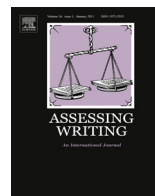




ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

## Assessing Writing



# Does the writing of undergraduate ESL students develop after one year of study in an English-medium university?



Ute Knoch\*, Amir Rouhshad<sup>1</sup>, Neomy Storch<sup>2</sup>

*School of Languages and Linguistics, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria 3010, Australia*

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 4 October 2013

Received in revised form 7 January 2014

Accepted 16 January 2014

Available online 26 February 2014

#### Keywords:

Writing development

Assessing writing

Discourse measures

Employability

International students

Feedback to writing

### ABSTRACT

English language skills are often listed by employers among key attributes needed for employment and there is a general dissatisfaction with English standards, especially writing skills, following graduation (e.g., Healy & Trounson, 2010; Rowbotham, 2011 in the Australian context). In the case of ESL students, research on whether English proficiency improves after studying at an English-medium university has to date been scarce, and has generally examined students' gains after a relatively short duration. The current study examined students' ESL writing proficiency following a year's study in an Australian university. The study used a test-retest design. A range of measures was used to assess writing, including global and discourse measures. All participants were also surveyed and a subset was interviewed. The study found that students' writing improved after a year of study but only in terms of fluency. There were no observed gains in accuracy, syntactic and lexical complexity. Global scores of writing also showed no change over time. Students stated in their questionnaires and interviews that they did not receive any feedback on their writing from their content lecturers. We discuss our findings in relation to the students' second language (L2) proficiency and the nature of their immersion experience.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +61 3 83445206.

E-mail addresses: [uknoch@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:uknoch@unimelb.edu.au) (U. Knoch), [arouhshad@yahoo.com](mailto:arouhshad@yahoo.com) (A. Rouhshad), [neomys@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:neomys@unimelb.edu.au) (N. Storch).

<sup>1</sup> Tel.: +61 3 8344 8588.

<sup>2</sup> Tel.: +61 3 83445208.

## 1. Introduction

Reports on the number of international students studying in Australia show that in 2011 nearly a quarter of a million international students were enrolled in the higher education sector ([International students in Australia, 2012](#)). These figures attest to the fact that international students continue to form a substantial proportion of students in Australian universities. Most of these students are second language (L2) speakers of English. A high level of English language proficiency is considered very important in our increasingly globalized world, and is certainly an attribute sought by employers. Studying in an English medium university provides these learners with a rich immersion experience; an environment where the learners are exposed to plentiful L2 input and where they are asked to produce meaningful L2 output. Such an environment has been hypothesized by major theories of SLA to be conducive to L2 development ([Dekeyser, 2007](#); [Gass, 2003](#); [Swain, 1985, 1995](#)).

Research on the effect of the experience of studying in an L2 medium university on the learners' L2 development is surprisingly scant. The bulk of research on the development of academic writing has focused largely on investigating the effect of a specific course of instruction ([Shaw & Liu, 1998](#); [Storch & Tapper, 2009](#)), or following relatively short time periods of time at university such as one semester ([Storch, 2007, 2009](#); [Storch & Hill, 2008](#)). The present study set out to investigate the impact of studying in an L2-medium university on second language writing development of non-English-speaking background students after one year. The data forms part of a larger study examining the writing development of students during their three years of undergraduate study.

## 2. Literature review

Over the past decade there have been a growing number of studies on second language writing development. The majority of these studies involved a specific course of instruction. However, these courses varied in the type and length of instruction offered (e.g., a short period of study abroad or specifically designed English for Academic Purposes semester length courses). Only a few studies focus on learners who have not taken a specific course of instruction. The studies also differ in how they measured writing development. Some employed band scores based on ratings by trained raters using band descriptors, others employed more fine-grained discourse-analytic measures (e.g., measures of fluency such as the number of words produced) and some made use of both types of measures. In the following we discuss these major strands of research in more detail as they illustrate the methodologies used as well as the major findings.

### 2.1. *Writing development as a result of instruction*

Studies that have examined second language writing development at university (e.g., [Sasaki, 2007, 2009, 2011](#); [Shaw & Liu, 1998](#); [Storch & Tapper, 2009](#)) used a range of measures to gauge development, and the results seem to vary depending on the measures used. In a series of study-abroad studies, [Sasaki \(2007, 2009, 2011\)](#) compared the L2 writing development of study abroad and at-home groups. Using composition band scores, Sasaki showed that 1.5 to 11 months of study abroad (when combined with general ESL and writing instruction) resulted in significant increases in the learners' L2 writing scores, whereas the writing of the at-home group counterparts did not show improvement over time.

Studies outside the study-abroad context, which employed band scores ([Tsang & Wong, 2000](#); [Xudong, Cheng, Varaprasad, & Leng, 2010](#)), and discourse measures ([Shaw & Liu, 1998](#); [Storch & Tapper, 2009](#); [Tsang & Wong, 2000](#)) to gauge development in writing, have shown mixed results following 10–14 weeks of instruction. For example, in Storch and Tapper's study, only the discourse measures of accuracy (measured via Errors/words, proportion of error free clauses and error free T-units) and lexical complexity (measured as a percentage of words which appeared on [Coxhead's \(2000\)](#) Academic Word List) showed improvement. However, measures of fluency and syntactic complexity showed no change following instruction. In [Shaw and Liu's \(1998\)](#) study, accuracy (measured via errors/T-units), and complexity (measured via increased use of nominalization, reduction of clauses to prepositional or participial phrases, increased subordination or changes in the pattern of subordination) fell short of

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/344226>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/344226>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)