

## Qualitative analysis on Taiwanese EFL learners' writing difficulties

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### Abstract

Growing importance has been attached to the competence in English writing as English has gained the status of lingua franca in several professional domains. However, many EFL learners in Taiwan struggle to write a “well-organized and generally coherent essay that demonstrates sufficient control of vocabulary and sentence structures” as described in the GEPT High-Intermediate Writing Test Rating Scale. To help improve EFL learners' English writing, efforts should be made to understand their writing difficulties as well as their learning processes. To address these issues, we examined the learning strategies and writing difficulties among a pool of 470 EFL learners who took the GEPT High-Intermediate Writing Test (roughly equivalent to the CEFR B2 level). This study mainly reports the results of Taiwanese EFL learners' writing difficulties, in particular their writing errors in the aspects of mechanics, word use, grammar, text coherence and unity, by analyzing a representative sample of writing scripts randomly selected from the passer group and the non-passer group of the GEPT. The non-passer group was compared with the passer group in terms of the error types and error frequencies in order to note the aspects they could improve to write more effectively. Preliminary findings showed significant group differences in the frequency of mechanic errors, grammatical errors, and text coherence. Moreover, the errors of the non-passer group were qualitatively different from the passer group, demonstrating their insufficient knowledge of basic writing mechanics and difficulties with basic syntactic rules (e.g., the occurrences of multiple-verb clauses or fragments) and syntactic behaviors of specific lexical units (e.g., incorrect usage of the subordinators *if* and *although*). The non-passer group also produced more off-topic sentences and showed difficulties with the use of connectors to present a logical flow of ideas. The results are to be discussed in relation to our previous findings on the relationship between writing performance and learning strategies (Li & Wu, 2018). Specifically, the writing difficulties are linked to the learning strategies on which EFL writing instruction should focus. The findings of this study are of pedagogical

significance for writing instructors.

#### Reference

Li, Naihsin, & Wu, J. (2018). The relationships between Taiwanese EFL learners' strategy use and writing test performance. Presented in the Asian Association for Language Assessment (October 18 – 20), Shanghai, China.