SCHOOL LEVEL ON FEATURES OF GOOD WRITING

Features of good writing	Teachers of grades 1-6 (Mean)	Teachers of grades 7-9 (Mean)	Teachers of grades 10-12 (Mean)
Cohesive devices	3.91		4.18

On the construct of basis of good writing, a One-way ANOVA with the factor 'school level' indicated a significant effect [$F(2, 487) = 4.45, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$] between teachers of grades 1-6 and grades 10-12 on the variable 'Cohesive devices'; the Tukey test found that the mean for teachers of grades 10-12 (4.18, $SD=.72$) is significantly higher than that for teachers of grades 1-6 (3.91, $SD=.81$). It seems that teachers at different school levels commonly tend to hold similar conceptions of writing.

Effect of class size

As a result of the huge population in China, class size in schools is accordingly quite large. In the current study, respondents basically have more than 30 students in their class. The class size is divided into four groups (see Table 1). ANOVA showed significant differences in certain items included in writing functions and features of good texts. The means are presented in Table 9 and 10.

TABLE 9
MEANS FOR GROUPS OF CLASS SIZE ON FUNCTIONS OF WRITING

Functions of writing	< 30 (Mean)	31-45 (Mean)	46-60 (Mean)	>61 (Mean)
Writing is for proving students' knowledge at exams	3.76	4.19	4.26	

TABLE 10
MEANS FOR GROUPS OF CLASS SIZE ON BASIS OF GOOD WRITING

Features of good writing	< 30 (Mean)	31-45 (Mean)	46-60 (Mean)	>61 (Mean)
Vocabulary	4.27		4.58	

On the construct of functions of writing, a One-way ANOVA with the factor 'class size' yielded a significant effect [$F(3, 486) = 3.84, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$] between teachers who have less than 30 students in their class and those who have 31-45 students on the variable 'Writing is for proving students' knowledge at exams'; the Tukey test indicated that the mean for the latter (4.19, $SD=.84$) is significantly higher than the mean for the former (3.76, $SD=1.61$); besides, the mean for those who have 46-60 (4.26, $SD=.85$) students is significantly higher than that for teachers who have less than

30 students (3.76, SD=1.61) on the same variable.

On the construct of basis of good writing, a One-way ANOVA with the factor 'class size' showed a significant effect [$F(3, 486) = 3.33, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$] between teachers who have less than 30 students in their class and those who have 46-60 students on the item 'Vocabulary'; the Tukey test identified that the mean for the latter (4.58, SD=.60) is significantly higher than that for the former (4.27, SD=.80).

Effect of lessons of teaching writing per class per week

It is safe to say that the frequency and intensity of teaching writing influences teachers' conceptions of writing. In this study, participants were asked about the number of English lessons they teach for one class of students per week ($M = 6.39, SD = 2.73; \text{Mode} = 6$), and the percentage of their teaching time devoted to teaching writing ($M = 18.8\%, SD = 14.04\%$); then, the approximate number of lessons of teaching writing per class per week ($M=1.22, SD=1.20$) is derived from the 'number of English lessons per class/week' multiplied by the 'percentage of teaching time devoted to teaching writing'. Accordingly, based on frequencies of responses, the numbers of writing lessons were divided into three groups: Group 1: less than one lesson of writing instruction per class per week, 55.7%; Group 2: one to two lessons per class per week, 31.2%; Group 3: more than two lessons, 13.1%.

A One-way ANOVA with the factor 'lessons of teaching writing per class per week' yielded a significant effect [$F(2, 487) = 3.37, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$] between the means of Group 1 and Group 2 on the variable 'Engagement in speaking facilitates writing'; the Tukey test found that the mean for Group 2 ($M = 4.35, SD=.70$) is significantly higher than that for Group 1 ($M = 4.13, SD=.90$).

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate Chinese TEFL teachers' conceptions of writing particularly in the exams predominant conventions. In the last part, discussion of the findings and matching conclusions are drawn.

In terms of the multidimensional notions of writing, respondents normally recognize the linguistic, cultural and cognitive natures of writing, however, over one-fifth of them question its social nature. Also, the majority of respondents recognize the four facets of writing, while a minority are in trouble with acknowledging the multiple natures. It reflects much or less the shortcomings of the exam-oriented language learning and instruction that the communicative nature of writing is relatively left out by teachers. Therefore, further efforts to examining teachers' inattention to some of the natures of writing are necessary.

Concerning possible functions of writing, informants report various favored functions of writing, while they stress the ones concerned with the self as well as self-expression but overlook functions addressing people. Worse still, only slightly over half of the participants agree with the six functions of writing in this study, and the others particularly a small number of them have difficulty accepting the multifunction of writing. Respondents' conceptions of writing concepts and functions reveal that they are inclined to be writer-focused and text-based, whereas considerably audience-ignored.

As far as the interventions to develop writing, respondents accept the interventions of other language skills and writing instruction to the development of writing. However, they lay the greatest stress on the transfer effects of reading on facilitating writing, which indicates that teachers rely more on the indirect interventions to facilitate students' writing ability but put to some extent insufficient emphasis on learning by doing.

In the light of features of good writing, respondents view the structure of a text, style, and conventions of writing to be the greater contributors, but relatively look over some linguistic features such as vocabulary and grammar. It, therefore, calls for further research to examine participants' relative inattention to these components of well-written texts.

Considering the above mentioned, a conclusion can be made that respondents, in the EFL context where exams are predominant, favor writing as a linguistic product as well as a cognitive process. Nevertheless, the essential social communicative nature and function of writing should also be emphasized by teachers. This might be of interest for in-service TEFL teacher trainers.

As for genders' conceptions of writing, male participants are only inclined to accept writing is for proving students' knowledge at exams, but generally, agree with female participants on all other variables of writing.

As expected, more experienced teachers have different ideas on writing from those novice teachers. The former accept more the facilitation of speaking activities to the development of writing and length and handwriting as features of good writing than the latter. However, experienced teachers' conceptions of multifaceted natures and multifunction of writing do not differ from other teachers.

Surprisingly, participants at different school levels do not report systematically different understandings of writing, except that teachers of grades 10-12 emphasize cohesive devices more as a basis for good writing than those of grades 1-6. It seems that teachers at different school levels generally maintain similar conceptions of writing.

With regard to class size, participants have normal class size with 31-60 students agree more with the function of writing for proving student's knowledge at exams than those who have smaller class size with less than 30 students. Also, participants have average class size attach more importance to vocabulary as the basis of good writing than those have smaller class size.

It is also a surprise to find out that the frequency of participants' teaching of writing does not make a systematic

change in their conceptions of writing. This definitely merits further investigation of the relationships between teachers' writing instruction and conception.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship program and the China Scholarship Council. The author wishes to thank Edit Katalin Molnár for her invaluable advice and comments on this project. The author would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their very detailed useful comments and suggestions for the improvement of the paper.

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