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Is There A Relationship Between Rhetorical Problems And Writing Process

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ABSTRACT

ESL and EFL writers encounter all sorts of writing difficulties, also known as rhetorical problems and these are encountered each time a writer embarks on a writing task. It is vital to further understand how ESL writers perceive these rhetorical problems because each writer may respond differently to these problems. The study sought to explore the perception of learners on rhetorical problems in writing and the writing process. In addition, the study also sought to identify the relationship between rhetorical problems and the writing process. The data was collected through the administration of a 5 Likert-scale quantitative survey and is rooted from Flower & Hayes (1980) and Petric & Czalf's (2003). The survey includes four sections namely 'writing difficulty', 'before writing', 'while writing' and 'when revising'. 125 of ESL learners from three public universities responded to this survey. The study found out that majority of the respondents agreed that writing is difficult due to the needs of long-term memory usage. Most respondents also prefer to revise the requirements of the task before writing and write the introduction first before continuing to complete the task during 'when writing stage'. Checking their essay for task fulfilment is the most preferred strategy when revising their writing task. On one hand, correlation analysis indicates that there is a low significant correlation between rhetorical problems and translating. The correlation analysis also shows a strong positive relationship between translating and reviewing. Overall, findings

suggest that university students are mainly concerned with the task fulfilment and this is continuously reflected in their choice of writing strategies. Future research should look at how learners gain their background knowledge and the sources of information they prefer. In conclusion, the teaching and learning of writing should also incorporate the latest technology in order to capture learners' attention and boost their motivation.
Keywords: Writing Process, Writing Difficulty, Rhetorical Problems.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Writing is a skill that demands a lot of cognitive process which involves pre, while and post stages. In addition to these, ESL and EFL learners also have to deal with internal and external challenges (Rahmat, 2020). This may include writing anxiety, inability to deal with grammatical structures, limited vocabulary and lack of background knowledge in the content area (see Azhari et al., 2022). According to Flower and Hayes (1981), writers encounter rhetorical problems and they can be categorized as i) rhetorical situations and ii) writer's own goal.

Writing skills are highly demanded especially in tertiary education where students are required to write assignments and research papers. And since many universities use English as their medium of instruction, it is necessary to equip students with sound writing skills. These skills will later be used in the workforce, especially in reports and proposal writing. In addition, students need to be exposed to the cognitive processes that are involved in writing. However, how many students are actually aware of these processes? And are they aware of the writing strategies that they can utilize to make their writing pieces comprehensible and coherent? The study seeks to explore how university students perceive writing difficulty, the process of writing and whether there is a relationship between writing difficulty and the process of writing.

1.2 Statement of Problem

English as a second language (ESL) and English as foreign language (EFL) learners perceive writing as a challenging task as it involves both cognitive and emotional aspects (Sulfiana, Kurniawati & Nurwanti, 2021). In ideal circumstances, writing would not be as difficult as how ESL and EFL learners experience if the writers manage to identify or overcome the challenges faced. As suggested by Fareed, Ashraf & Bilal (2016) writing skills of Pakistani ESL undergraduates' learners could be improved if the learners constantly read as reading will expose learners to a good range of vocabulary. Not only that, writing culture or writing practices should be developed as it could lead to greater opportunity of advancing the skills. Besides suggesting improvements that can be done individually, the researchers also emphasized on the importance of having effective teachers who could provide constructive and positive feedback to the learners. Therefore, in order to get skilful teachers, training should be provided by the institutions.

Despite the ideal situations that could be achieved as aforementioned, there are also challenges experienced by writers in writing. Derakhshan and Shirejini (2020) enumerated Iranian EFL learners' perception towards common writing difficulties. The frequency results for each item provide insight into this matter by indicating that the

majority of participants identified grammar, punctuation, and spelling as significant challenges in writing. In line with the result of the frequency, it is also reported that these are some of the factors that lead to difficulty in writing sentences, specifically paragraphs as it is closely related with choice of words, organisations, familiarity with genres and others. In addition to that, most interviewees stated that the most challenging concern for them is constructing sentences that are in a coherent and cohesive paragraph.

Similar findings can also be seen in a study conducted by Nur Amalina Jaafar Sidek & Hanita Hanim Ismail (2021) on factors contributing to writing difficulties in narrative writing among Malaysian Primary learners. It can be identified that the significant factors are difficulties in writing coherently such as coming out with short and logical paragraphs, the interference of L1, improper writing topics and educational or teaching approaches for instance lack of post writing feedback. However, it is also highlighted that the result may be varied based on individuals' specific techniques for learning language.

Previous studies have attempted to identify factors that lead to common problems faced by learners, especially among ESL/EFL learners in writing and ways to overcome it. However, there is still a need to further research how these learners perceive rhetorical problems and stages in the process of writing. Additionally, the present study explores whether there is any significant connection between rhetorical problems and the writing process.

1.3 Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore perception of learners on rhetorical problems in writing and the writing process. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

- How do learners perceive rhetorical problems in writing?
- How do learners perceive planning in writing?
- How do learners perceive translating in writing?
- How do learners perceive reviewing in writing?
- Is there a relationship between rhetorical problems and writing process?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Rhetorical Problems/ Problems in Writing

Writing is one of the crucial skills and there are many different styles of writing which fall under formal essay and informal essays, also there are various reasons for writing (Ibrahim, 2015). Through writing, a learner is able to express one's thoughts and ideas. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) mention that writing is a complex skill since it requires effort and does not come naturally. Though writing skill has been taught since young, many ESL learners still face issues and problems with writing and some issues listed by Hedge (1988) that affect learners' effective writing are grammatical problems, sentence structure problems, word choice problems and cognitive problems including punctuation, capitalization, spelling, content and organization. Some of the causes of learners' problems in writing highlighted by Ibrahim (2015) are the nature of the writing process as it requires the mastery of grammar, conceptual thinking and judgmental elements, learners' lack of motivation, inadequate time, lack of practice

and teachers' feedback. Despite the problems faced in writing, Hedge (1988) suggests eight points to be included in writing to enhance one's essay which are accurate grammar, variety of vocabulary, correct punctuation, meaningful layout conventions, accurate spelling, variety and clear sentence structure, linking ideas and information as well as convincing content. In terms of the writing process, Hedge (1988) further proposed three steps to be able to write well which are; start with an overall plan, think about what to write and who are the audience, draft sections, review, revise and edit the work.

2.2 Writing Process

The writing process approach was widely applied in the 1970s to replace the traditional approach in writing allowing students to experience the writing processes rather than focusing on the outcome of their products based on teachers' feedback (Tompkins, 1994). Graves (1983) proposes the processes of writing should comprise prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. Laksmi (2006) later applied Graves' approach in her classroom, and she found that the approach is helpful as the processes can be understood easily by EFL students in her classroom. In addition, Tompkins (1994) also adds that this process is circular which means that the students can review the previous parts of their works to edit in order to modify or improve the final products before publishing.

2.3 Past Studies on Problems in Writing

Many studies have been conducted to investigate the writing difficulties faced by learners, especially in terms of the challenges faced in the writing process and the solutions. Muhammad Fareed, Almas Ashraf and Muhammad Bilal (2016) conducted a study on Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners to investigate the problems and factors faced in their writing skills as well as suggestions to improve their writing skills. This study was carried out on eleven undergraduate ESL learners and ten English language teachers through interviews and essay collections namely descriptive essays, narrative essays and argumentative essays. These essays were collected from 30 undergraduate ESL learners from four public and private universities for the purpose of thematic analysis to identify the emerging themes and patterns. Several issues were identified including structure organization, reliance on first language, lack of ideas, writing anxiety and problems in linguistic proficiency (vocabulary, syntax and grammar). These challenges were influenced by several factors which are learners' lack of motivation and ideas, lack of practice, large number of students in classes, untrained teachers and issues with teaching and examination system. From the issues and problems identified, several suggestions were listed including increase in learners' reading and writing practice, more writing competitions, include indirect vocabulary teaching, increase the number of trained teachers and finally, reform the examination system. Next, Moses and Mohamad (2019) did a literature review study on the challenges faced by students and teachers on writing skills in ESL contexts. Several problems were identified from both learners and educators' perspective. From the view of learners, some concerning problems identified are lack of vocabulary and trouble with grammar which leads to anxiety as grammar is the structure that conveys meaning of the sentences. Some common mistakes made in grammar are subject-verb

agreement, pronouns, tenses, articles, prepositions and basic sentence structures (Fareed et al., 2016). Aside from that, poor spelling can also cause anxiety among learners in writing skill. Few other identified issues are learners' readiness, learners' motivation and lack of exposure to reading materials as reading skill is closely linked to writing skill where learners are able to enhance their vocabulary as well as other challenges through reading. From the same study by Moses & Mohamad (2019), challenges faced by teachers in teacher writing skills were also identified and these includes learners low level of motivation, learners' different academic level in the same class which requires different approaches, lack of parental support that deals with learners' motivation and lack of professional experience. These studies reflect the challenges faced by learners and educators in writing skill.

2.4 Past Studies on Writing Process

Numerous studies have been carried out to explore the writing process. A study by Bui, Nguyen & Viet (2023) investigated the strategies Vietnamese EFL pre-service teachers used in academic writing in their assignments for instance reports, final assignments and project papers. 17 pre-service teachers' final assignment papers (one paper per teacher) were analysed and semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten teachers. The research utilized a content-based method to analyze qualitative data, specifically focusing on a detailed taxonomy derived from previous research. This taxonomy encompassed various strategies for academic writing in a second language (L2), such as rhetorical, metacognitive, cognitive, and social affective strategies. The findings indicate that the teachers participating in the study primarily employed rhetorical, metacognitive, and cognitive strategies. Additionally, the results revealed that the teachers' utilization of these strategies during the writing process was influenced by their levels of self-efficacy and self-regulation. The implications of these findings for the second language (L2) writing classroom center around enhancing the quality of writing for pre-service teachers through the implementation of academic writing strategies.

Similarly, Nhung (2023) conducted a study primarily to investigate the writing strategies used by participants and to discover the frequently used strategies by students with high proficiency as compared to students with medium and low proficiency at different writing stages which are; before, during and after the writing assignment. 137 English-major students participated in this study. According to the study, students with high proficiency utilise writing styles more frequently than students with medium and poor proficiency. High proficiency students talk about their ideas with peers and professors, study more often outside of class, and consider how previous knowledge relates to new material. Unlike low proficiency students, they use their native language first before translating it into English. They also proofread their writing using dictionaries and grammatical guides. While low proficiency students record errors to prevent repetition, high proficiency students frequently alter grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation. Overall, students with high proficiency employ techniques more often than students with poor proficiency.

Therefore, it can be concluded that ESL learners of various competency levels employ a variety of writing strategies. Although different writing strategies were used by the participants in these two studies, it can be seen that these strategies were all applied throughout the writing processes namely, pre-writing, drafting and revising.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

This study is rooted from the writing process model by Flower and Hayes (1980). With reference to figure 1, the composing process involves three main factors; the writer's long-term memory, the task environment and the writing process. At the start of the composing process, the writer needs to use his/her long-term memory for the initial content of the essay. This comes in the form of the writer's background knowledge. Next, the task environment determines how the writer sees the writing task. The rhetorical problems depict the writing difficulties that the writers face based on their knowledge of the topic, audience and exigency. The most active stage is the writing process which involves planning, translating and reviewing.

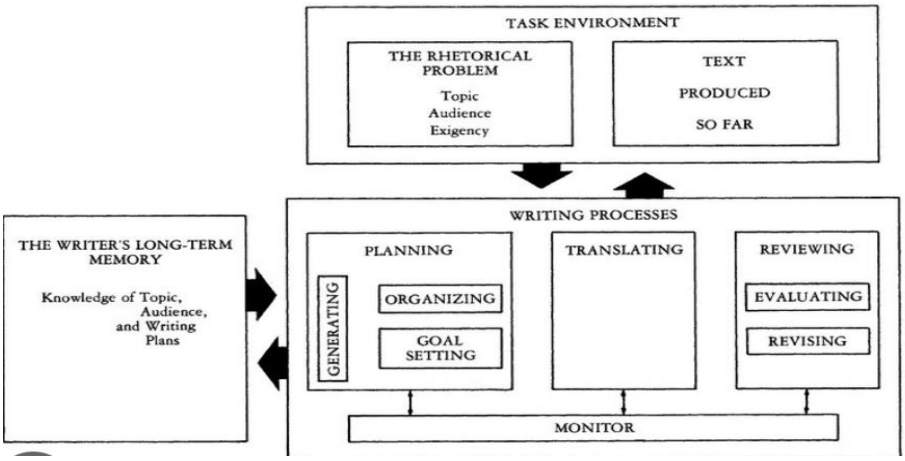

Figure 1- Writing Process Model (Source- Flower and Hayes, 1980)

Figure 2 shows the conceptual framework of this study. In the context of this study, the rhetorical problem refers to the writing problems faced by the writers (Rahmat, 2020). Next, writing process labelled by planning, translating and reviewing correspond with Petric & Czalf's (2003) before writing, when writing and when revising respectively.

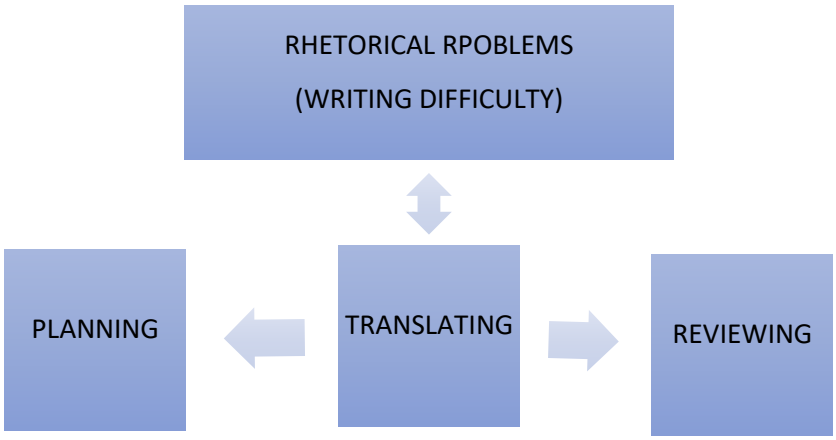

Figure 2-Conceptual Framework of the Study-
Rhetorical problems and writing Process

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study is done to explore motivation factors for learning among undergraduates. A purposive sample of 125 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Flower & Hayes (1980) and Petric & Czalf's (2003) to reveal the variables in table 1 below. The survey has 5 sections. Section A has items on demographic profile. Section B has 7 items on rhetorical problems.. Section C has 8 items on planning. Section D has 14 items on when writing and section E has 12 items on reviewing.

Table 1- Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECTION	WRITING PROCESS MODEL Flower and Hays (1980)	WRITING STAGE Petric & Czalr (2003)	NO OF ITEMS
B	RHETORICAL PROBLEMS	Writing Difficulty	7
C	PLANNING	Before Writing	8
D	TRANSLATING	When writing	14
E	REVIEWING	When Revising	12
			41

Table 2- Reliability of Survey

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.857	41

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .857, thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument chosen/used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 Findings for Demographic Profile

Q1 Gender

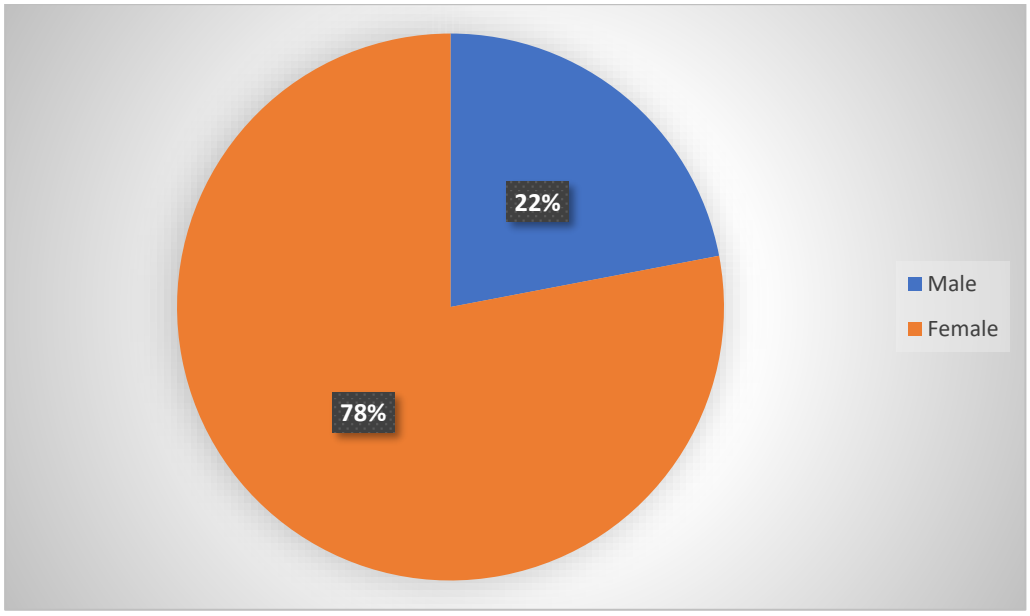

Figure 3- Percentage for Gender

As indicated in figure 3, female respondents represented 78% and the male respondents represented 22%.

Q2 Age Group

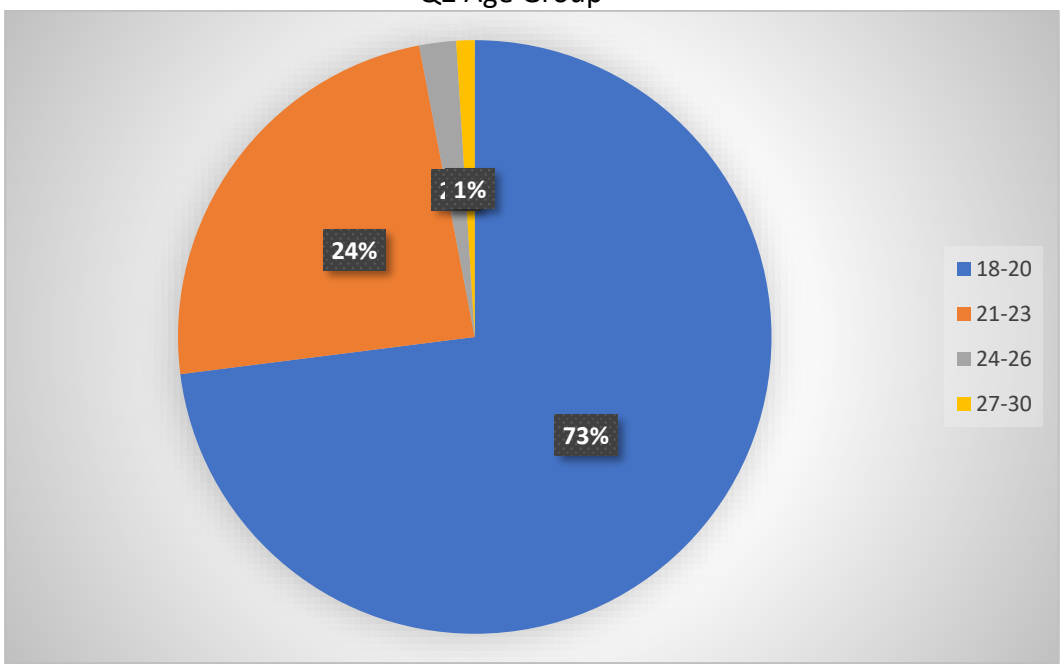

Figure 4- Percentage for Age Group

From figure 4, it can be seen that the majority of the population are aged 18-20 years old with 73%, followed by aged 21-22 years old with 24%, aged 24-26 years old 2% and the minority of 1% aged 27-30 years old.

Q3 Level of Studies

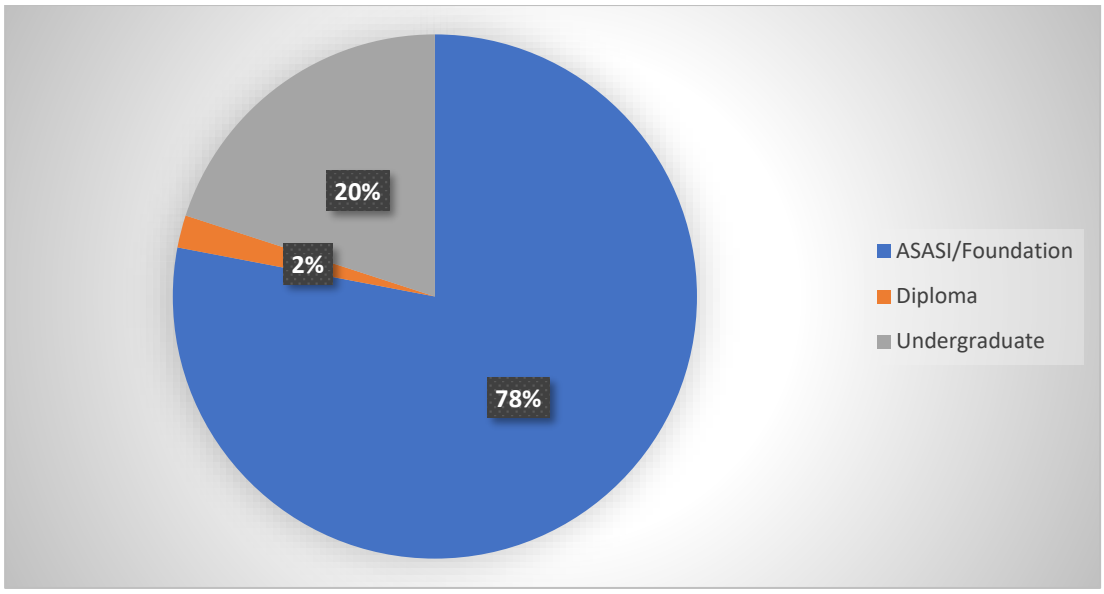

Figure 5- Percentage for Level of Studies

From figure 5, it is noted that there are three levels of studies where the majority of the respondents are ASASI/ Foundation with 78%, followed by undergraduate students 20% and a minority of Diploma students with 2%.

Q4 Disciplines

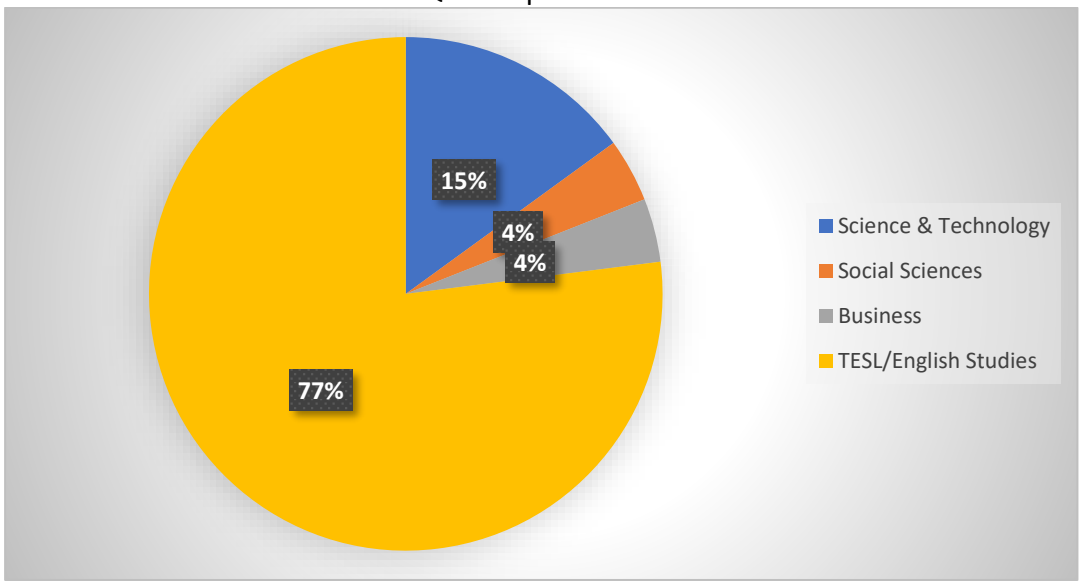

Figure 6- Percentage for Disciplines

Figure 6 shows four main disciplines of studies, in which the biggest group is TESL/ English Studies with 77%. Next is Science & Technology with 15% and equal distribution of respondents from Social Science and Business with 4% each discipline.

Q5 Type of Institution

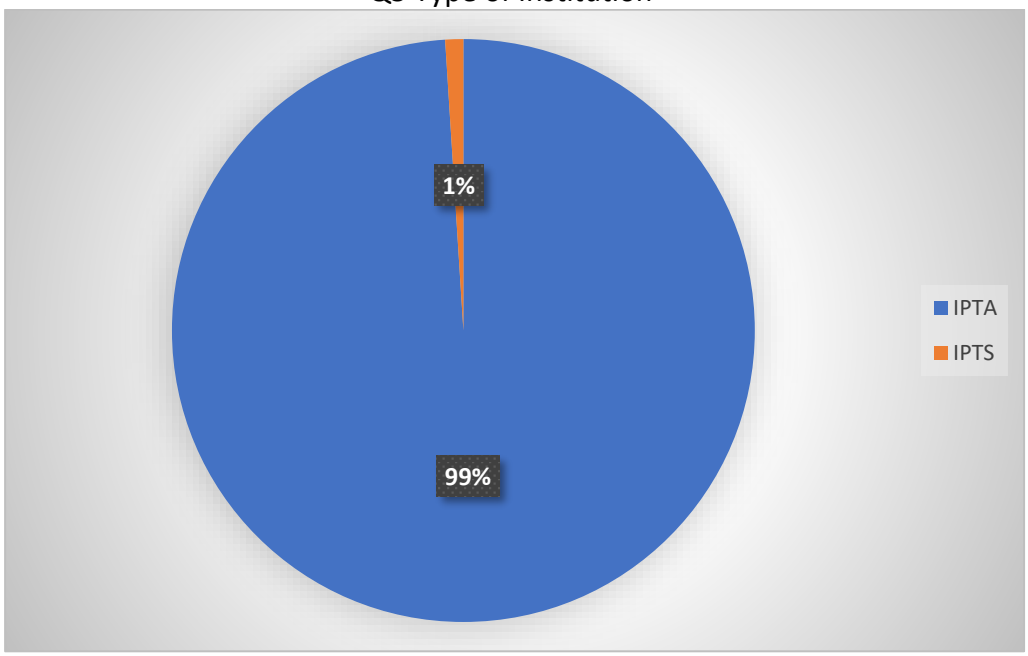

Figure 7- Percentage for Type of Institution

In figure 7, the majority of respondents are from IPTA with 99% and 1% from IPTS.

Q6 MUET Result

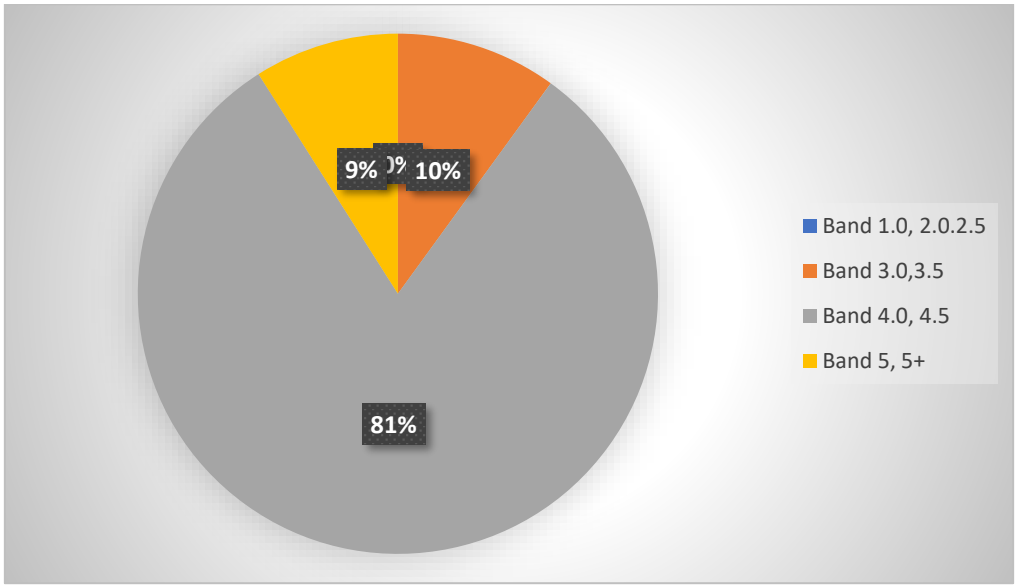

Figure 8- Percentage for MUET

Figure 8 indicates the percentage for MUET. Majority of the respondents scored Band 4.0, 4.5 with 81%. Next is 10% for Band 3.0,3.5 and followed closely by Band 5,5+ with 9%. None of the respondents scored Band 2.5 and below.

4.2 Findings for Rhetorical Problems

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do learners perceive rhetorical problems in writing? In the context of this study, rhetorical problems are measured by writing difficulty.

Figure 9- Mean for Writing Difficulty

Figure 9 indicates average mean score for writing difficulties based on seven statements. The fifth statement has the highest mean score which is 3.3 where the majority of participants agreed that writing is difficult as they need to use their long-term memory based on the topic given. The second highest is the second statement which scored 3.2 where it signifies writing could be difficult due to difficulties in achieving some goals in writing. Subsequently, the third highest mean score; with 31 mean is the sixth statement on individual paragraphs. Next, the first and the final statements fall under fourth and fifth highest mean which scored 3 and 2.9. The first statement conveys that participants have difficulties in writing due to not being familiar with different types of writing, while the final statement indicates difficulties faced due to lack of clarity in the writing process. Finally, the least mean score which is 2.3 represents third and fourth statements which both are related to the educators where writers experienced difficulties in understanding the instructions and explanation provided by the educators.

4.3 Findings for Planning

This section presents data to answer research question 2- How do learners perceive planning in writing? In the context of this study, planning is shown what writers do before writing.

BEFORE WRITING (BW)

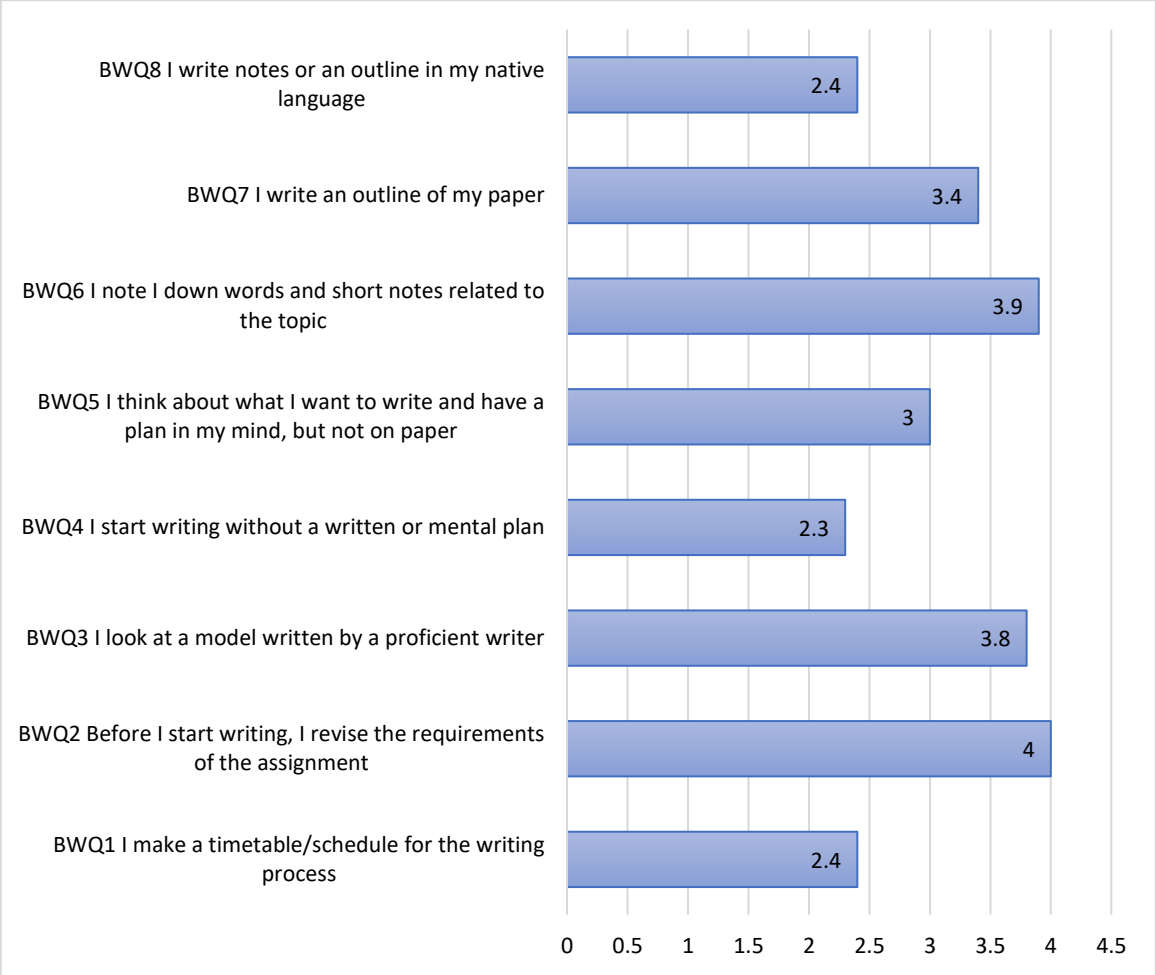

Figure 10- Mean for Before Writing

Figure 10 displays eight statements regarding the pre-writing stage. The second statement received the highest average score of 4, followed closely by the sixth and third statements, which received mean scores of 3.9 and 3.8, respectively. These statements indicate that before writing, the participants would revise the requirement of the task given, draft some points and refer to a writing model. Following that, the fourth mean score of 3.4 is on the seventh statement where an outline of the paper will be written. The fifth statement explained a situation where participants will visually plan on what needs to be written. Next, the first and final statements share the same mean score of 2.4 where a schedule of writing process will be planned and notes or outlines are written in participants' L1. Finally, the lowest mean score is 2.3 which reflects how some participants just write without any proper plan.

4.4 Findings for Translating

This section presents data to answer research question 3- How do learners perceive translating in writing? In the context of this study, translating is done during the "when writing" stage.

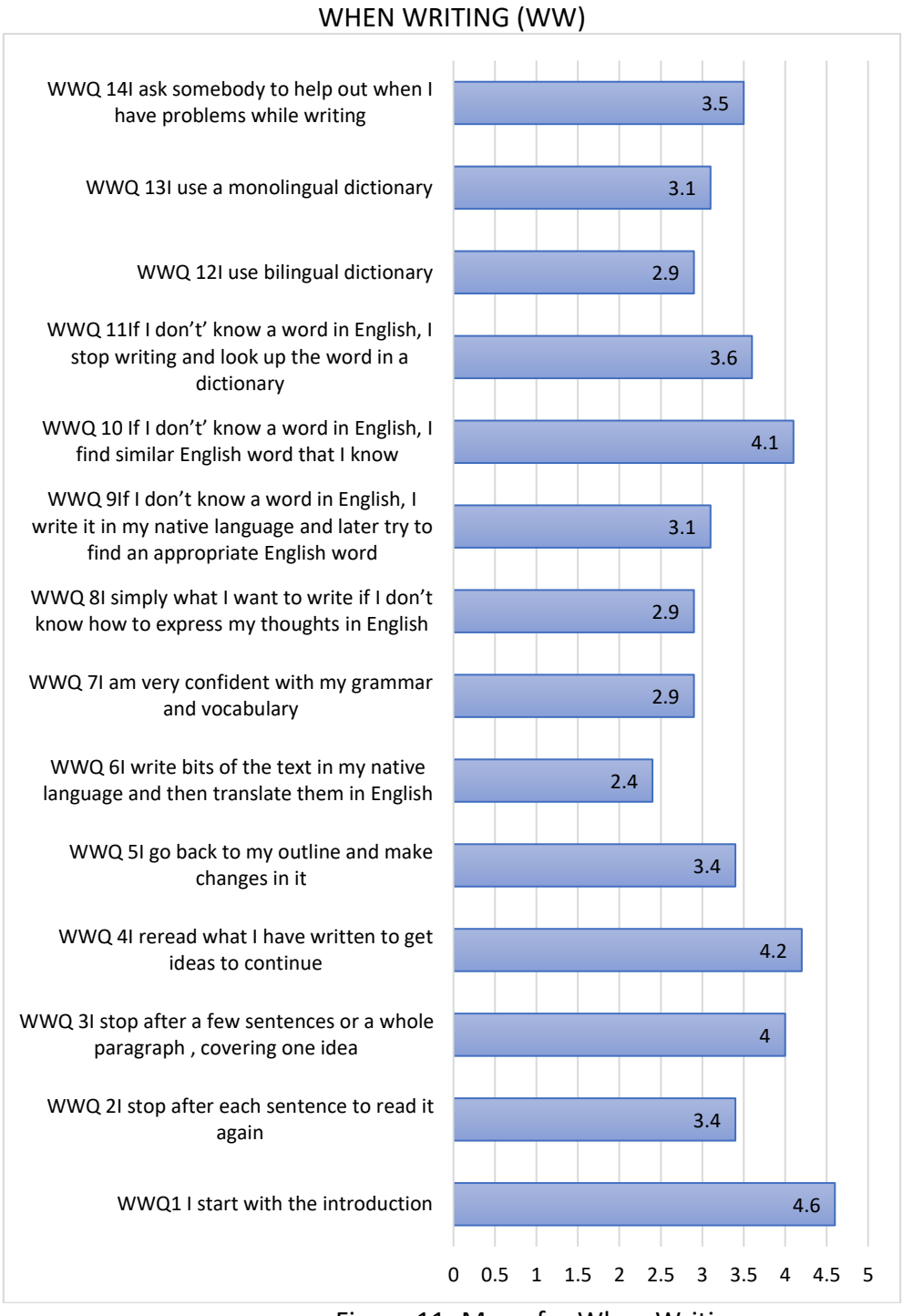

Figure 11- Mean for When Writing

Figure 11 shows 14 statements reflecting the mean score for the challenges faced during the writing stage itself. The highest mean score is 4.6 for the first statement where the participants state that they start writing by writing the introduction and they have to reread what they have written to get more ideas to

continue writing with a mean score of 4.2. Statement 10 scored 4.1 where participants had to find a synonym of the words that they do not know in English, some would search for the word in a dictionary (mean= 3.6) and ask for help when facing problems while writing (mean= 3.5). The second and fifth statements scored 3.4 where participants have to stop after completing each sentence and reread them as well as go back to the outline and make changes. A mean score of 3.1 is for two statements where participants have to write a word in their native language if they do not know the word in English and later find an appropriate work in English as well as use a monolingual dictionary for statements 9 and 13. Participants responded neutrally for statements 7, 8 and 12 (mean= 2.9) where they are very confident with their grammar and vocabulary, they simply write what they want to write if they do not know how to express their thoughts in English and they use a bilingual dictionary. Mean score of 2.4 is recorded for statement six where participants would write some parts of the text in their native language and later translate to English language.

4.5 Findings for Reviewing

This section presents data to answer research question 4- How do learners perceive reviewing in writing? In the context of this study, reviewing is measured by the “when revising” stage.

WHEN REVISING (WR)

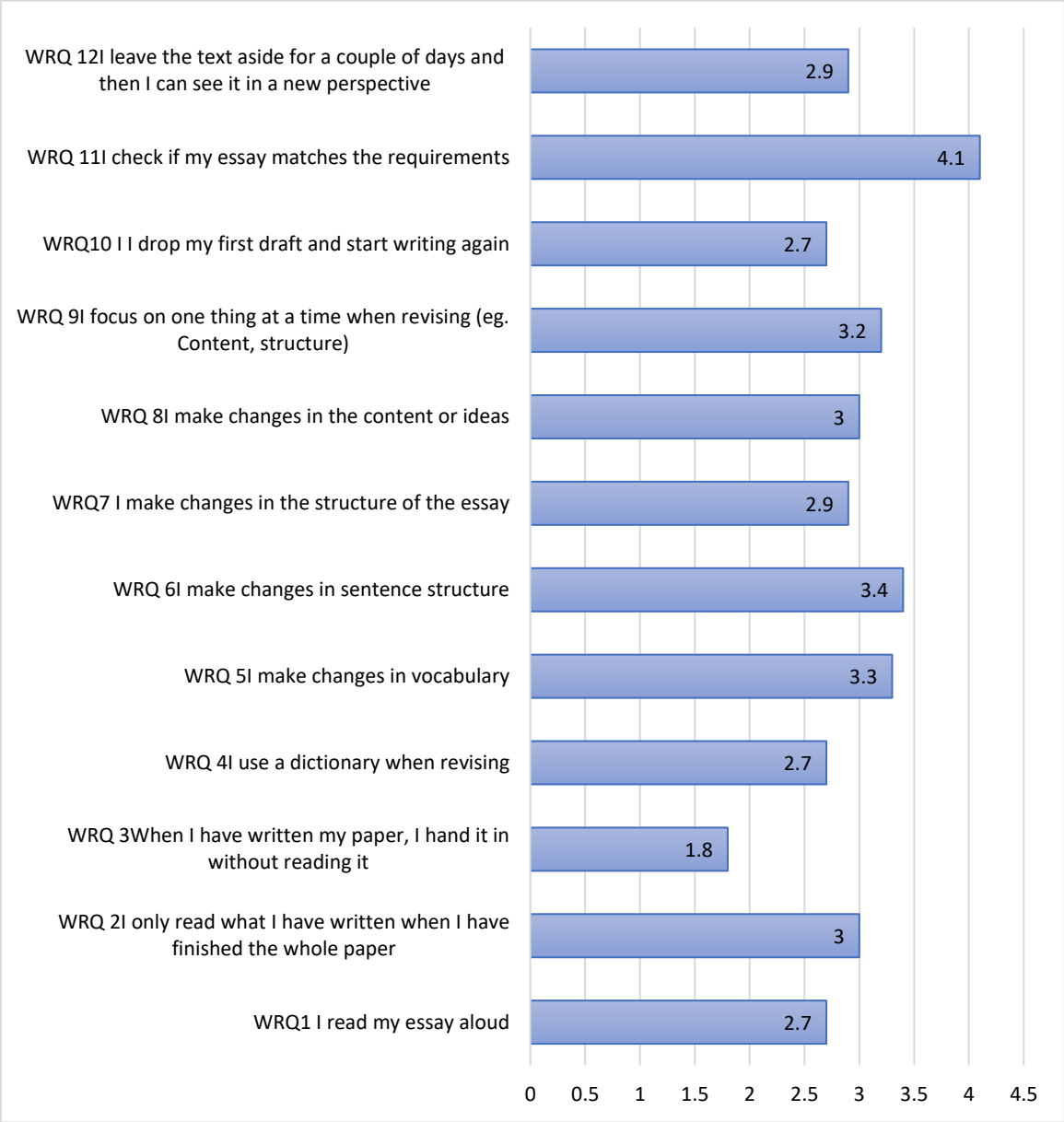

Figure 12- Mean for When revising

Table 12 presents the mean score for when revising stage. This stage consists of 12 statements with the highest mean score (4.1) and the lowest mean score (1.8). The highest mean score is for statement 11 where participants positively responded that they check their essay to ensure that it matches the requirements given. Participants responded neutral for most of the statements. Statement 6 recorded 3.40 where participants make changes in the sentence structure, statement 5 (mean= 3.3) participants make changes in vocabulary, and statement 9 (mean= 3.2), participants focus on one thing at a time when they make changes. A similar mean score of 3 is recorded for statement 2 where participants only read what they have written when they have finished the whole paper and statement 8 where participants make changes in the content or ideas. Statements 7 and 12 have similar scores (mean= 2.9) in which participants make changes in the structure of the essay and leave the text aside for a couple of days and then are able to see it from a new perspective. Mean score of 2.7 is recorded for statement 1 “I read my essay aloud”, statement 4 “I use a dictionary

when revising" and statement 10 "I drop my first draft and start writing". Participants responded negatively for statement 3 where they submit their paper without reading it indicating that they show a positive attitude towards revising their essay.

4.6 Findings for Relationship between Rhetorical problems and Writing Process

This section presents data to answer research question 4- Is there a relationship between rhetorical problems and writing process? To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between metacognitive, effort regulation, cognitive, social and affective strategies data is anlaysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in table 3, 4, and 5 below.

Table 3- Correlation between Rhetorical problems and Translating

Correlations

		RhetoricalProblems	Translating
RhetoricalProblems	Pearson Correlation	1	.273**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
	N	125	125
Translating	Pearson Correlation	.273**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	125	125

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows there is an association between rhetorical problems and translating. Correlation analysis shows that there is a low significant association between rhetorical problems and translating (r=.273**) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a weak positive relationship between rhetorical problems and translating.

Table 4- Correlation between Translating and Reviewing

Correlations

		Translating	Reviewing
Translating	Pearson Correlation	1	.559**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	125	125
Reviewing	Pearson Correlation	.559**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	125	125

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows there is an association between translating and reviewing. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between translating and reviewing (r=.559**) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between translating and reviewing.

Table 5 -Correlation between Translating and Planning

Correlations

		Translating	Planning
Translating	Pearson Correlation	1	.475**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	125	125
Planning	Pearson Correlation	.475**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	125	125

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows there is an association between translating and planning. Correlation analysis shows that there is a moderate significant association between translating and planning (r=.475**) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0.

This means that there is also a moderate positive relationship between translating and planning.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Findings and Discussions

The study aims to explore learners' perceptions on rhetorical problems in writing, and the three planning stages: planning, translating and reviewing following the writing process model by Flower and Hayes. (1980). The first research question investigates the learners' perceptions on rhetorical problems (writing difficulty) in writing and findings highlight that the need to use long-term memory makes essay writing challenging because writers lack background knowledge of the content area. This echoes with the findings from previous studies that highlighted writers' limited background knowledge (Azhari et al 2022). The second most preferred factor that contributes to writing difficulty is having to achieve the goal for essay writing, which is typically common for many ESL and EFL writers which has been suggested in previous research. The second, third and fourth research questions seek to explore learners' perceptions of the three writing stages: planning (before writing), translating (while writing) and reviewing (when revising). Majority of the respondents answered that they revise the requirements of the assignment before starting the task. Two other strategies that also received high responses are jotting down words and short notes and looking at essay models that have been produced by proficient writers. When writing, the majority of the respondents chose to start with the introduction and others chose to reread what they have written in order to get ideas to continue. The least chosen strategy is to actually write some parts of the essay in their native language and later translate it into English. The most preferred strategy for reviewing has to be checking if my essay matches the requirements of the task followed by making changes in sentence structure. This is similar to a past study conducted by Roofi et al (2017) that also investigated university students. The final research question seeks to investigate the relationship between rhetorical problems and the writing process. Correlation analysis indicates that there is a low significant correlation between rhetorical problems and translating. The correlation analysis also shows a strong positive relationship between translating and reviewing.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Findings suggest that university students are mainly concerned with the task fulfilment that will later result in their course grades. This is continuously reflected in their choice of writing strategies. In addition, most learners agreed that background knowledge is the key to good writing. However, with the recent developments in digital technology, most learners would rather watch videos to understand a topic rather than reading about it in print. Hence, writing teachers need to encourage their students to read and find means and ways to connect their students to reading. Also, future researchers may want to look at how learners gain their background knowledge and the sources of information that they prefer. In conclusion, the teaching and learning of writing will have to incorporate the latest technology in order to capture learners' attention and boost their motivation.

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