

## English Writing Proficiency among Three Types of Students in an ESL Composition Course

Maxine E. Goldberg  
Alliant International University  
San Diego, California, USA

### Abstract

This article reports the findings of a study that identified similarities and differences in the perceived second language writing proficiency generation 1.5 students, immigrant/refugee students, and international student brought to an advanced ESL composition course at a local community college in Southern California. Under quantitative investigation was (1) students' perceptions of their L2 writing proficiency as determined by self-rated perceived writing attitude, perceived writing ability, perceived word processing/computer skills, and perceived writing behaviors scores, (2) the regionalized distribution of participants' overall L2 writing proficiency as determined by the sum of the four component scores, and (3) students' actual writing ability and gain in writing ability as determined by teacher-graded in-class essay scores. G1.5 students maintained realistic perceptions of their L2 writing proficiency, IMR students overrated perceptions of their overall L2 writing proficiency, and IS students underrated perceptions of their L2 writing proficiency. The results suggested that the experiences and perceptions of academic literacy for different types of ESL students may not match ambitious standards and expectations of the American ESL college-level reading-to-writing curriculum.

**Keywords:** L2 writing attitude, L2 writing, L2 writing behavior, L2 electronic literacy

**Introduction**

In the past, writing instruction in second and foreign language classes was intended to support oral language, grammar and vocabulary, but this has changed. Learning to write in a second language has become a more worthwhile discipline in and of itself (Krashen, 2007, 2008; Will-Harris, 2000). Second language writing has come of age and evolved into an interdisciplinary field of inquiry with its own disciplinary infrastructure (Matsuda, 2003a, 2003b; Matsuda, et al., 2003; Silva, et al., 2001). The current momentum of second language writing is perpetuated by the acknowledgment of written English as the predominant medium in discourse about English as the language of globalization and international communication (Kushner, 2003; Rauch, 2000). Accordingly, a distinct complication when teaching academic English composition is the form writing instruction should take given the interaction and variations between ESL students' L1 background, experiences, schema, and the meaning of academic literacy in both the target language culture and student's L1 culture (Kern 2000; Hyland 2002).

Changes in U.S. immigration laws and globalized processes produced unprecedented human demographic shifts in higher education reflective of the cultural and linguistic diversity of American society-at-large (Kirkpatrick, 2001). The diversity of race, class, religious and cultural origins of student populations arrive in the U. S. from a wide variety of educational traditions and cultures substantially different from the traditions they encounter in American higher education (Aliakbara, 2002, Allison & Mei, 2001). Such a diverse student population brings a large array of needs and educational aspirations, prior experiences, expectations and qualifications that challenge community colleges in finding appropriate ways of responding to the diversity of backgrounds and needs these students present (Erdosy, 2001; Szelényi & Chang, 2002). Local learning communities are now composed of a growing number of immigrants, refugees, international students, and the economies of these communities are increasingly dependent on positive relationships with other countries whose culture and belief systems require understanding, regard and a degree of international sensitivity not demanded in the past (Vaughan, 2006). Therefore, understanding the characteristics of three types of ESL writers is of utmost importance for ESL writing teachers, administrators and researchers (Leki, 1992, 1999, 2003a, 2003b).

Despite the abundance of empirical evidence and commentary about learning and teaching L2 writing, there are areas that remain open to further investigation (Petrić, & Czár, 2003) because the international student population has not been the only source, and perhaps not even the primary source of increasing linguistic diversity in higher education (Harklau, Siegal & Losey, 1999). Few studies examined or compared generation 1.5 students, international students' and immigrant/refugee students perceptions of their L2 writing proficiency and what they bring to the shared context of the ESL learning community in higher education. What constitutes pluralistic writing instruction and good writing in the pluralism of a learner-centered ESL classroom is problematic, particularly when teaching and learning a second language extends beyond simply the use of the right words, or the correct grammar (Harklau, 2001, 2002, 2003).

The assumption frequently made in literature is that students' progress in writing is simply part of their oral L2 proficiency, but Archibald (2001) asserted that there are aspects of writing proficiency specifically being developed through writing instruction aimed at improving overall English language proficiency. Harklau (2002) further argued that writing, as a communicative modality has been marginalized as a key to understanding second language acquisition in the context and content areas of the ESL classroom where academic literacy plays

a central role in communication and transmission of knowledge. This study favored Archibald's (2001) assertion, Harklau's (2002) contention, and what literature described as the arduous and slow process of acquiring a second language most L2 learners are involved while time trying to learn and perform higher order academic writing tasks within a shorter period of time.

### Research Site

A community college in Southern California, by virtue of its open access policies, diversity, proximity and wide range of ESL course offerings was a suitable site for conducting the study. Community colleges in California are among those nationwide engaged in a wide range of efforts to internationalize the learning experience ("Community College Teaching," 2009) and play an important role in providing foreign-born populations comprising persons residing in the United States who are not American citizens at the time of their birth, and individuals processing work, or student visas with opportunities to participate in the American educational system (CCC Commission Statement, 2001).

Moreover, the implementation of the *California Basic Skills Initiative* (CBSI) mirrors a nationwide concern about the ability of community colleges to meet the distinct educational, socio-linguistic, socio-cultural and socio-emotional needs of non-traditional students who are non-Anglo, older L2 students, with less college preparation in their background (Boroch, et al., 2007) in need of additional instruction to acquire sufficient academic language proficiency to pursue higher education and succeed in American academia ("Basic Skills Initiative," 2008). New to the ESL curriculum at research site was an advanced ESL composition course. It was the fifth core ESL course required for all L2 learners proceeding through and out of the ESL Program prior to enrollment in mainstream English composition courses that lead to associate degrees, and/or transfer to four year college/university programs. Lectures covered the writing process, rhetorical structures, and research writing. This credit-bearing, 16-week, advanced ESL composition course was five semester units, 96 semester hours, and met two days a week for five lecture hours plus one hour lab.

### Participants

A total of 122 participants enrolled in seven intact sections of the new advanced ESL composition course responded to a self-assessment questionnaire administered pre- and post-semester. Ten students classified themselves as generation 1.5 students; 55 as immigrant/refugee students; 57 as international students. Seventy-three were female and 49 students were male. Eighty-seven students were between 18-28 years of age; 15 students between 29-39 years of age, and 20 students were over 40 years of age. The length of stay in the USA for 83 students was one to three years; five to ten years for 17 students, over ten years for four students, and 18 students were in the USA less than six months. Eight-four students had less than three semesters of English composition or literature study at the college level, 35 students had three to five semesters of study, and three students had more than five semesters of English composition or literature study at the college level.

In the researcher's estimation participants' oral language skills ranged from low-intermediate to advanced levels, and contrasted with participants written second language skills that ranged from beginner to high-intermediate. For this reason, the spectrum of internal and external factors that contribute to the socio-culturally distinctions between the three types of students and their goals to acquire the English language socially and academically were considered, but factors relevant to second language acquisition such as participants' oral English

proficiency, language aptitude, learning styles, motivation, levels of anxiety, and frequency and use of language learning strategies (Ellis, 2008) were outside the scope of the study.

### Variables and Operational Definitions

The independent variable *type of student* included three types of ESL students: (1) generation 1.5 students (G1.5) with at least an American high school education, (2) international students (IS) with temporary student status in America, returning to their country, and (3) immigrant/refugee students (IMR) educated in their country, committed to staying in America and not returning to their country.

The first dependent variable, *perceived writing attitude (WAT)* was defined as a score obtained from the respondents' about their position, thinking, opinion, judgment and degree of like, or dislike for L2 writing as measured on various Likert scale items ranging from four to one, where four indicated absolute agreement and one indicated absolute disagreement. A higher score indicated that participants' perceived themselves as highly skilled second language writers with developed strategies to cope with and compensate for weakness and capitalize on strengths in terms of academic literacy. A lower score indicated that participants perceived themselves as unskilled second language writers with undeveloped or developing strategies to cope with and compensate for weakness and capitalize on strengths in terms of academic literacy.

The second dependent variable *perceived writing ability (WAB)* was defined as the score obtained from respondents about their writing competencies, abilities, predisposition, or tendency to respond positively or negatively towards writing as part of the learning process as measured on various Likert scale items ranging from four to one, where four indicated that perceived writing ability was outstanding, and one indicated that perceived writing ability needed improvement. A higher score indicated that participants perceived no problems understanding the writing process and were confident second language writers. A lower score indicated participants' perceived serious problems understanding the writing process and lacked confidence in their ability as second language writers.

The third dependent variable, *perceived word processing/computer skills (WPC)* was defined as a score obtained from the respondents about their electronic literacy skills and qualities that make their second language writing unique as measured on various Likert scale items ranging from four to one, where four indicated that respondents believed they have outstanding electronic literacy skills, and one indicated electronic literacy skills in need of improvement. A higher score indicated that participants perceived themselves as knowledgeable and knew how to use word processing software for written tasks and oral presentations, and were familiar with online educational tools and databases for researching information. A lower score indicated that participants perceived themselves as lacking knowledge and experience with word processing software for written tasks and oral presentations, and were unfamiliar with online educational tools and databases for researching information (Hebe & Storey, 2006).

The fourth dependent variable, *perceived writing behavior (WBE)* was defined as a score obtained from the respondents about their preferences and dispositions to act in certain ways before, during and after composing measured on various Likert scale items ranging from four to one, where four indicated writing behaviors that always occurred, and one indicated writing behaviors that never occurred. A higher score indicated that participants tended to exhibit writing behaviors more frequently and perceived their writing behavior positively. A lower score indicated that participants tended to exhibit writing behaviors less frequently and perceived their writing behavior negatively.

*Region of origin* was defined as historical, political, economic, cultural variations in contact, variations in the meaning of academic literacy, and academic cultural capital based on the country of birth and first language background reported. Participants identified themselves as speakers of 29 different languages that when regionalized represented five geographical regions: Africa, Asia, Europe, Mexico/South America, and the Middle East. The dominate languages were Arabic, Korean, Spanish and Vietnamese.

*Perceived L2 writing proficiency (L2WP)* was defined as thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, attitudes, actions or behaviors ESL students were consciously aware of and attentive to when self-rating themselves as second language writers and their anticipated performance during the semester. Participants' perceived L2 writing proficiency was the composite score of their self-rated perceived writing attitude writing ability, word processing/computer skills, and perceived writing behavior scores. Self-rating put the participants in charge of rating their own performance (Luoma & Tarnanen, 2003) throughout the course of the semester in this study.

*In-Class Essay* was defined as the *diagnostic*, *mid-term* and *final* essays students composed under timed conditions. Students had 75 minutes to write approximately 600 words for the diagnostic essay without the use of a dictionary, and 90 minutes to write approximately 600 words with the use of a non-electronic dictionary during the mid-term and final essays. (Bishop, 2001).

*Actual L2 Writing Ability* was defined as a score on teacher-graded in-class essays as determined by an ESL Essay Scoring Rubric, and *Gains in L2 Writing Ability* defined as scores indicative of improved writing ability as determined by increases in teacher-graded in-class essays scores from the diagnostic essay to midterm essay to the final essay. Essay point values were converted to grade equivalent percentage scores based on the Essay Grading Scale established at the community college research site. (Matsuda, Cox, Jordon & Ortmeier-Hooper, 2006).

## Instruments

Participants were divided into two groups. For the purpose of examining perceived L2 writing proficiency, Group A consisted of 122 ESL students enrolled in the seven sections of the new advanced ESL composition course. For the purpose of examining participants' actual writing ability and gain in writing ability, Group B consisted of 98 ESL students enrolled in six sections of the advanced ESL composition course at the community college site. Twenty-four participants were excluded due to zero "0" grades on in-class essays, and because all the L2 writing teachers in the study, except one, used the same ESL Essay Scoring Rubric to evaluate the three in-class essays participants composed in the study. The instruments and sources of quantitative data included:

1. The **Writer's Self-Assessment Questionnaire** administered pre and post semester measured perceived L2 writing proficiency and changes in student's internal syllabus and perception of themselves as second language writers as a result of general writing instruction (Brown, 2005, 2007). The first part of the questionnaire asked participants for general demographic information. The remaining four parts contained 55 items drawn from instruments in previous L2 composition studies that examined similar issues related to L2 learners' writing attitude, writing ability, word processing/computer skills and writing behaviors. The sum of Part A, B, C and D calculated separately then collectively yielded participant's overall perceived L2 writing proficiency composite scores. The maximum score possible was 220. A higher composite score indicated overall confidence and favorable perceptions of L2 writing proficiency, while a

lower composite score indicated less confidence and less favorable perceptions of L2 writing proficiency.

In Part A of the questionnaire respondents rated their *writing attitude (WAT)* on a four-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” There were 20 items and the maximum score possible was 80. A higher writing attitude score was indicative of favorable attitudes toward writing in English that tend to enhance learning and participants’ perception of themselves as second language writers, whereas, a lower writing attitude score was indicative of less favorable attitudes toward writing in English that tend to impede or hinder learning and participants’ perception of themselves as second language writers (Ellis & Yuan, 2004; Harklau, 2002; Krashen, 2002).

Respondents rated their *writing ability (WAB)* in Part B of the questionnaire based on a four-point Likert scale ranging from “Outstanding” to “Needs Improvement.” There were 10 items and the maximum score possible was 40. A higher writing ability score indicated that participants perceived no problems in their ability to express an understanding of the composition course and the writing process. In contrast, a lower writing ability score indicated that participants perceived problems in their ability to express an understanding of the course and the writing process (“Academic Literacy,” 2002).

In Part C of the questionnaire, respondents rated their *word processing/computer skills (WPC)*, in other words, electronic literacy on a four-point Likert scale ranging from “Outstanding” to “Needs Improvement.” There were five items and the maximum score possible was 20. A higher score reflected participants’ knowledge, experience and familiarity with the use of word processing software for written academic tasks, oral presentations, and with online educational tools and databases for researching information, whereas a lower score reflected participants’ lack of knowledge, experience and familiarity with word processing software for written academic tasks and oral presentations, and educational tools and databases for researching information (Brown, 2009, Pennington, 2003; Warschauer, 2000, 2002).

Respondents rated their *writing behavior (WBE)* in Part D of the questionnaire based on a four-point Likert scale ranging from “Very Often” to “Never.” There were 20 items and the maximum score possible was 80. A higher writing behavior score indicated that participants’ perceived their English writing behavior conducive for learning while a lower score indicated participants’ perceived English writing behavior less conducive to learning to write academic English (Laborda, 2006; Mohsin, 2009).

2. **ESL Essay Scoring Rubric** was the standard measurement all teachers of the advanced ESL composition course were trained to use to evaluate students’ essays. The rubric was in accordance with the student learning objectives (SLOs) for the advanced ESL composition course at the research site. Point values for the components of writing measured were: content (10 points), organization (15 points), word choice (5 points), sentence structure (5 points), grammar (10 points), and mechanics (5 points) for a total of 50 points. Point values and letter grades were: 45-50 points=A grade; 40-44 points =B grade; 35-39 points=C grade; 30-34 points=D grade and less than 29 points= F grade converted to equivalent percentage scores.

3. **In-Class Essays** gathered quantitative data about participants’ actual writing ability and gains in writing ability on in-class essays as measured by the ESL Essay Scoring Rubric point values, letter grades, and equivalent percentage scores. Readings for in-class essay writing prompts were selected collaboratively by the teachers of the advanced ESL composition course. The score on the *diagnostic essay* was an indication of students’ readiness for the advanced ESL composition course; the score on the *mid-term essay* was an indication of how well students

fulfilled the expectations of the course eight weeks into the semester; the score on the *final essay* at the end of the course was an indication of students' readiness for the next level of English composition courses.

### Results for Research Questions

**RQ1.** Is there a significant difference between the three types of students' perceived L2 writing proficiency at the beginning of the semester and the three types of students' perceived L2 writing proficiency at the end of the semester? Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics of means and standard deviations calculated for each of the three types of student out of a maximum score of 220. The G1.5 group's L2WP composite mean scores were higher than both the IMR group and the IS group mean L2WP composite mean scores both pre- and post-semester. The results of a *t*-test conducted to determine if there were significant differences between participants' pre- and post-semester L2WP composite scores revealed a significant difference ( $t = -3.843$ ,  $df = 56$ ,  $p = .000$ ) in perceived L2WP for the IS group, marginal significance ( $t = -2.543$ ,  $df = 54$ ,  $p = .014$ ) in perceived L2WP for the IMR group, and no statistical differences in the L2WP composite mean scores for the G1.5 group.

**Table 1. Perceived L2 Writing Proficiency Pre-Post Semester**

	G1.5 Group (n=10)		IMR Group (n=55)		IS Group (n=57)	
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
L2WP Pre-Semester	153.3	8.95	151.2	13.03	146.4	12.4
L2WP Post-Semester	160.4	16.2	157.2	16.6	154.7	17.6

ANOVA comparisons of the dependent variables revealed that there was a marginal difference approaching significance  $F(2, 119) = 2.638$ ,  $p = .076$ ) at the .05 two-tailed level between the three sets of L2 writing proficiency (L2WP) composite scores pre-semester, and no statistically difference revealed between L2WP composite scores post-semester. The eta squared calculations at .042 and .010 indicated that approximately 4% of the total variance in perceived L2WP between the three groups was accounted for pre-semester, and only 1% accounted for post-semester. The remaining percentages in both instances were attributable to differences within groups, error, or other factors. Prior general English writing instruction in addition to general writing instruction over the course of the semester elicited change in students' perceptions of their L2 writing proficiency post-semester.

**RQ2.** Is there a significant difference between the three types of students' perceived writing attitudes, perceived writing ability, perceived word processing/computer skills, and perceived writing behavior pre- and post-semester? Table 2 summarizes the pre- and post-semester mean scores and standard deviations for the dependent variables comprising L2 writing proficiency for the three types of students. Pre-semester, differences between the three sets of mean scores was marginal and the magnitude of statistical differences in mean scores between the three types of students smaller post-semester.

**Table 2. Components of L2 Writing Proficiency Pre-Post Semester**

Pre-Semester	G1.5 Group (n = 10)		IMR Group (n = 55)		IS Group (n = 57)	
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Writing Attitude-WAT	61.10	5.78	60.45	5.90	58.02	5.25
Writing Ability-WAB	23.50	5.64	24.31	6.17	23.14	5.02
Word Processing/Computer Skills-WPC	16.00	3.43	13.11	4.36	13.42	3.75
Writing Behavior-WBE	52.70	6.85	53.31	6.50	51.86	6.08
Post-Semester	G1.5 Group (n = 10)		IMR Group (n = 55)		IS Group (n = 57)	
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Writing Attitude-WAT	63.90	7.09	59.56	7.94	58.84	5.25
Writing Ability-WAB	27.50	4.79	26.60	5.94	25.82	5.02
Word Processing/Computer Skills-WPC	16.20	3.43	15.55	5.40	15.28	3.75
Writing Behavior-WBE	52.80	7.53	55.44	6.99	54.79	6.08

ANOVA results revealed a statistical difference in perceived writing attitude (WAT) just under the significant  $p < .05$  two-tailed cut-off ( $F(2,119) = 3.18, p = .045$ ) pre-semester. Tukey's HSD post-hoc test revealed that the nature of difference in perceived WAT scores was between the G1.5 group ( $M=61.10$ ) and the IS group ( $M=58.02$ ). The eta squared of .051 indicated that approximately 5% of variance between the groups was attributable to the group students were assigned to rather than the type of student, and the other percent of the variance came from the within groups, error, or the possible effects of social-psychological and social-cultural factors.

Further analysis revealed a statistically difference in perceived writing behavior (WBE) that coincided with the number of semesters the three types of students studied English. Perceived writing behavior ( $M=53.20, SD=6.45$ ) for students with three to five semesters of English study was slightly higher ( $M=52.71, SD=6.03$ ) for students with more than five semesters of English study, and significantly higher ( $M=41.67, SD=3.77$ ) for students with less than three semesters of English study. There was no statistical difference found for perceived WAB and perceived WPC means scores pre-semester, and no statistical differences in four dependent variables post-semester. The obtained result suggested that prior educational training in the English language probably influenced the perceived writing behavior self-ratings of the three types of ESL student.

**RQ3.** Is there a significant difference in students' self-rated perceived L2 writing proficiency, perceived writing attitudes, writing ability, word processing/computer skills, and writing behavior scores by region of origin pre- and post-semester? The demographic section of the self-assessment questionnaire elicited participants' county of origin. When consolidated geographically, the countries of origin represented five regions of the world: Africa, Asia,

Europe, Mexico/South America, and Middle East. Table 3 summarizes the means and standard deviations by region of origin for perceived L2WP composite mean scores out of a maximum score of 220.

**Table 3. Regional L2 Writing Proficiency Pre-Post Semester**

Regions of Origin		L2WP Pre-Semester	L2WP Post-Semester
Africa (N=5)	Mean SD	161.20 5.85	169.60 14.99
Asia (N=53)	Mean SD	146.70 12.40	154.40 17.75
Europe (N=10)	Mean SD	148.80 11.43	149.70 16.02
Mexico/South America (N=17)	Mean SD	146.00 8.16	158.12 16.26
Middle Eastern (N=37)	Mean SD	152.54 14.28	158.14 16.19

The African group had the highest mean composite scores pre-semester (M=161.20) and highest post-semester (M=169.60), followed by the Middle Eastern group (M=152.54) pre-semester and (M=158.14) post semester. The results of a *t*-test conducted to compare pre- and post-semester L2WP composite mean scores by region of origin revealed a statistical significant difference ( $t = -4.838$ ,  $df = 121$ ,  $p = .000$ ) at the .01 two-tailed level. The obtained result was consistent with participants' self-rated overall L2WP pre- and post-semester in RQ1 to suggest that the regional groups of participants held more confident postures and perceptions of their overall L2 writing proficiency post-semester than they did pre-semester. An awareness of cultural variations in contact (Savignon & Sysoyev, 2002), and students' confidence in the academic cultural capital they possessed (Brammer, 2002) may have contributed to this finding.

With regard to the four dependent variables comprising participants' overall L2WP by region of origin, there was a statistical difference ( $F(4,117) = 4.21$ ,  $p = .003$ ) in perceived writing attitude (WAT) pre-semester. The Tukey HSD post hoc test revealed a significant difference in the perceived (WAT) scores of students assigned to the Middle Eastern group and Asian group. The Middle Eastern group (M=61.97) was significantly different from the Asian group (M=57.72), but not significantly different from the perceived WAT mean scores of

students assigned to the Africa group ( $M=62.40$ ); the Mexico/South American group ( $M=59.29$ ), and the Europe group ( $M=57.10$ ). The magnitude of difference between the regional group means in writing attitude was moderate. The eta squared calculation was .126. Approximately 13% of the total variance between the groups' perceived WAT was accounted for. The other percent of variance was attributed to within groups, error, or from other factors.

Statistical difference ( $F(4, 117) = 5.062, p = .001$ ) in perceived writing ability (WAB) by region of origin also reached significance pre-semester. Even though the regional groups were unequal in size, Tukey's HSD post-hoc test revealed significant differences between the perceived WAB scores of students assigned to the African, Asian, European, and Mexico/South American groups. The WAB scores of students assigned to the African group ( $M=31.80$ ) was significantly different from the WAB scores of students assigned to Asian group ( $M=22.66$ ), of students assigned to the European group ( $M=22.60$ ), and students assigned to the Mexico/South American group ( $M=21.71$ ). The magnitude of difference between the regional group means in writing ability was large. The eta squared calculation of .148 confirmed that approximately 15% percent of the total variance between the groups' perception of writing ability was accounted for.

Post-semester statistical difference reached significance ( $F(4,117) = 2.49, p < .05$ ) in perceived writing behavior (WBE) by region of origin. The Tukey's HSD post-hoc test revealed a significant difference in perceived WBE scores for students assigned to the African and European groups. The African group ( $M=61.40$ ) was significantly different from the European group ( $M=50.10$ ), but did not differ significantly from the WBE mean scores of students assigned to the Asian group ( $M=55.57$ ), the Middle Eastern ( $M=54.62$ ), and the Mexico/South American group ( $M=54.47$ ). The eta calculation of .078 represented a moderate effect size. Roughly 8% of the total variance between the groups writing behavior was accounted for in the study. The rest of the variance came from within groups, error or some other factor(s).

There was marginal significance ( $F(4,117) = 1.93, p = .109$ ) divulged in perceived writing attitude (WAT) by region of origin. Tukey's HSD post-hoc test revealed a difference approaching significance at the .05 level in perceived WAT specific to the subset of mean scores for the Mexico/South American group ( $M=62.47$ ) and the European group ( $M=55.40$ ). Marginal significance ( $F(4,117) = 2.31, p = .062$ ) was also found in perceived English writing ability (WAB) by region of origin. The difference approaching significance in perceived writing ability was specific to the African group ( $M=32.40$ ) and Asian group ( $M = 25.21$ ) subset of mean scores. Tukey's HSD post-hoc test confirmed a p-value of .049, and the more conservative Scheffe post-hoc test a p-value of .111 for the African/Asian sub-sets of WAB mean scores. There was no statistical difference in mean scores for perceived word processing/computer skills (WPC) between the five regional groups post-semester.

**RQ4.** Is there a significant relationship between the three types of students' actual L2 writing ability and their self-assessed L2 writing proficiency? Actual L2 writing ability mean scores on in-class essays, and pre- and post L2WP composite means scores for 98 participants by type of student are displayed in Table 4. The IMR final mean ( $M=79.61$ ) was slightly higher than the midterm mean ( $M=79.27$ ), and the midterm mean higher than the diagnostic ( $M=76.71$ ). Similarly, the IS group final mean ( $M=79.67$ ) was higher than the midterm ( $M=76.50$ ), and the midterm mean higher than the diagnostic ( $M=74.11$ ). In contrast, the G1.5 group midterm mean ( $M=80.22$ ) was higher than both the diagnostic ( $M=75.89$ ) and the final ( $M=78.11$ ) mean scores.

**Table 4. Actual L2 Writing Ability and L2 Writing Proficiency**

	G1.5 Group (n = 9)		IMR Group (n = 51)		IS Group (n = 38)	
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Diagnostic Essay	75.89	5.8	76.71	10.5	74.11	12.7
Mid-term Essay	80.22	7.3	79.27	11.5	76.50	9.1
Final Essay	78.11	11.5	79.61	8.6	79.76	9.3
L2WP Pre-semester	151.67	10.3	151.86	12.7	147.74	12.5
L2WP Post-semester	159.67	13.5	157.22	16.5	153.71	16.0

Statistical differences ( $t = -2.663$ ,  $df = 97$ ,  $p < .05$ ) between the diagnostic and midterm essays; between the diagnostic and final essays ( $t = -3.908$ ,  $df = 97$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and between the pre- and post-semester perceived L2WP composite mean scores ( $t = -5.837$ ,  $df = 97$ ,  $p < .001$ ) across the three types of students were significant  $t$ -test results. Differences between midterm and final mean scores did not reach significance. The strength of the relationships between actual L2 writing ability and perceived L2 writing proficiency composite mean scores of participants was then examined using Pearson correlations. Overall, there were more significant correlations for the IMR students than for G1.5 students, and both the IMR students and the IS students shared similar significant relationships.

The G1.5 group correlation revealed a significantly strong positive relationship between the midterm and final essays ( $r = +.818$ ,  $n = 9$ ,  $p = .007$ ) at the .01 two-tailed level; a significantly strong positive between the midterm essays and post-semester perceived L2 writing proficiency ( $r = +.706$ ,  $n = 9$ ,  $p = .003$ ) at the .05 two-tailed level, and a moderate, positive relationship approaching significance between the final essay and post-semester self-rated perceived L2 writing proficiency ( $r = +.614$ ,  $n = 9$ ,  $p = .079$ ). The results suggested that G1.5 students' actual writing ability on the in-class essays were related to L2WP such that G1.5 students with high midterm and final essay scores were inclined to have realistic perceptions of their L2 writing proficiency post-semester.

Correlation results for the IMR group disclosed a significantly, moderate, positive relationship between the diagnostic and midterm essays ( $r = +.655$ ,  $n = 51$ ,  $p = .000$ ); between the midterm and final essays ( $r = +.682$ ,  $n = 51$ ,  $p = .000$ ) at the .001 two-tailed level, and a significant, moderate, positive relationship ( $r = +.340$ ,  $n = 51$ ,  $p = .015$ ) between the diagnostic and final essays at the .05 two-tailed level. A significantly weak, positive relationship existed between pre and post perceived L2WP ( $r = +.332$ ,  $n = 51$ ,  $p = .017$ ) at the .05 two-tailed level, but

this finding was unrelated to the actual L2 writing ability of the IMR group on in-class essays and the overrated perceptions IMR students maintained of their L2 writing proficiency.

The IS group correlation showed a significantly, moderate, positive relationship between the diagnostic and midterm essays ( $r = +.468$ ,  $n = 38$ ,  $p = .003$ ) at the .01 two-tailed level; a significant, moderate, positive relationship ( $r = +.618$ ,  $n = 38$ ,  $p = .000$ ) between the midterm and final essays, and a significant, moderate, positive relationship between the diagnostic and final essays ( $r = +.542$ ,  $n = 38$ ,  $p = .000$ ) at the .001 two-tailed level. Like the IMR group, the significantly moderate, positive relationship ( $r = +.441$ ,  $n = 38$ ,  $p = .006$ ) found at the .01 level two-tailed level between pre- and post-perceived L2WP was unrelated to the actual writing ability of the IS students evident in the underrated perceptions IS students maintained of their L2 writing proficiency. In the final analysis of teacher-graded in-class essays participants produced and grades assigned, actual L2 writing ability across the three types of students differed by only one percentage point. The IMR students averaged 79% (C+), G1.5 students averaged 78% (C+), and IS group averaged 77% (C+).

**RQ5.** Are there significant gains in L2 writing ability for the three types of students' from the diagnostic to midterm essay to final essay scores? Table 5 shows marginal gain that approached significance ( $t = -2.001$ ,  $df = 50$ ,  $p = .051$ ) in IMR students' diagnostic to midterm essay mean scores, and marginal gain ( $t = -1.873$ ,  $df = 50$ ,  $p = .067$ ) in their diagnostic to final essay mean scores

**Table 5. Gains in L2 Writing Ability**

	Diagnostic to <u>Midterm Essays</u>	Midterm to <u>Final Essays</u>	Diagnostic to <u>Final Essays</u>
IMR Group	.051+	--	.067+
IS Group	--	.017*	.003**
G1.5 Group	--	--	--

Statistically significant difference in gain was found in the IS group midterm to final essay mean scores ( $t = -2.498$ ,  $df = 37$ ,  $p = .017$ ) at the .05 two-tailed level, and statistical difference in the IS group diagnostic to final essay mean scores ( $t = -3.192$ ,  $df = 37$ ,  $p = .003$ ) at the .01 two-tailed level. There was no statistical difference in gain revealed for the G.1.5 group. Gain in L2 writing ability was, therefore, greater for IMR and IS students than for the G1.5 students. With low diagnostic and midterm mean scores, and a higher final mean score, the IS students had the most gain in L2 writing ability.

## Conclusion

Participants' expectations, aspirations, and perceptions of the cultural realities of the English academic written discourse community within the context of the L2 culture may not have been fixed or immutable, but the three types of students certainly needed more time to adjust, adapt and develop coping strategies and written academic language proficiency to

succeed at the college level. Regional similarities and differences in perceived writing attitude, writing ability, and writing behavior were specific to the African and Middle Eastern group, and word processing/computer skills specific to European and Mexico/South American groups. Generalizability of the findings was limited due to varying circumstances/conditions and emotional/physical challenges created by immersion in a new society and different educational environment. For some students from the African, Middle Eastern, and European regions perceived L2 writing proficiency was overshadowed by the pressures of the resettlement, challenges to traditional familial roles, and motivation for adaptation in a duality of cultures (Lucey, et al., 2000). It is also possible that it may have been the first time students had a native English-speaking teacher and exposure to rhetorical differences in their L1 and L2 reading-writing skills and learning capabilities in the ESL context.

### About the Author:

**Dr. Maxine E. Goldburg** is a TESOL educator/researcher, Academic Writing Editor and Student Affairs Representative at Alliant International University, San Diego, California who received a Master's degree in TESOL education from Long Island University, New York and Doctoral degree in TESOL Education from Alliant International University. After a seven-year career as an ESL teacher in the American public school system, Dr. Goldburg accepted a commission as EFL teacher, Vice Director and Dean of the International Education Center at Shandong University of Science & Technology in Taian, China. There she authored in collaboration with Shandong University of Science and Technology a teacher training manual entitled *Aiming Beyond*, published by Taishan Shandong Foreign Language Training Center of the State Administration of Foreign Experts. In addition to student advising, she provides academic writing support and editorial services to domestic and international undergraduate and graduate students and serves on the Review Board of the *Arab World English Journal*.

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