

Exploring Writing Process from The Social Cultural Theory

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Abstract

Contrary to popular beliefs, writing is not a solitary process. Writers use language to communicate with the people around them for content and as audience to their work. The writing process can be considered as a social cultural task in several ways. This quantitative study explores the perception of learners' writing process from the social cultural view. To begin with, language use is measured by (i) metacognitive and (b) cognitive strategies. Next, zone of proximal development (zpd) is measured by (i) effort regulation and (ii) social strategies. Finally, social interaction is measured by affective strategies. 109 students participated in this study. The instrument used in this study is a questionnaire. Data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. This study revealed that there is a strong positive relationship between language use and zone of proximal development. There is also a strong positive relationship between zone of proximal development and social interaction. Finally, there is also a strong positive relationship between social interaction and language use. Findings in this study bear interesting implications in the teaching of writing strategies.

Keywords: Writing, Language Use, Zone of Proximal Development, Social Interaction, Strategies.

Introduction

Contrary to popular beliefs, writing is not a solitary process. Writers use language to communicate with the people around them for content and as audience to their work. Flower and Hayes (1981) state that writers go through three important stages when they write and they are planning, translating and reviewing. In the planning stage, the writer may need to connect with people or devices around them to accumulate content for the writing. Next, during the translating stage, the writer may convert (a) oral thoughts into written form. They may also convert ideas from (a) reading tasks into their own interpretation of written form.

The study by Dari, et.al (2022) explored student-centred and process-oriented writing instructions. The study specifically looked at the writing strategies used by 125 students in a university and found that writers used different types of strategies at different stages of the writing task. In addition to that, Aluemalai and Maniam (2020) suggested future studies to explore writing strategies in different forms and also investigate how these strategies influence different aspects of the writing task. This study is done to explore perception of learners on their use of writing strategies. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

- How do learners perceive language use in writing?
- How do learners perceive zone of proximal development in writing?
- How do learners perceive social interaction in writing?
- Is there a relationship between language use, zone of proximal development and social interaction?

Literature Review

Social Cultural Theory and Learning Writing

Learning is a social process as learners learner through interaction. The social cultural theory is introduced by Vygotsky (1978) and the theory states that firstly, language use is important for successful learning. This refers to the learners' use of internal language to create their own meaning. Secondly, Vygotsky (1978) also emphasizes the influence of social interaction in learning. The interaction allows learners to practice social skills and even problem solving skills to make the interaction work. Lastly, in line with social interaction, Vygotsky (1978) also felt that learners achieve more in a group than they can alone- hence achieving the zone of proximal development.

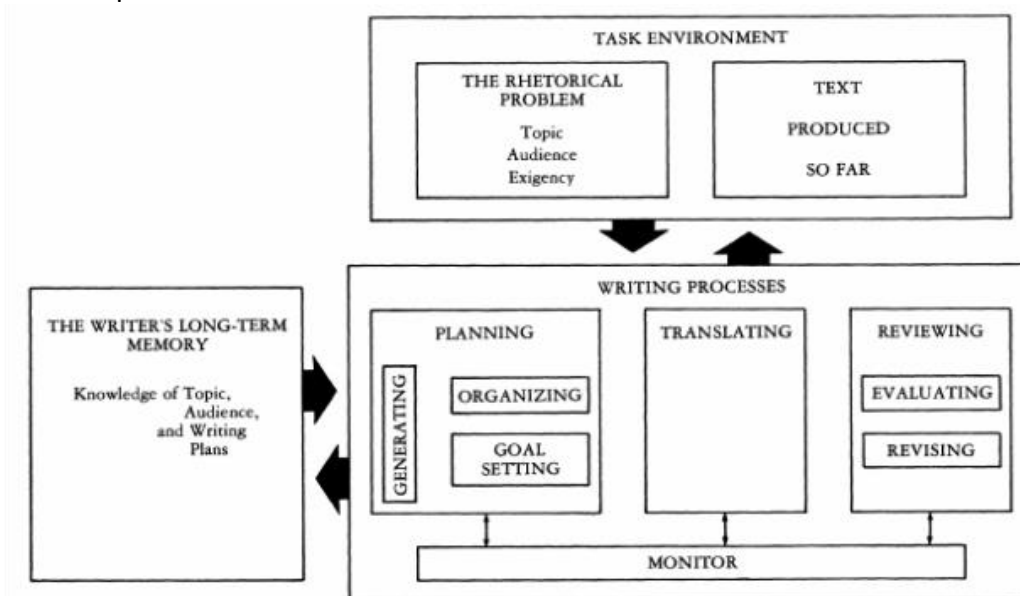


Figure 1- The Composing Process
(source: Flower and Hayes, 1981)

Figure 1 presents the composing process by (Flower and Hayes, 1981). The model explains the main components involved in the composing process. The initial component is the (a) task environment. This is initial phase where the writer receives the writing task and needs to consider the (a) rhetorical problem and (b) text produced so far. Rhetorical problems refer to

the writer's knowledge of the topic, exigency and their audience. This component involves the writer's language/communicative ability (especially communicating with the audience) to make the writing meaningful. The next component is the writer's long-term memory. This requires the writer to have knowledge of the topic, audience and writing plan. This requires the writer to practice their social interaction when they undergo the process of preparing the writing plan which includes obtaining information from sources. The last component is the writing process. Flower and Hayes (1981) considers this stage as the writers' cognitive ability. Writers depend on their cognitive functions to plan, translate and review their writing. Similarly, Han (2017) merges the writing strategy use from traditional views and cultural perspectives. He states that writing is strategy is first understood from the cognitive development theory. Next, the use of writing strategies is seen from the communication theory when the writer are seen to use discourse, or different communicative purposes. Finally, writing is also considered society-mediated; especially when the writing instructors bridge the gap for students by scaffolding learning activities for them.

Past Research on Writing

The study by Dari, et.al (2022) explored student-centred and process-oriented writing instructions. The study specifically looked at the writing strategies used by 125 students in a university. The instrument used is a questionnaire by (Petrić & Czár, 2003). Data is analysed using descriptive statistics to report on the types of strategies used and their frequency of use; as well as the stages of writing used. Findings showed that most students are medium users of the strategies. Findings also revealed that students used While writing stage followed by Pre-writing and Revising writing stages. The findings indicated that the teaching of academic writing needs to accommodate the development of writing strategies used in the three stages of writing, especially Pre-writing and Revising writing.

Another study was done by Aluemalai and Maniam (2020) to examine the writing strategies used by ESL students. The study was done to examine ESL students' preferred strategies. Three main strategies were examined and they were pre-writing, while writing and revising strategies. 50 students participated in this study. The instrument used was a questionnaire. Data was analysed using SPSS. Findings showed that preferred the planning strategies more than the other 2 strategies.

The study by Rahmawati et al (2019) explored the types of writing strategies used by high and low achievers. This qualitative research was done at the Language Training Centre of Universitas Gadjah Mada. The participants were there high achievers and three low achievers in the programme. Data was collected from structured interview and open-ended questionnaire. Findings revealed that all writers use all the writing strategies. The findings also showed that high achievers used more writing strategies compared the low achievers.

Conceptual Framework

Learning writing can be a joy or a pain for learners. It depends on how the writing instructors based their writing focus on (Rahmat, 2022). According to Vygotsky (1978), based on the social cultural theory, (a) language is a n essential tool in interaction, (b) social interaction plays an important role in learning and (c) learning occurs within the sone of proximal development. These three factors in social cultural theory is scaffolded onto the writing strategies by Raoofi,et.al (2017) to reveal the framework in figure 1. In the context of this

study, language use is measured by (i) metacognitive and (b) cognitive strategies. Next, zone of proximal development (zpd) is measured by (i) effort regulation and (ii) social strategies. Finally, social interaction is measured by affective strategies.

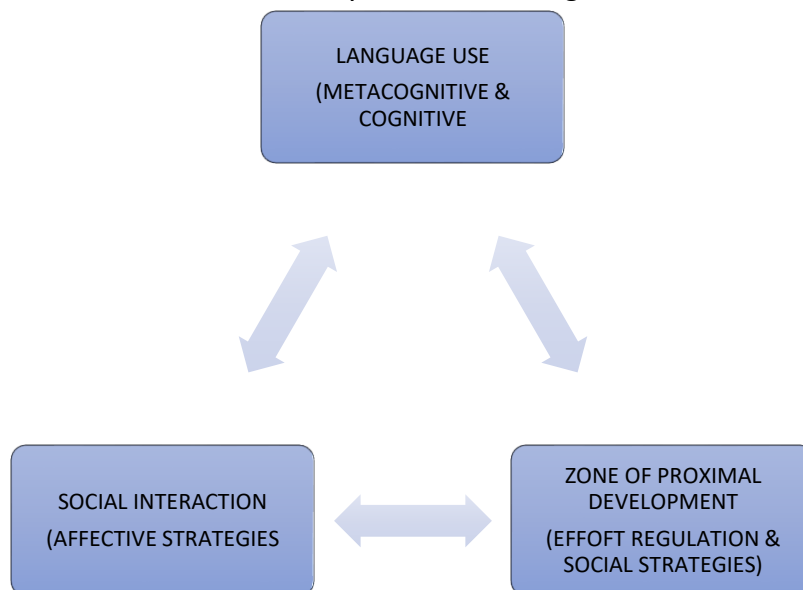


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study- Relationship of Variables in Social Cultural Theory in Writing

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to explore motivation factors for learning among undergraduates. A purposive sample of 109 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Vygotsky (1978) and Roofi, et. al (2017) to reveal the variables in table 1 below. The survey has 4 sections. Section A has items on demographic profile. Section B has 16 items on language use. Section C has 9 items on Zone of Proximal development (ZPD) and section D has 3 items on Social interaction

Table 1
Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECT	SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY (Vygotsky, 1978)	WRITING STRATEGY (Raofi, et. al. 2017)	ITEMS	ITEMS	Cronbach Alpha
B	LANGUAGE USE	Metacognitive (MWS)	10	16	.918
		Cognitive (CWSQ)	6		
C	ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT	Effort Regulation (ERSQ)	4	8	.811
		Social (SWSQ)	4		
D	SOCIAL INTERACTION	Affective (AWSQ)	3	3	.749
				27	.925

Table 1 also shows the reliability of all sections in the survey. The analysis shows a Section A has a Cronbach alpha of .918. Section B has a Cronbach alpha of .811. Section C has a Cronbach alpha of .749 and overall the questionnaire has a Cronbach Alpha of .925. These

scores thus reveal 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.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

This section (refer to table 2) presents the findings for the demographic in the form of percentage.

Table 2

Findings for Demographic Profile

Q	Heading	Categories		
		Male	Female	
1	Gender	26%	74%	
2	Discipline	Science & Technology	Humanities	Business & Management
		13%	19%	8%
3	Self-Rated English Proficiency	Weak	Average	Good
		11%	83%	6%
4	Country of Study	Thailand	Malaysia	
		84%	16%	

Table 2 shows the percentage for demographic profile of respondents. Firstly, when it comes to gender, 26% of the respondents are male and 74% are female. Secondly, for discipline, 13% of the students are from Science & Technology. 19% are from Humanities while 8% are from Business & Management. Next, The respondents were asked to self-rate their English proficiency. 11% self-rated themselves as weak. 83% self-rated themselves as average while 6% rated themselves as good. Finally, 84% of the respondents are from Thailand while 16% are from Malaysia.

Findings for language use

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do learners perceive language use in writing? In the context of this study, language use is measured by (i) metacognitive and (ii) cognitive strategies.

Metacognitive (MWS)

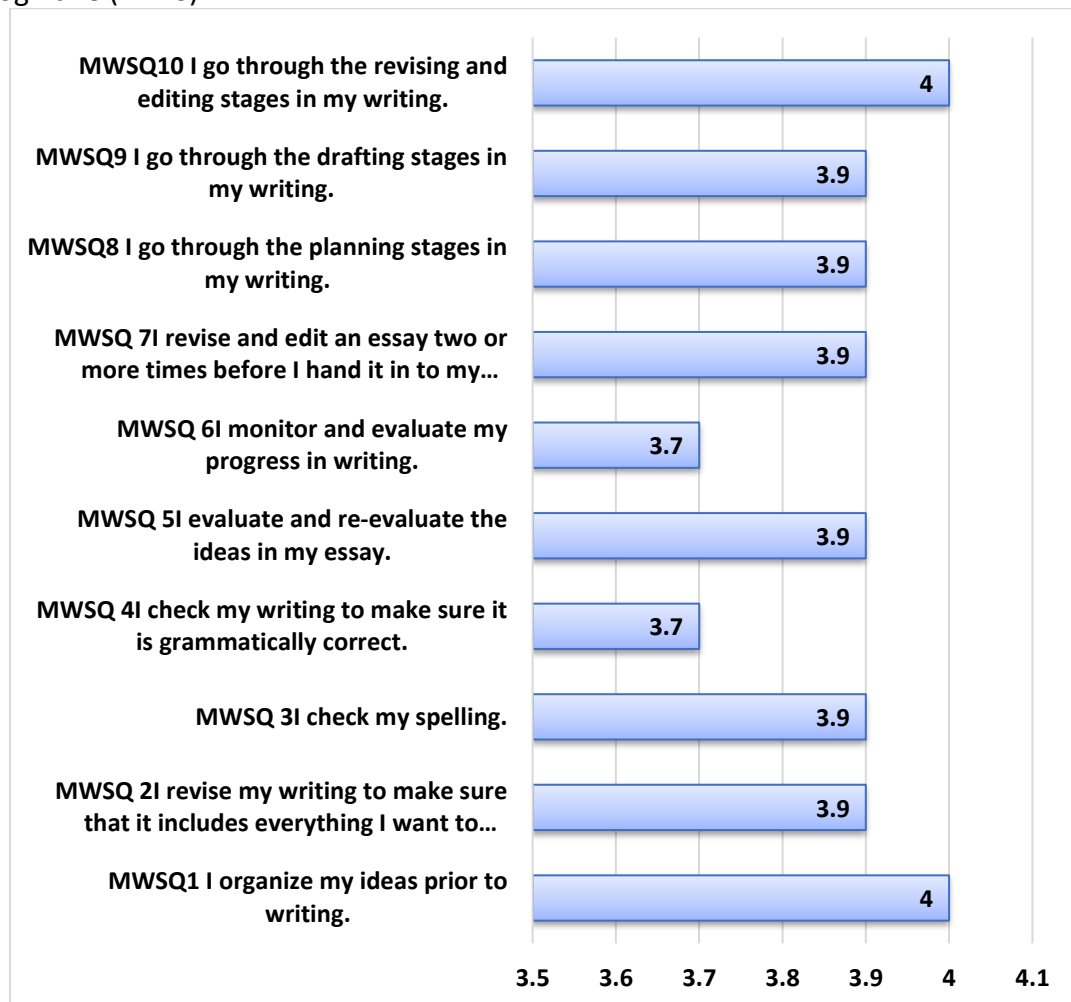


Figure 2- Mean for Metacognitive Strategies

Figure 2 shows the mean for metacognitive strategies. Two items share the highest mean of 4 and they are “MWSQ1 I organize my ideas prior to writing” and “MWSQ10 I go through the revising and editing stages in my writing”. Next, six items have the same mean of 3.9 and they are “MWSQ 2I revise my writing to make sure that it includes everything I want to discuss in my writing”, “MWSQ 3I check my spelling.”, “MWSQ 5I evaluate and re-evaluate the ideas in my essay.”, “MWSQ 7I revise and edit an essay two or more times before I hand it in to my teacher.”, “MWSQ8 I go through the planning stages in my writing” and “MWSQ9 I go through the drafting stages in my writing.”.

Cognitive (CWS)

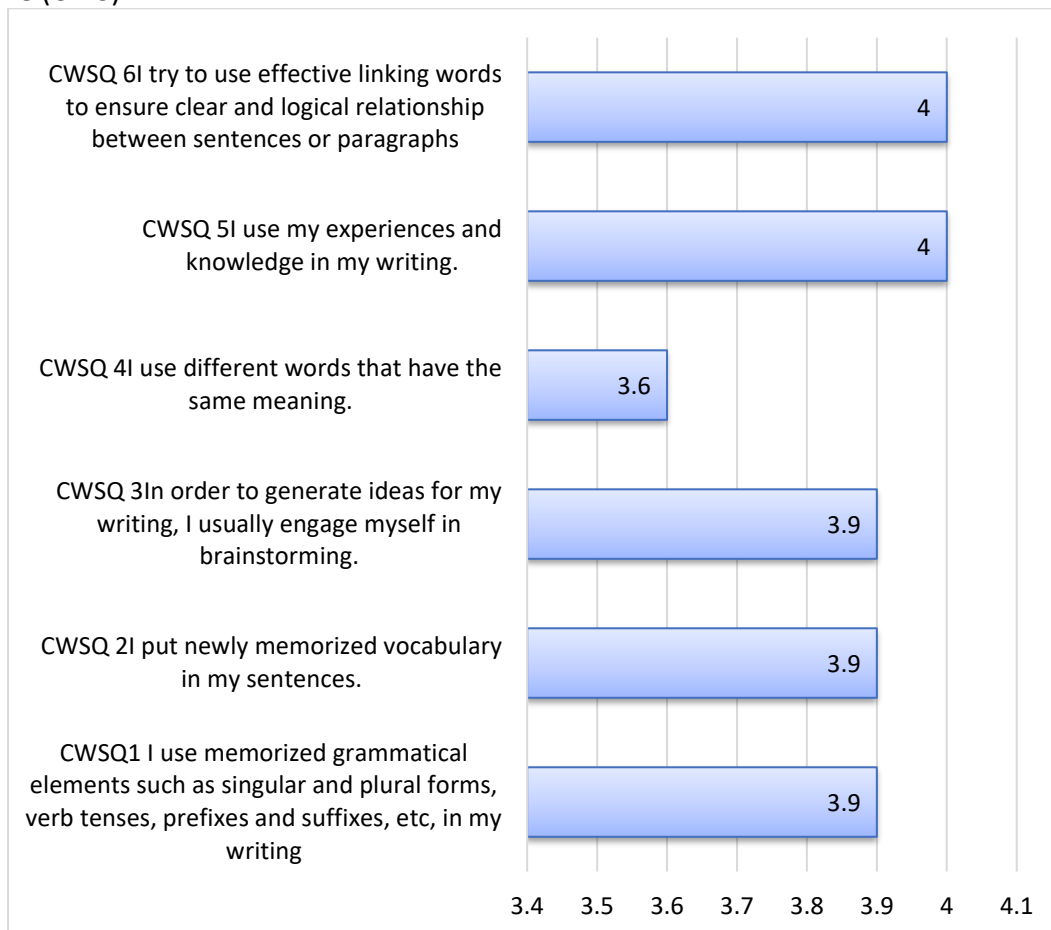


Figure 3- Mean for Cognitive Strategies

Figure 3 shows the mean for cognitive skills in writing. Two items share the same highest mean of 4 and they are “CWSQ 5I use my experiences and knowledge in my writing” and “CWSQ 6I try to use effective linking words to ensure clear and logical relationship between sentences or paragraphs”. Next, three items have the same mean of 3.9 and they are “CWSQ 1I I use memorized grammatical elements such as singular and plural forms, verb tenses, prefixes and suffixes, etc, in my writing”, “CWSQ 2I put newly memorized vocabulary in my sentences” and “CWSQ 3I In order to generate ideas for my writing, I usually engage myself in brainstorming”.

Findings for zone of proximal development

This section presents data to answer research question 2- How do learners perceive zone of proximal development (zpd) in writing? In the context of this study, zpd is measured by (i) effort regulation and (ii) affective strategies.

Effort Regulation (ERS)

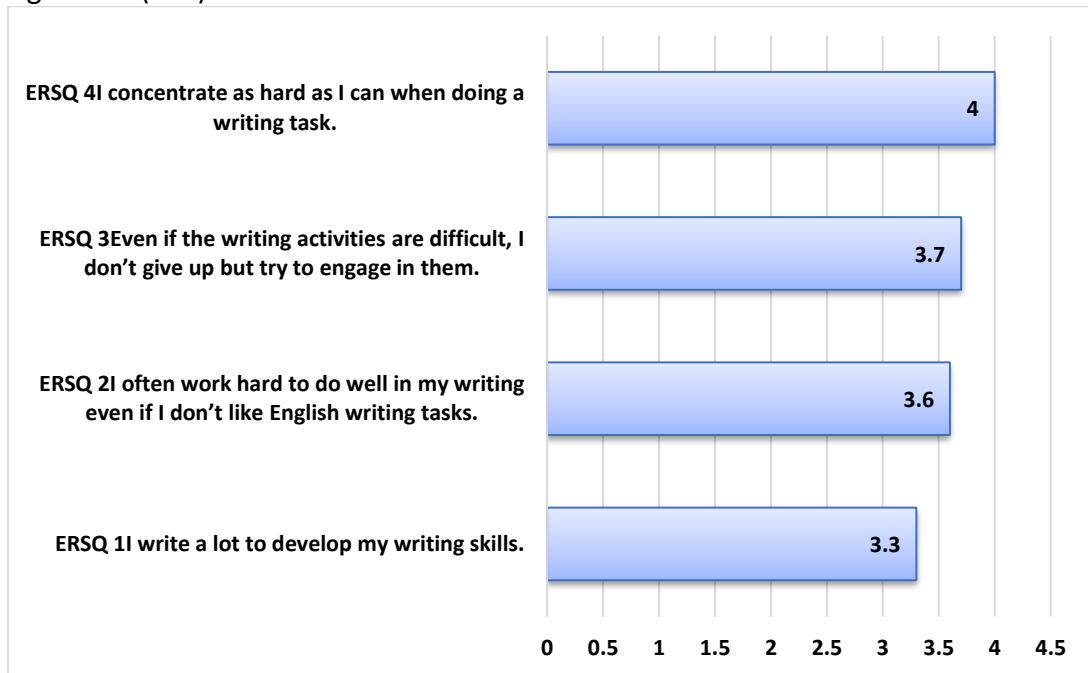


Figure 4- Mean for Effort Regulation (ERS)

Figure 4 shows the mean for effort regulation. The highest mean is 4 for the item “ERSQ 4I concentrate as hard as I can when doing a writing task”. This is followed by the mean of 3.7 for the item “ERSQ 3Even if the writing activities are difficult, I don’t give up but try to engage in them”. The lowest mean is 3.3 for the item “ERSQ 1I write a lot to develop my writing skills”.

Affective (AWS)

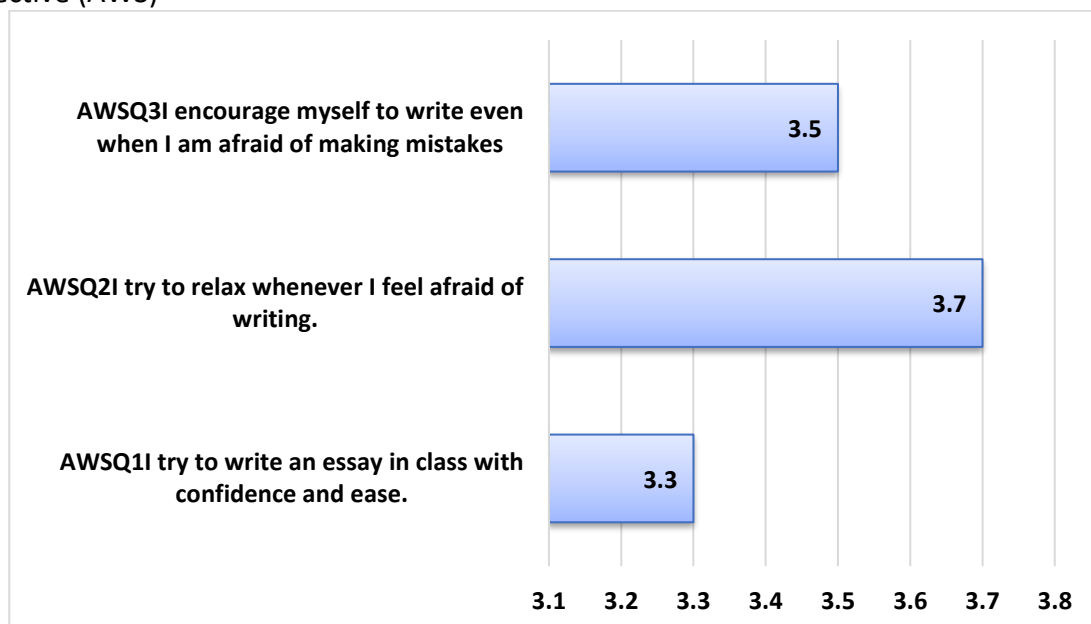


Figure 5- Mean for Affective Strategies

Figure 5 shows the mean for affective strategies. The highest mean is 4 for the item “AWSQ3I encourage myself to write even when I am afraid of making mistakes”. This is followed by the

mean of 3.7 for the item “AWSQ2I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of writing”. The lowest mean id 3.3 for the item “AWSQ1I try to write an essay in class with confidence and ease”.

Findings for social interaction

This section presents data to answer research question 3- How do learners perceive social interaction in writing? In the context of this study, social interaction is measured by social strategies.

Social (SWS)

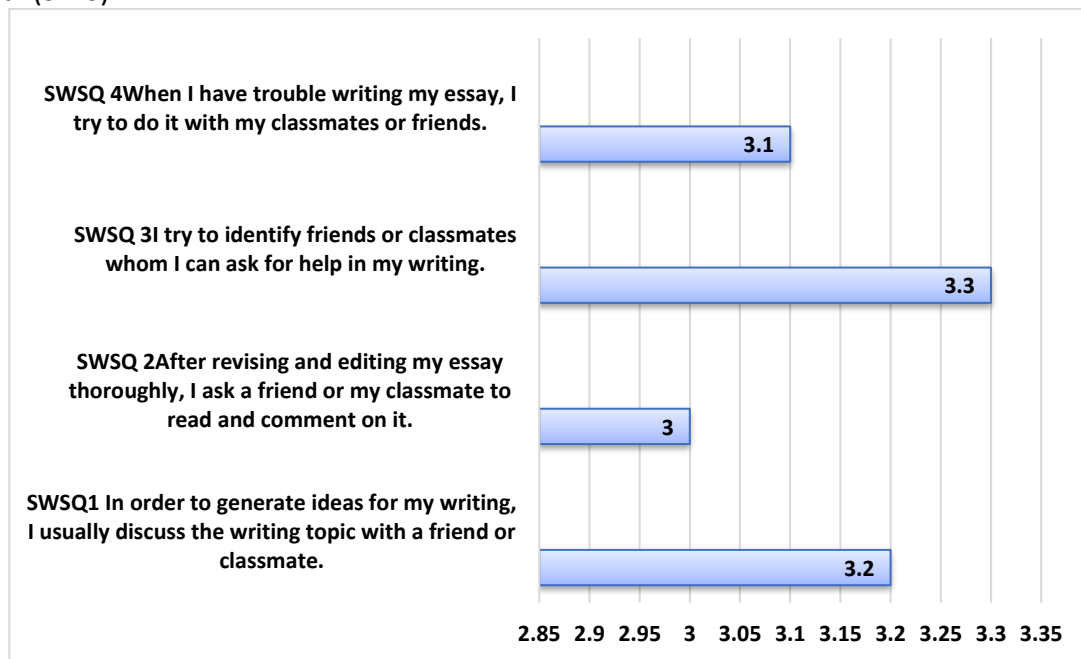


Figure 6- Mean for Social Strategies

Figure 6 shows the mean for social writing strategies. The highest mean is 3.3 for the item “SWSQ 3I try to identify friends or classmates whom I can ask for help in my writing”. This is followed by the mean of 3.2 for the item “SWSQ1 In order to generate ideas for my writing, I usually discuss the writing topic with a friend or classmate”. The lowest mean is 3.1 for the item “SWSQ 4When I have trouble writing my essay, I try to do it with my classmates or friends”.

Findings for Relationship between language use, zone of proximal development and social interaction?

This section presents data to answer research question 3- Is there a relationship between language use, zone of proximal development and social interaction? To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between language use, zone of proximal development and social interaction, data is analysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in table 3, 4, 5 and 6 below.

Table 3

Correlation between Language Use and Zone of Proximal Development

		LANGUAGEUSE	ZPD
LANGUAGEUSE	Pearson Correlation	1	.518**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	109	109
ZPD	Pearson Correlation	.518**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	109	109

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

Table 3 shows there is an association between language use and zone of proximal development. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between language use and zone of proximal development ($r=.518^{**}$) 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 language use and zone of proximal development.

Table 4

Correlation between Zone of Proximal Development and Social Interaction

		ZPD	SOCIALINTERACTION
ZPD	Pearson Correlation	1	.516**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	109	109
SOCIALINTERACTION	Pearson Correlation	.516**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	109	109

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

Table 4 shows there is an association between zone of proximal development and social interaction. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between zone of proximal development and social interaction ($r=.516^{**}$) 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 zone of proximal development and social interaction.

Table 5

Correlation between Social Interaction and Language Use

		SOCIALINTER ACTION	LANGUAGEU SE
SOCIALINTERACTION	Pearson Correlation	1	.574**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	109	109
LANGUAGEUSE	Pearson Correlation	.574**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	109	109

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

Table 5 shows there is an association between social interaction and language use. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between social interaction and language use ($r=.574^{**}$) 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 social interaction and language use.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussions

The function of language in writing is not only for clarity of presentation of content. The participants in this study perceived organization in writing as important. They reported that reviewing of their won writing helped to make their writing clearer. In addition to that, writing also facilitates the communication between the writer and the reader. The language ability of the writer can help with the clarity of presentation and also communication with the reader. This is also agreed by Rahmawati et al (2019) who also found that different types of writers use different strategies to make their writing clear.

Next, when it comes to cognitive skills in writing, participants put their importance in the planning of ideas before the actual writing task. Next, writing becomes less tedious when writers engage the help of the people around them. Social interaction helped bridge the gap between what the writers can achieve alone compared to what they can do with the help of others. Findings in this study reveal that writers need to engage with other especially when the writing task gets difficult for them. The study by Dari,et.al (2022) reported that engagement activities help writers become better writers. Engagement also helps writers reduce their fear when writing. Participants in this study reported that engagement helped them gain confidence and ease in writing. This study also revealed that there is a strong positive relationship between language use and zone of proximal development. There is also a strong positive relationship between zone of proximal development and social interaction. Finally, there is also a strong positive relationship between social interaction and language use.

Contributions and Suggestions for Future Research

This study revealed that from the angle of social cultural theory, writing is seen as an activity that requires writers to depend on language use, social interaction and also zone of proximal development. Instructors need to teach writing as a non-solitary task. Writers should be encouraged to use resources around them to be used as information in their writing task. During this stage, writers should be encouraged to interact with the people around them to also build the audience awareness for their writing. Future researcher can explore more writing strategies that combines both social interaction and audience awareness for the writers.

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