Writing Across the Curriculum: Experiences of Undergraduate Multilingual International Students

Zhenjie Weng

Follow this and additional works at: https://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
https://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd/1364

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Knowledge Repository @ IUP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (All) by an authorized administrator of Knowledge Repository @ IUP. For more information, please contact sara.parme@iup.edu.
Writing Across the Curriculum: Experiences of Undergraduate Multilingual International Students

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Zhenjie Weng
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
May 2016
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the thesis of

Zhenjie Weng

Candidate for the degree of Master of Arts

__________________________
Gloria Park, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of English, Advisor

__________________________
Ben Rafoth, Ed.D.
Distinguished University Professor

__________________________
Bryna Siegel-Finer, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of English

ACCEPTED

__________________________
Randy L. Martin, Ph.D.
Dean
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Title: Writing Across the Curriculum: Experiences of Undergraduate Multilingual International Students

Author: Zhenjie Weng

Thesis Chair: Dr. Gloria Park

Thesis Committee Members: Dr. Ben Rafoth
Dr. Bryna Siegel-Finer

With increased multilingual international students in the U.S. higher education system and the conspicuous oversight of their needs in classrooms when writing across curricula, this study endeavors to explore the affordances and challenges the students encountered while writing in disparate disciplines. With recourse to semi-structured interviews as the main data source and completed written documents as complementary, this study brings each individual participant’s experiences, perceptions, and voices to the fore. Through disclosing their experiences in writing, the researcher intends to enrich the literature in Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) by taking multilingual international students into consideration, to buttress the continuous effort to implement WAC in more majors at the particular university, and also to suggest a possible revolution of WAC through the collaboration with Second Language Writing experts. Implications for content course instructors are given in terms of how to provide instructions and feedback with a salient diversity in class.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It was a serene dark night. After a busy day commuting between school and home, I finally could sit down and take a deep breath in my little cozy apartment. My roommate who was a night owl has already gone to bed, and I realized it was already 1:00am. Quiet, chilly the night is, my mind still lingers on what happened in the day and refuses to surrender to my sleepiness. Hui’s husband who looked frustrated reached me this morning and confided that “Hui was in tears last night when she found out that she might not be able to write properly to pass Praxis Test…” (Journal entry, Weng, February, 2015).

Starting with this excerpt from my journal entry, I want to express my greatest gratitude to my MA TESOL program which offers a platform for me, a novice researcher, to conduct this research and unfold multilingual international students’ concerns and struggles while writing in the academy in the United States. It also enables me to be a committed researcher who learns to be attentive to the voice from underrepresented members in the research site. Millions of thanks to my generous participants who show their trust and support to me through sharing their personal stories.

I am deeply indebted to my dear advisor, Dr. Gloria Park, who punctiliously guided me throughout the research by giving me timely constructive feedback and unconditionally sharing her time and expertise with me. Without her, this thesis would never be possible. Also, I want to thank her for her emotional support, listening to my worries and concerns and her constant encouragement which never failed to cheer me up and ignited my hope. It is my honour to be her advisee. Also, I sincerely appreciate my other committee members: Dr. Ben Rafoth and Dr. Bryna Siegel Finer who supported me in productive ways. I would like to express my gratitude for the unsurpassed knowledge they shared and the precious time they spent reading and commenting on my thesis. My special thanks to Dr. Curtis Porter who meticulously read my first three chapters and was willing to share his valuable thoughts with me. Last, I will never forget to thank my
beloved Dr. Usree Bhattacharya who witnessed my academic and professional growth in the program, and I am indebted to her for her unconditional intellectual and emotional support.

I would like to give my heartfelt appreciation to my MA TESOL cohorts: Mir Abdullah, Abdullah Aljaafari, Zack Fish, Rudi Hartono, Arifah Mardiningrum, Michael McKeegan, Kristiane Moe, Jonathan Montgomery, Miriam Saxton, Alexander Staszkiewicz. Throughout the two years, my dear cohorts instilled confidence and optimism in me and offered their support while I struggled to write my thesis and stayed by my side over the past two years. Particularly, I want to offer thanks to the girls: Arifah, Kristiana, and Miriam, all of whom took up a special room in my heart. With them, my MA TESOL life became unforgettable and vivid.

Last but not least, I would like to thank to my dear roommate Fu Yao who is an experienced researcher and a Ph.D candidate of Education. From the first day we became roommates, she has given me unparalleled help and inspiration. Also, I thank my supportive friends from Composition and TESOL program: Zhang Tong, Yi Yu, and Liao Fangyu for their encouragement and advice.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overviews of Upcoming Chapters</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Across the Curriculum</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted Version of Writing and Broader Version of Writing</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing as a Mode of Learning</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing on Course Understanding</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing on Language Acquisition</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing-to-learn on Multilingual International Students</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genres Within Disciplinary Writing</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Discourses for Multilingual International Students</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposes of Writing</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audiences for College Writing</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Concept of Affordance</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Features of Affordances</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Environment- Faculty Instructions and Feedback</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty’s Instructions and Feedback</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Site: Western Pennsylvania University (WPU)</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permission from Institutional Review Board (IRB)</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entering the field: As a Researcher and Participants</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Participants</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological Challenge</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Method</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data 1: Semi-structured Interview</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data 2: Completed Written Documents From Courses</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Procedure</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1: Field Test</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Interview</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3: Collection of Completed Written Documents From Courses</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4: Transcribing and Translation</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergent Themes From the Research Findings</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Across the Curriculum</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse: Cross-Cultural Discourse</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse: Second Language Acquisition</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse: BICS and CALP</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructions and Feedback</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies Learned From Composition Class</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications and Recommendations for Further Studies</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research Directions</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REFERENCES ................................................................................. 168

APPENDICES ................................................................................. 184

Appendix A – Consent Form .............................................................. 185
Appendix B – IRB Approval ............................................................... 186
Appendix C – Interview Questions .................................................... 188
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Profile of Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Records of Interview Time and Completed Written Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Codes Generated From the Cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Summaries of All Affordances That Hui Had</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Challenges for Hui While Writing in Her Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Types of Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Overview of All Affordances That Huang Discussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Challenges for Huang While Writing in the Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Types of Writing That Huang Was Introduced to in Content Classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Types of Feedback That Huang Received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Overview of All the Affordances That Qing had</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Challenges That Qing Encountered While Writing in Her Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Overview of the Types of Writing That Qing Discussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Overview of the Three Cases in the Basis of the Seven Codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The process of date analysis .................................. 62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Systematic coding .................................................. 108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I heard so many following exhortations when I decided to stay in English Department while my other Chinese friends shifted their major from English Literature to Finance, Accounting, Business, or other majors which, in their opinion, required less writing.
-“We changed our majors because Finance does not require so much writing.”
-“Are you sure you wanted to continue English literature. It is very hard for international students.”
-“You are good at English. We are jealous of your English…” (Weng, Journal entry, September 21, 2011).

I submitted my biology report with timidity and restlessness. This was the first biology report written in my life in APA format which I had never heard about before. …The following week, I sat on the seat sweating with a bumping heart, waiting for the teacher to hand me back the report. I was very concerned about my scores (Weng, Journal entry, October 23, 2011).

I was upset…my tears were in my eyes… He [my professor of American Literature] gave me a B minus of the mid-term essay and his feedback was “[Y]our English is limited… there are … and other grammatical errors ….” No one word was about my ideas in the essay… He judged my intelligence in the basis of my English proficiency (Weng, Journal entry, July 15, 2012).

“Before coming to class, prepare a writing note which could be your questions about our class readings or some comments that you would like to bring up in class… Writing is also a way of participation” (Weng, Journal entry, March, 2013).

These excerpts from my own journal entries documented my academic life after I was enrolled in a southern university in the United States in 2011. Rereading those journal entries and recalling my experiences during those years, I realized how scary writing was for me and my friends, all of whom were multilingual international students from China, and how cryptic and misunderstood writing was, being associated only with English courses and only those who have advanced English proficiency are qualified to write.

However, my attitudes towards writing experienced tremendous changes from frightening to intriguing owing to my own persistent endeavor and my compassionate content instructors who listened to me and graciously offered their help. Although there was no lack of setbacks and adversities, I was successfully granted the degree of Bachelor of
Arts in English, and writing began to play an indispensable role in my life since then. But my misconception of writing still continues, just as it aggravates challenges among other multilingual international students.

“English major has lots of writing and other majors need no writing”

In the initial stage in the United States in August 2011, I was like a pendulum swaying between two majors - English Literature and Accounting. My friends, all English major students in China like me, were busy changing their majors to Finance, Math, or other majors which they considered to have less writing requirements. I oscillated between English and Accounting but finally I insisted on my interest - English literature. My friends scolded me: “Why do not you choose Accounting?” “It will be very difficult to write.” “English major has lots of writing and other majors need no writing.” Their misconception conveyed that writing only transpired in English courses, while in other majors there were no writing requests, echoing one of my participants’ statements in the interview that Accounting major has no writing.

However, the truth is that Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) program was implemented 30 or so years ago, and around one-third of institutes in higher education in the U.S. developed writing programs pertinent to WAC by the mid-1980s (Young, 2011, p. 1). This trend is still continuously growing. The widespread launch of WAC program in higher education demonstrates one fact that writing, other than in English classrooms, has been incorporated into teaching methods and used to improve students’ effective communicative skills in their disciplines. Also, my experience in a biology lab class defied the claim that other content classes, except for English classes, demand no writing.
“I submitted my biology report with timidity and restlessness”

Berkenkotter and Huckin (1993) expound that “students entering academic disciplines need a specialized literacy that consists of the ability to use discipline-specific rhetorical and linguistic conventions to serve their purposes as writers” (p.19). This body of research reveals the complexity of genre writing in academic contexts, in alignment with specific disciplinary discourses. To be specific, writing in different disciplines requires particular disciplinary vocabulary and conforms it to communicative conventions such as the purposes of writing and “sets of expectations, depending on the goals of writing” (Zhu, 2004, p. 30). The discourses in different disciplines should not be oversimplified and reduced to language as words but draw on multiple resources like drawings, tables, graphs, symbols, etc. (Moschkovich, 2015).

Although I ultimately decided to be an English major, I still encountered writing in other classes. In the middle of the semester, the lab instructor assigned a lab report, at least five pages in length and with correct citations in APA style. Prior to this assignment, I had neither written a lab report, nor had I used APA format previously. Thus, when the due date came, I was anxious and stressed.

I submitted my biology report with timidity and restlessness. This was the first biology report written in my life in APA format which I had never heard about before. Luckily, the instructor said it was not the final report. After she returned it, she would allow her students to revise them based on her feedback… (Weng, Journal entry, October 23, 2011).

My uneasiness depicted in my journal entry is derived from the fact that, as an English major student, I was used to MLA format and felt more comfortable utilizing specific
vocabulary and discourses from my major. Out of the comfort zone, my writing was neither incisive enough nor my vocabulary transferable to an experimental report. Also, I could use flippant, ironic, or genuine tones in writing for my literature class, including response papers, analytical essays, and personal narratives. To complete the lab report, however, I had to use a formal, scrupulous, and scientific tone to present my laboratory findings and explicate contrasting graphs I drew during the experiment. The gap between the two discourses and lack of according academic literacy became the challenge for me to write across the curriculum. This uneasiness also happened to my participants who believed the lack of consistency among different curricula led to their difficulty in writing. Apart from the difficulty from particular genre requirements across disciplines, my identity as a multilingual international student became an impediment to my academic achievement in writing as well – the grammatical errors in my writing were overemphasized and my critical thinking expressed through writing was often overlooked. This obsession with grammatical and other surface level errors averted my professors’ attention from my writing ability, the efforts I had made on writing, and more importantly, my critical thinking.

“He [my professor] judged my intelligence in the basis of my English proficiency”

Based on Zamel and Spack (2006), the growing number of “linguistically diverse students” in colleges in the U.S. is an inevitable trend (p. 128). The Open Doors report, documented by Witherell and Clayton (2014) and released on the occasion of the 15th annual celebration of International Education Week in 2014, recorded a surge in international enrollment at U.S. universities:

[The] overall number of international students in the United States has grown by 72 percent since […] 2000. There are five times as many Chinese students […]:
almost two and a half times as many Indian students; seven and a half times as many Vietnamese students; and more than ten times as many Saudi students.

(para. 5)

However, the multiplicity and diversity embedded in the classrooms do not foster some content instructors’ attention, and biased treatments towards multilingual international students still exist, which can be exemplified in my case.

I was upset after I got my mid-term essay back. There were not much feedback but my tears were in my eyes after I read the comments. He [my professor of American Literature] gave me a B minus in the mid-term essay and his feedback was “[Y]our English is limited and you need to improve your English proficiency. There are repeated punctuation mistakes and other grammatical errors. The structures of your writing are also confusing.” No one word was about my thought in the essay, which saddened and disturbed me further. He judged my intelligence in the basis of my English proficiency. But how well my English should be so that my ideas will be paid more attention to. I did not want to write anymore! (Weng, Journal entry, July 15, 2012)

As a multilingual international student, I felt helpless to avoid all grammatical errors in my writing and to erase the locus of my educational background that I received from my native country. In the case, my professor expected me to have “achieved mastery of English before [I] grapple with the demands of the academy,” which runs counter to Zamel and Spack’s (2006) idea that “language acquisition takes place not only through the study of language but also when language is used as a means for understanding and constructing knowledge” (pp. 127-128). To my professor, my English should be “perfect”
since I had already taken major classes. He disregarded and dismissed that it was also his responsibility to help develop my language ability and to try to understand the process a multilingual international student had to undergo to acquire academic proficiency in an additional language (Zamel & Spack, 2006).

Besides, the contrastive rhetorical writing between my native country and the United States gave rise to my professor’s confusion with my writing. Instead of trying to understand my educational backdrop, cultural diversity that I brought in to the classroom, and the “cross-cultural disorientation” I came across, my professor rigorously and poignantly misjudged my English writing as deficient and belittled the effort (Zamel & Spack, 2006, p. 128). Moreover, he totally ignored my critical thinking in the writing and judged my intelligence in the basis of my English proficiency. His ignorance triggered my resistance and hatred towards writing. My encounters in this class illuminate the possible reformation needed in WAC as well. When an influx of linguistically diverse students appears in classrooms, content instructors should not still plan their curricula with native English speakers in mind. This is further confirmed by the circumstances that my participants encountered. They had to compromise their cultural background and willingly or unwillingly to accept the “American” culture in writing to be academically successful. Although negotiation was allowed among the students and teachers, the outcomes were power oriented (See my discussion of power discourses in Chapter Four). They had to conform to what their teachers expected them to do even at the cost of their L1 identities.

However, there are no lack of professors who are considerate, sympathetic, and understanding to their students. My panic towards writing was overcome because of two
professors, Dr. Cooper\textsuperscript{1} and Dr. Kumar, who taught me minority literature and poetry, respectively. They helped me to surmount my sentiments toward writing and enabled me to recognize the importance of writing as a way of participation and inquiry (e.g., Emig, 1977; Herrington, 1981; Knoblauch & Brannon, 1983; Zamel & Spack, 2006, Melzer, 2009; Defazio, Jones, Tennant, & Hook, 2010).

In the previous paragraphs, I specified one of the reasons why I initiated my MA thesis on the topic of WAC, aiming at undergraduate multilingual international students (UMISs). My rich and lived experience as an undergraduate multilingual international student from China is indicative that on the one hand, writing in different disciplines was an affordance (In my study, “affordance” refers to available resources that can be utilized by the participants in their environment, relying on their ability to recognize those affordances. More specific definitions and explanations are provided in Chapter Two), since it provides a chance to enhance my writing ability. On the other hand, writing has brought challenges to multilingual international students like me as well. I had to come to terms with various academic discourses across curricula and cultural influence in order to achieve academic success in the university, and my encounter with inconsiderate professors only exacerbated my feelings toward writing. Another vital reason for this research is the enlarging percentage of multilingual international students enrolled in higher education in the United States. Nevertheless, there is a chasm between the increasing amount of international students and the shortage of existing literature addressing their needs in the field of WAC. Namely, research studies are wanting,

\textsuperscript{1} All names and institutions mentioned in the study except for the researcher’s name (Zhenjie) are pseudonyms.
specifically those regarding localized strategies that course content instructors could use to accommodate the students’ needs and how WAC administrators depart from the trend towards native English speaking students. Therefore, the current study endeavors to explore and understand the experiences of three UMISs while writing in their majors, to unfold their misgivings and struggles, and to manifest their particular needs in writing and living in the United States. In this regard, the study can elicit beneficial data and potential suggestions for course content instructors and WAC specialists at this particular research site.

Statement of the Problem

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) is a program that endorses the need to assign intensive writing to students outside of composition, literature, and other English courses “to bring writing-to-learn pedagogies to instructors across disciplines” and also to reflect how composition courses can be transformed to prepare students to engage in disciplinary-specific writing (Melzer, 2009, p. 258). With its increasing hybridity and wide execution in classrooms, WAC has become an integral part of English language learning and academic knowledge acquisition for multilingual international students who study English as a second language in the U.S.

Previous research studies on WAC prioritize several topics like program design (e.g. Dunn, 1983; Ferris & Smith; Fulwiler, 1984; Thaiss & Porter, 2010; McLeod, 2007) and teacher training (Amore, 1988; Emmer, 1986; Kuriloff, 1992; Walvoord, 1997; Soven, 2001). Several studies have examined writing as a pedagogical approach, emphasizing writing as a process of learning. Those scholars highlighted the importance of incorporating WAC into curriculum as a transformative and instructional tool, from
writing about what students already knew to writing as a tool to elicit students’ critical thinking and curiosity towards knowledge (e.g., Emig, 1977; Herrington, 1981; Bazerman, 1987 & 1992; Fulwiler, 1992; Abels, 1994; Melzer, 2009). Some scholars have investigated different genre writing across disciplines, such as research projects, case studies, annotated bibliographies, and essay exams. They discussed academic writing as community-based with particular conventions and discourses (Melzer, 2009; Zhu, 2004). The common argument is that genre writing provides writers salient structures and formats to follow, facilitating and scaffolding writing development (Hyland, 2008); while, on the other hand, the dynamic and community-based features of genres across disciplines require instructors to give specific instructions to students to demystify ambiguities embedded in genres (Melzer, 2009). The danger of reifying genres is that “[it] can straightjacket creativity through conformity to restrictive formulae so that genres…as moulds into which students just put their own content” (Hyland, 2008, p. 556). Fewer studies have analyzed faculty members’ perceptions on WAC to highlight teachers from disparate disciplines, their attitudes towards writing in their curricula. The emphasis on faculty members’ understanding of WAC reveals miscellaneous disciplinary culture that different curricula stress different skills in writing. Most of the teachers mention that they are more concerned about students’ comprehension of content and the ability to critique and organize their ideas, rather than surface level errors like spelling and punctuation (Eblen, 1983; Herrington, 1981; Zhu, 2004).

Nevertheless, research regarding multilingual international students in the field of WAC is scarce and lacks specificity on the emphasis of multilingual international students, leading to several problems. Given the increased proportion of multilingual
international students in mainstream classrooms, their needs are still rarely assessed, and their voices are often in periphery. Possible interpretation for the lack of attention to the group of students is that they are still perceived as minorities in U.S. higher education. However, Hall (2009) explicates the new reality that “multilingual learners are part of mainstream” (p. 37). Because of ignorance regarding the instruction of multilingual learners, some course content instructors lack adjustment in their attitudes towards those students. The students are frequently unfairly treated as the following example demonstrates. Several professors, in Zamel and Spack’s (2006) study, are preoccupied with the students’ language errors, which prevents them from engaging meaningfully with the students’ work. One professor delivers that “‘I used to think that my major responsibility as an evaluator of writing, with respect to [multilingual] students, was to be a grammar policeman, to screen for errors, and to mark down students’ grades accordingly, regardless of the content of their grades’” (p. 134). The case exemplifies that many teachers misjudge multilingual students’ intelligence on the basis of their language proficiency, which “shut them off from the students’ insights and perceptions but did little to enhance students’ progress or build their confidence” (Zamel & Spack, 2008, p. 135). Thus, this study, through investigating three multilingual international students’ experiences while writing across the curriculum, at least partially, tries to enrich the literature in this area, hopefully increase more attention paid to multilingual international writers whose voices are marginal.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to gain insights of three UMISs’ experiences of writing across the curriculum at a Western Pennsylvania University
to shed light on various themes: their diverse understanding of writing in different disciplines; their writing experiences in sections of Multilingual Writers (MLW) 101, 202, or 121 and other content courses held in their majors; their varying perceptions on affordances and challenges that they encountered while writing, owing to their various educational backgrounds, linguistic experiences, and other related experiences; and their writing needs in composition courses and other content courses. In addition, the study intends to display the challenges that WAC specialists and content course instructors may encounter by analyzing the three multilingual international students’ experiences of writing across the curriculum in the era of globalization, which “brings different cultures in contact… and brought diverse people together within common borders and a single sovereignty” and which is embodied through the increased mobility and migration transpiring in the world (Ghai, 2007, p. 383).

**Research Questions**

The current study consists of one main research question and three ancillary research questions. The primary purpose of the study is to disclose the affordances and challenges that the three undergraduate multilingual international students (UMISs) encountered while writing across the curriculum. The affordances and challenges experienced by the three UMISs should not be generalized since each individual carries with them unique cultural and educational backgrounds; thus, the possibilities and obstacles for each individual vary. A close investigation of their experiences while writing across the curriculum is required. The following three questions are conducive to unpacking the UMISs’ affordances and challenges while writing.
The three ancillary questions intend to uncover the types of writing that the three UMISs practice while writing in diverse disciplines. This question is significant because each curriculum has its own disciplinary culture. No one genre is employed throughout all curricula writing. Knowing what different genres are utilized in each curriculum, my research can better inform the UMISs of academic genres and the target discourses in different disciplines, which may be helpful for their academic success. Also, my research questions are designed to explore the participants’ perceptions on the teachers’ instructions and feedback, and the possible improvement they can make. Last, the current study tries to find out whether composition class can benefit the students’ disciplinary-focused writing. This question tests the effectiveness of writing courses widely administrated in colleges from the participants’ perspectives. The explicit research questions are demonstrated as follows:

Main research question:

What are the affordances and challenges that the three undergraduate multilingual international students (UMISs) encounter while writing across the curriculum?

Ancillary research questions:

1. What genres are introduced to the three UMISs in their curricula?
2. In what ways do the three UMISs perceive teachers’ instructions and feedback that assist them in improving their language skills and their understanding of course content?
3. What are the self-reported learning strategies they accrue in writing courses that are beneficial for their other class writing assignments in colleges?
Significance of the Study

I believe the significance of the study, highlighting the three UMISs’ experiences while writing, is as follows:

1. At least partially this study will enrich the knowledge in this area.
2. Hopefully this study can draw more attention to UMISs whose voices are often unheard.
3. This study will underpin the continuous need to support WAC at the particular university by unpacking its significance to the UMISs.

Along with the reasons listed above, this study will also provide reciprocal benefits for both educators and multilingual international students. Educators will be informed of the benefits of writing brought to them, through which they can “gain insight into students’ thoughts and interpretations and for responding to and drawing on students’ written work in order to promote further learning” (Zamel & Spack, 2006, p. 139). Also, the current study provides an opportunity for the educators to reexamine their teaching pedagogy in a new light and to reflect on the work they do. To the educators, it is also a self-improvement to transform themselves to more thoughtful and responsive teachers. They will be more cautious about the students’ needs and ameliorate the feelings of frustration with the presence of multilingual international students in classrooms (Zamel & Spack, 2006, p. 128). For the UMISs, they will have a better comprehension of academic genres and the target discourses in multifarious disciplines. Therefore, they will be better prepared to “adapt to multiple disciplinary conventions and perspectives as they progress through their college writing career,” which are valuable in helping them achieve academic success (Hall, 2009, pp. 41-42). In addition, as educators become more vigilant
towards students’ particular needs, the students’ struggles and concerns in unfamiliar subjects will be taken into consideration.

Finally, this study intends to signal to WAC instructors that revised pedagogy is needed with the proliferated cultural and linguistic diversity in student population. That is, WAC programs also face the destiny to transform themselves in the wake of globalization, which enhances the mobility of multilingual international students from all over the world to be matriculated in North America. WAC programs need to be “in the forefront of researching and developing the MLL-active writing pedagogy” (Hall, 2009, p. 45).

**Overviews of Upcoming Chapters**

The study consists of five chapters: 1) introduction, 2) literature review, 3) methodology, 4) case presentation, and 5) discussion and implications. Chapter one has shown the panorama of my research study, including how the study began, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, and the significance of the current study. Chapter two provides a detailed literature review pertinent to the study. All the information I gathered is relevant to my research questions. I explore the essence of WAC discussed in prior research studies and its impact upon language acquisition, as well as the understanding of course content. Most importantly, its influence on multilingual international students is investigated. In addition, this chapter explores different ways to categorize writing, the concept of affordance, and also briefly mentions the importance of composition classes for multilingual international students in literature. Chapter three depicts the whole process of the current research: the research design, recruitment of the participants for the study, data collection methods and procedure, and
data analysis that I use in this study. Apart from discussing what methodology I utilized and the process of data collection and analysis that I underwent, I also exposed the struggles I encountered as a novice researcher in the chapter. Chapter four gives a holistic and thorough presentation of the research results of this study. This chapter extracts results, interpretations, and summary of findings that are linked to research questions. Finally, chapter five emphasizes the overall themes emerging from the research findings, enriches the study with more pertinent theories, and also analyzes implications as well as limitations of the study.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

The goal of this chapter is to review prior research studies on WAC and the possibilities and restraints that connect with undergraduate multilingual international students (UMISs) while writing in different disciplines. This chapter starts with a brief introduction regarding WAC, a review concerning its misinterpretations, and a presentation of its central idea – writing to learn. Next, previous studies about the nature of genre and diverse ways of categorizing various types of writing are discussed. Then, the following section explicates affordances, their features, and their reciprocal relation with environment. The final section describes faculty’s instructions for writing assignments and the functions of feedback to demonstrate affordances provided by and associated with classroom environments.

The logic behind the organization of this chapter is roughly concurrent with my research questions:

Main research question:

What are the affordances and challenges that the three undergraduate multilingual international students (UMISs) encountered while writing across the curriculum?

Ancillary research questions:

1. What genres are the three UMISs introduced to in their curricula?

2. In what ways do the three UMISs perceive teachers’ instructions and feedback that assist them in improving their language skills and their understanding of course content?
3. What are the self-reported learning strategies they accrue in writing courses that are beneficial for their other class writing assignments in colleges?

I discussed the key terms WAC, genre, and affordances, and then I introduced the significance of teachers’ instructions and feedback as part of classroom environment that provides affordances to UMISs. Through this way, I connect my main research question with my ancillary research questions.

**Writing Across the Curriculum**

Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) is a program that advocates the need to assign intensive writing to students outside of composition, literature, and other English courses “to bring writing-to-learn pedagogies to instructors across disciplines” (Melzer, 2009, p.258). For the purposes of this study, I align myself with scholars such as McLeod (2007) who debunk the idea which situates WAC apart from or outside of English Department where the largest potential WAC populations reside and where WAC courses may begin. Writing in WAC should not be equal to the length of writing. It has nothing to do with length but rather on how writing functions throughout the class for the holistic development of students’ language skills and knowledge acquisition. The nature of WAC is to accentuate the combination of teaching both literacy (basic English skills) and boosting the “relevance of writing to [the] coursework” (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1983, p. 465). Therefore, WAC emphasizes both language skills and content knowledge. However, it is not safe to conclude that all writing assignments across the curriculum lead to learning. Content instructors possess different misinterpretations of writing across the curriculum, including a restricted version of writing in WAC, and a broader concept as well. The difference will be discussed below.
Restricted Version of Writing in WAC and Broader Version of Writing in WAC

The restricted concept of writing is a misunderstanding among content course instructors who degrade the value of writing to “the periphery of [teachers’] syllabi” (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1983, p. 466). Writing is deemed as a redundant activity due to teachers’ pressure to diversify a syllabus and their tendency toward perfunctory coping with the implementation of WAC. The benefits that students can obtain from this activity are slight and vague, and the writing assignments are perceived by students as meaningless and laborious.

The broader concept of WAC is undergirded by WAC proponents and is the original intention of the program. This concept of WAC does not simplify writing as term papers assigned in every class and includes much more than grammar and packaging information. Under the broader concept of WAC, writing is not additive but transformative (McLeod & Soven, 1992). It highlights the “heuristic value of composing” (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1983, p. 466). Through the process of writing, students should not only grasp the information presented in the text, but also their curiosity in knowledge should also be elicited as a desire to know more. This embodies the essence of WAC, which has been valued by many scholars. Knoblauch and Brannon (1983) appraise it as a medium of “intellectual discovery” (p. 466). Gribbin (1991) propounds that the broader concept of writing “[forces] students to recall, to apply, and to analyze” (p. 366), which pushes students to explore new knowledge to heighten their “thinking skills” and “writing abilities” (Gribbin, 1991, p. 366).

The most salient difference between the restricted concept of WAC and the broader concept of WAC is that the latter mitigates the “concern for formal and technical
correctness” but emphasizes the use of writing to cultivate more a “competent, motivated writer – by writing for the sake of learning” (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1983, pp. 467-468), alleviating the fear that writing assignments will reduce the distribution of time in teaching the course content. The broader concept of WAC can truly promote the idea of writing as “a mode of learning”, which has been demonstrated thoroughly by a great range of studies (Emig, 1977, p. 122).

**Writing as a Mode of Learning**

As the previous section underpins the broader concept of WAC, the aim of this section is to specifically underline how writing in broader concept of WAC can strengthen learning based upon previous research studies. A great range of research studies have discussed that writing is a method of inquiry (e.g. Emig, 1977; Herrington, 1981; Brannon & Knoblauch, 1983; Zamel & Spack, 2006, Melzer, 2009; Defazio, Jones, Tennant & Hook, 2010). Gribbin (1991) claims that “learning and writing are complementary” (p. 365), and this ideology has been applied to many subjects, including business, history, clinical classes, etc. For instance, Brown (2015) investigates creative expression of science through poetry and other media to enrich and enhance medical and science education, which defies the expectation that science and poetry are exclusive. Davidson and Gumnier (1993) explain how a writing project in a macroeconomic class is implemented to better facilitate students’ understanding of the discipline and to think like business professionals. Carlson, Chu, Denial, and Lyons (2007) report the promotion of writing-to-learn pedagogy through using reflective journal writing in an Optometric clinical class to foster students’ self-evaluation and life-long learning skills.
Based on the findings in these research studies, writing has shown its profound impact upon the course understanding, including enhancing comprehension of course content, remedying the information gap, and developing critical thinking skills. Besides, writing can also promote language acquisition by improving language proficiency and increasing familiarity with diverse disciplinary discourses.

**Writing on Course Understanding**

The functions of writing are abundant, signified by the enhancement of course work, remedying the information gap, and also the cultivation of critical thinking skills. Herrington (1981) puts forward that writing throughout a lesson enables students to be familiar with course content when they come to class, and the students will have a better mastery of the course materials, key terms, and the questions which are elicited from writing and thinking. Besides, Herrington (1981) mentions in her study that the process of writing is a process of “[stimulating] students’ learning,” which provides students a chance to remedy the knowledge which they might miss without writing (p. 382). Through minimizing students’ blind spots in information to build a comprehensive understanding of course content, writing is a vital practice for the students.

Along with enhancing the understanding of course content and narrowing the information gap, the idea that writing can nurture critical thinking is also explored in some research studies. Knoblauch and Brannon (1983) state that WAC is a way of “discovering new knowledge” (p. 468). An illustration of this point comes from the case of a science class observed by Brannon and Knoblauch. They discovered that students were required to keep doing a notebook writing assignment to depict the observations of animal behaviors, which reinforced the content the students learned in class. The teacher
also encouraged the students to think deeper, like connecting animal behavior with human behaviors. In this way, the teacher tried to “lead [the students] to more writing, and more learning, by drawing the students into ever deepening dialogue” (Knoblauch & Brannon, p. 472). Moreover, Herrington (1981) brings up that writing is not a simplified act of memorization. Students are involved in critical and meaningful activities by “selecting and recording material, digesting it, and translating it into one’s own meaning and words” (p. 385). Via the procedure of writing, students’ critical thinking skills are cultivated and further strengthened.

**Writing on Language Acquisition**

Although there is a handful of studies that are reviewed regarding WAC, far too few empirical studies exist to debate how writing can promote language acquisition. Among the limited studies, Herrington (1981) specifies that writing throughout a lesson can facilitate students’ language use. Not only does it enable students to be familiar with course content when they come to class, but also they are able “to participate more actively and knowledgeably in class discussions” (Herrington, 1981, p. 384). This is indicative of achieving comprehensive language proficiency through the practice of writing. This point resonates with Zamel and Spack’s (2006) claims that “language acquisition takes place not only through the study of language but also when language is used as a means for understanding and constructing knowledge” (p. 128).

To conclude, as Zamel and Spack (2006) put it:

When students are given multiple, meaningful opportunities to write (not just to read) as a way to learn within their courses, they can engage actively when the material they are studying, making sense of their texts, generate ideas and
interpretations, make connections, experiment with unfamiliar language and literacy practices, and construct new knowledge. (p. 138)

**Writing-to-learn on Multilingual International Students**

This topic of writing-to-learn on multilingual international students has far less been discussed in such areas as WAC. Partially it is because, as Matsuda and Jablonski (1998) elucidate, WAC is compared to a second language due to different discourses and linguistic conventions in diverse disciplines. This misunderstanding about WAC blurs the discrepancy between L1 and L2 English speaking students, oversimplifying second language learning and marginalizing L2 students in WAC programs. Conversely, some scholars pinpoint an argument that if writing across the curriculum has already been arduous for L1 students who at least share the similar cultural, racial, or social backgrounds with their teachers, it would be much harder for L2 students who do not have that privilege. In other words, L2 students have to learn both the target language and disciplinary language simultaneously, even though their needs have not been negotiated and communicated with content class instructors.

Multilingual students’ experience across curriculum, analyzed in Zamel and Spack’s (2006) study, denotes the importance of writing to provide a sense of security and comfort to understand and critique course content, shape their ideas before class, and “[allow] for the possibility of students’ taking risks with language – which in turn leads them to acquire it” (p. 138). Multilingual students differ from native English speaking students in the way that multilingual students usually demand more time in consuming new knowledge and digesting “sophisticated vocabulary” and “unfamiliar topics” (Zamel & Spack, 2006, p. 127). Writing, as a process of learning, “gives [multilingual] students
the safety and time to deliberate and reflect on their thoughts and interpretations,” and “it can lead to insights and understanding that students might otherwise not have had” (Zamel & Spack, 2006, p. 138). Also, the safety and time supplied by writing enable multilingual students to “rehearse and articulate their thoughts” and to “consider not just what they want to say but how they will say it,” which is conducive to breaking their silence in class, reducing their fear, and encouraging their classroom engagement as well (Zamel & Spack, 2006, p. 138).

In addition, writing scaffolds multilingual students’ effective language use. One comment from the student in Zamel and Spack’s study (2006) perpetuates the notion that writing can promote growth in vocabulary and students’ other language skills:

[T]he word ‘barely’ is new for me. I’ll use it several times in my written language […]. So one day, unconsciously, ‘barely’ escape through my mouth in conversation, and it becomes part of my speaking. (p. 142)

Writing helps students to internalize words which can be utilized unconsciously in speaking. Besides, multilingual students very often feel excluded from classroom discussion due to their diffidence and timidity in speaking. Writing can also contribute to speaking and to participation in classroom conversations. An example to this point is also explicated by the aforementioned student from Zamel and Spack’s study (2006):

“[W]riting … makes my voice heard. Being a member of the class, I do want to get involved in class activities and to be heard. Writing is a form of class participation.”” (p. 142)

In a word, writing stimulates language acquisition.
Moreover, since writing-to-learn advocates the process of discovering knowledge, it prevents teachers from prioritizing the correctness of information, citations, and grammar. This avoids multilingual students being put into an underprivileged situation in which their limitations in language proficiency are magnified, while their richness and intelligence are neglected. Although language deficit is a common problem among multilingual students in the light of Zamel and Spack’s study (2006), writing-to-learn keeps teachers from exercising prejudice toward multilingual students by “[questioning] [the] students’ intelligence on the basis of their language errors” (p. 135).

Furthermore, writing across the curriculum provides opportunities for multilingual students to explore discourses in different disciplines. The discourse mainly refers to different genres (types of writing) utilized across curricula and the conventions that are socially constructed and recognized only by specific communities. According to Hyland (2008), genres enable multilingual writers to imitate structures, follow formats, and facilitate discipline-specific writing on one hand and deprive their creativity and erase the marks of native culture on the other hand. This idea echoes with Kubota’s (1999) assertion that to acculturate multilingual international students is to teach them the dominant “form of language and culture that the students lack,” (p. 20). By treating the students’ culture as a deficit, the students who remain their way of speaking and writing will feel disfranchised and powerless in the target academic community. The duality of genre writing debated in previous studies is discussed in the following section.

**Genres Within Disciplinary Writing**

When discussing WAC, it seems inevitable to talk about academic discourses, conventions, and genres, all of which are relevant to each other and can be synonymous
to each other. The word “genre” is a popular term currently in literacy studies.
Traditionally, genre referred to different types of literature, such as poetry, short stories, novels, etc. Also, genre has been used to distinguish any type of written discourse (Johns, 2003). Written discourses vary across disciplines, such as lab reports for chemists, article surveys for mathematicians, program documentation for computer scientists, and project reports for social scientists (Hyland, 2008). Owing to different disciplinary natures, different genres are emphasized while writing in different disciplines for specific social and cultural purposes. For instance, writing in a business class is emphasized and perceived as essential due to the fact that writing enables students to “‘[sell] ideas,’” and writing skills are equal to business skills. However, in a computer science class, the writing is more mathematically oriented and accompanied by formulas and equations to show evidence (Zhu, 2004, p. 45). That is to say, physicists do not write like lawyers, nor do philosophers write like engineers.

Genre, in light of Hyland’s (2008) definition, is a format “for grouping texts together, representing how writers typically use language to respond to recurring situations” (p. 554). His definition divulges that genre regulates particular discourses in disciplines and reveals both the facilitating and restrictive features of genres in writing across disparate disciplines. On the one hand, a specific disciplinary genre “refers to a shared sense of the conventions of grammar, vocabulary, [and] content” and helps students “express values and identities that relate to … particular discipline” (Hyland, 2008, p. 550). This implies that genre explicitly specifies vocabulary, grammar, and structures that writers should use to create meaning, achieve purposes, and obtain recognitions in specific communities, as well as institutional and disciplinary contexts.
On the other hand, the conventions that are embedded in genre writing repress students in certain formats, restrain their creativity, and lack flexibility. In addition, genre is a far more complex notion when applied in different contexts. Although genres provide discourses for writing in similar situations, genres as social practices vary tremendously across disciplines and social contexts. As academic writing involves “particular disciplinary thought and communication processes” (Zhu, 2004, p. 42), genre is a more “situated, contextual, and typical” concept which is “community-based” (Soliday, 2011, p. 6). This echoes what Soliday (2011) states, that genres are “more or less shaped by the expectations of groups beyond the moment at a more abstract level: the institutional, discipline, or workplace” (p. 5), suggesting that academic writing is affected by layers of contexts. Further, Soliday states that “a language form like a genre must be acquired to a certain extent in the natural contexts of its use” (p. 5). This leads Soliday to the problematic nature of genres, specifically that their users must be more fully situated in the communities where they are common:

[A] novice cannot really learn to write a new genre without participating in the life of the social groups who make genres possible in the first place. If writing ability is local, [students] acquire and use it exclusively in the actual rhetorical situations where [they] are immersed. (p. 5)

Soliday illuminates that the improvement of writing should be through students’ active participation. One of the efficient ways to acquire the knowledge of different genres of writing is to be given adequate practice, developing writing skills in particular disciplinary contexts.
Cultural Discourses for Multilingual International Students

Discourse is a double edged sword to multilingual international students. On one side, through explicit understanding and awareness of how target texts are structured and why they are written in the ways they are, students are able to mimic the formats, follow the regulations of a specific genre, and manipulate the language and choices to “scaffold their effective use of them” and to establish “professionally acceptable voice and appropriate attitude” (Hyland, 2008, p. 561). On the other side, as genre underscores the conformity to certain community-recognized pattern, it accentuates resemblances between texts at the cost of differences (Hyland, 2008, pp. 547-548). Nevertheless, different languages may prioritize a particular way of organizing ideas and constructing arguments, which, among other factors, can explain why writing is so difficult for multilingual international students with divergent cultural and educational experiences. Hyland (2008) clearly states some of the typical barriers to genre writing across multiple languages:

[A]cademic texts in English tend to be more explicit about structure and purposes, to be less tolerant of digression, to be more cautious in making claims, and to use more sentence connectors… very different from German, Korean, Chinese and Japanese, where the reader is expected to dig out the meaning from a dense text. (p. 548)

This is also demonstrated in the interaction between the researcher in the current study and one of the participants who perceived that writing in China and in the United States shared different format and styles, and she thought writing in the United States was more restrictive than writing in China. This phenomenon resonates Angelova and
Riazantseva’s (1999) statement that “the underlying issue is not that [multilingual international students] cannot write but rather that they think and write in ways different from the dominated discourses of the U.S. academia” (p. 494).

To multilingual international students, obstacles in writing are from varying cultural discourses and disciplinary discourses. In disciplinary discourses, the community-based and institutional-situated features of genre challenge the attempt to group various types of writing assigned in courses across the curriculum, (i.e., literature review, feasibility reports, essay exams, annotated bibliographies, etc.). This disconnect between community and genre practice oversimplifies and does not accurately “distinguish the boundaries of each type of writing which should be defined in their various disciplinary contexts” (Melzer, 2009, p. W251). How scholars categorize different types of writing and their purposes are reviewed in the next section.

**Purposes of Writing**

Since genre is a complicated concept, ways of grouping types of writing are debated. Scholars have different perceptions in grouping types of writing. My study will label different types of college writing based on Melzer’s ways of categorization. Melzer categorizes types of writing based upon their social functions, such as purposes and audiences. These targets are the key elements writers should keep in mind in order to identify themselves within communities, instead of “imposing static categories on dynamic uses of language by classifying genres by their formal features,” like lab reports, executive summaries, essay exams, and book reviews just to name a few,

Melzer (2009), based on Britton’s taxonomy, categorizes writing into four functions based upon rhetorical situations: “the expressive function,” “the poetic
function,” “the transactional function,” and “the exploratory function” (p. W243).

Different functions of genres serve different purposes of writing. Expressive writing is “informal and exploratory,” which considers self as audience “with the goal of invention” (p. W243). Poetic writing is “imaginative, with a focus on the text as art form,” making it a valuable way for students to connect personally with disciplinary content (p. W243); it is also highly supported by WAC specialists who promote writing-to-learn.

Transactional writing is used to “inform or persuade an audience” (p. W243). Melzer (2009) adds the last function, informal exploratory writing, to describe assignments that require students to explore ideas while the audience is beyond self and instead towards the public (p. W243). Exploratory writing, in Melzer’s perspective, is a way to “encourage students to invent argument, make connections, reflect on personal experience, and take risks” (p. W247). The most common type of writing belonging to exploratory writing is journals.

As stated in Melzer’s (2009) study, transactional writing is predominant in college writing assignments. Expressive and poetic writing are barely used in writing across curriculum. The transactional writing means the function of “writing to inform,” namely, “to display the ‘right’ answer or the ‘correct’ definition to the instructor through a recall of facts” in the form of short answers and essay exams (Melzer, 2009, p. W245). This is also confirmed in Melzer’s (2009) study that the dominant types of genre are the term paper and the short-answer exam (p. W251). Melzer’s (2009) study shows that transactional writing may lessen the level of difficulties of writing since the answers can be found in lecture materials or textbooks and only require regurgitating information. At the same time, students asked to practice transactional writing lose the chance of “writing
to learn” through making “personal connections with disciplinary content and broaden[ing] their repertoire of language tools for thinking and communicating,” as emphasized in creative or poetic functions of genres (Melzer, 2009, p. W246).

**Audiences for College Writing**

Previous studies illustrate that audiences for writing at the tertiary level are limited (Melzer, 2009; Zhu, 2004). There are various categories of audience, such as “self, teacher, peers, and wilder audiences” (Melzer, 2009 p. W243). Teachers as examiners are the dominant audience for students’ transactional writing, which is the leading function of writing assigned across curriculum. Melzer (2009) states that the emphasis on “the instructor as examiner has a negative effect on student engagement” since it lacks “self-evaluation and reflection” and personalizing the knowledge (pp. W249-250); hence, Melzer (2009) advocates to expand the audiences of college writing, such as “audience of the self” and “students to instructors” (p. W249). “Students to instructors,” for instance, creates a dialogue between instructor and student. Instructors take up a role of guide and give comments on a draft of an essay, rather than the role of examiners. In this way, teachers engage students in a writing process (Melzer, 2009, p. W249). The example to the point is that “journals in ‘history, business, secondary education, linguistics, [and] industrial studies’” are helpful to understand students’ experience in their fields, but grades are unnecessary. Writing without grades can encourage, especially multilingual students, to freely express their ideas, and also in the form of journal writing, teachers can understand the students’ challenges and difficulties in the fields (Gribbin, 1991, p. 367).
To sum up, in my current study I employ Melzer’s categorization of different types of writing. Focusing on the purposes of writing, it indicates the social function of writing like who the audience is, what the issue or topic is, and what the constraint is. Due to the peculiar features of genres, not only do they proffer affordances to students, but at the same time, they challenges students’ ability in managing different disciplinary cultures involved in genre writing. This point also sheds light on the complex properties of affordance, which is discussed in-depth in the next section.

**The Concept of Affordance**

This section aims to clarify the evolving meaning of the affordance and its usage in different fields, thus providing the theoretical underpinning for analysis in the sections that follow. Affordance originally is a psychological term, coined by Gibson (1979), to uncover the relations between the environment as surface and substances that the environment affords to a person or an animal. His contention is that “the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill” (Gibson, 1979, p.127, italics added by the researcher²). That is to say the feasibility of an action is due to what the environment offers to the actor. Gibson’s definition of affordance emphasizes the importance of environment and the dependence of affordance upon environment. Cognizant of the definition, I realize that the affordance coined by Gibson contains both-beneficial-and-dangerous sides, which have been indicated in my data as well.

---

² Here and further on throughout the chapter, the italics are to underscore the words which usually are telling information and to make the key information clearer to the readers.
One of my participants highly valued native English speakers – her husband and neighbors, both of whom were less educated than her; however, she relied on them heavily to check her grammatical errors, especially during the very beginning of her arrival in the U.S. To some extent, this personal relationship available in her social environment is a good affordance for her in writing, but gradually, even she was aware of the inadequacy of her husband and neighbors to assist her in writing. After their suggestions were included, her writing was with fewer grammatical, structural, and spelling problems. As for higher level problems, such as organization of the writing or whether an idea was, she found that their input was either unhelpful or simply not present. The good affordance turned out negatively, as they were unable to provide her constructive suggestions; therefore, this affordance impeded her improvement on English, and the affordance became a disturbance.

Gibson does not underscore affordance per se but its relationship with the ambient environment. Affordances, as a part of nature, do not have to be visible, desired, or known. Norman, an expert in Electrical Engineering and Psychology with a penchant for investigating affordances in design, borrows and modifies affordance from Gibson. He uts forward a nuanced difference in the definition of affordance, describing them as “the perceived and actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how [the] thing could possibly be used” (1999, p. 39). This definition poignantly pinpoints that it is not just how an environment affords affordance, but also relies on an individual’s capability to perceive the affordance. In other words, it depends on how meaningful and useful affordances are to an actor so that the affordances will be perceived.
A few research studies discuss affordances in the domain of language learning as well (Segalowitz, 2001; Van Lier, 2004; Singleton & Aronin, 2007; Ziglari, 2008; Aronin & Singleton, 2010). For example, Segalowitz (2001) puts forward that “a language …possessing affordances” with reference to multiple language learning (p.15). Singleton and Aronin propound a similar idea that “multilingual speakers have a more extensive range of affordances available to them than others,” presumably because they have a “higher level of language awareness of the social and cognitive possibilities which their situation affords them” (Singleton & Aronin, 2007, p. 85). In other words, the language awareness of multilingual speakers enables them to perceive and capitalize upon more language-related possibilities, which are affordances for their language learning and use. Their experiences as multilingual speakers do not simply equip them with a stock of languages, but also provide them with “the capacity to deal with the languages at their disposal and the challenges and opportunities connected with them” (Singleton & Aronin, 2007, p. 86).

Van Lier (2004) believes that “the environment is full of language that provides opportunity for learning to the active, participating learner,” and “the affordances which are picked up help the learner to promote more action and lead to higher levels of interaction” (p.23). Ziglari (2008) explains this idea, mentioning that “in the case of language learning, affordance comes out of participation and use that causes learning opportunities” (p. 377). This statement identifies the importance of interaction and sequential affordance in the environment, and in connection with language learning opportunities. In my study, affordance refers to available resources that can be utilized by the participants in their environment, relying on their ability to recognize those
affordances as premise. Based upon the foregoing theories, several features of affordance are analyzed in the flowing section.

**The Features of Affordances**

Aronin and Singleton (2010) enumerate several characteristics of affordances, stating first that “in the affordance perspective, the actor and the environment are an inseparable pair. This is encapsulated in the notion of *actor-environment mutuality*” (Aronin & Singleton, 2010, p. 115). Such mutuality of affordance refers to the “fit between an animal’s capabilities and the environmental supports and opportunities (both good and bad) that make a given activity possible” (Aronin & Singleton, 2010, p. 115). This can be explained in a way that teachers from various disciplines provide multilingual students opportunities to improve their language skills by making writing assignments but without specific instructions and guidance. The students may be unable to finish the assignments satisfactorily because the assignments are beyond their knowledge. This is similar with the “perceivability” of affordance, which indicates that the existence of an affordance has to be in the premise of being perceived, and then by means of the affordance, a particular action can be performed. For the sake of illustration, I consider my participant as an example to the point. She complained that her instructor did not make it explicitly clear what he expected to see in her writing when he assigned her the writing practice. Due to her cultural background and the fact that she had different writing experiences with academic writing in a U.S university, it was beyond her ability to surmise what the instructor asked for; thus, her grades were not desirable in the writing portion of her classwork.
Aronin and Singleton (2010) bring up another feature of affordance – “volatility” – resulting from the “[m]utuality and perceivability of affordance” (p.115). This echoes the example in the forgoing paragraphs. When students are given the chance to write, if the writing assignments are beyond their knowledge or experience, the affordance will be seen as a physical or mental constraint. Conversely, if the students welcome such challenges, they may think a challenge is a beneficial opportunity to approach learning; then, the challenge becomes an affordance in that case. The effect of an affordance relies on an individual’s attitudes to recognize it and should be within an individual’s capability to realize it. I perceive the volatility of affordances to be one of their individual traits, which reveals that an affordance for one student cannot be generalized as an affordance to other students. Also, because of diverse cultural, educational, political, and historical reasons, “the same affordances may be perceived and effectuated by some people but not perceived or ignored by others” (Aronin & Singleton, 2010, p. 122).

Based upon Aronin and Singleton’s (2010) findings of affordances, my study will focus on interviews as a form of data collection and will employ a collective-case-study approach, selecting “multiple case studies to illustrate the issue” to “show different perspectives on the problem” (Creswell, 2013, pp. 99-100). Since affordances are much more perceptions of individuals, they will vary from one individual to another owing to varying linguistic proficiency levels, cultural backgrounds, “economic positioning,” and attitudes towards target languages (Zamel & Spack, 2006, p. 126). Owing to these individual variables, it is more important to focus on each individual participant’s interpretation of affordances rather than making easy generalizations or inaccurate predictions.
Aronin and Singleton believe (2010) that environment is significant to language affordance, including physical objects like the speakers and physical entities and nontangible phenomena such as ideologies, attitudes towards languages, specific language knowledge, and metalinguistic awareness (p. 116). As Ziglari (2008) puts it:

[T]he environment is full of meaning potentials. These can include:

- classroom/textbook or instruction and the learner has also several abilities. So, affordances are those relationships that match between something in the environment (object or utterance) and the learner. Affordances bring about meaning as they fuel our perception and activity. (p. 378)

From this perspective, and apart from explicit genre teaching hidden in genre writing, faculty plays an important role in helping students to perceive an affordance in a classroom or to provide affordances to their learning, as they are the ones fostering a classroom environment and making the affordance come into existence through their instructions and feedback.

**Classroom Environment- Faculty Instructions and Feedback**

As previously mentioned, environment is a vital factor that will provide and affect individuals’ abilities to perceive affordance. In this current study, the external factors primarily consist of faculty’s instructions for writing assignments and feedback, as “faculty [members are the] main providers of writing opportunities and as providers of content-related feedback on student writing” (Zamel & Spack, 2006, p. 130). Based upon Zamel’s longitudinal study of two undergraduate multilingual students, it reveals that “how particular conditions of courses and specific approaches of individual instructors can benefit or undermine a student’s sense of progress and impact a student’s sense of
engagement or alienation” (Zamel & Spack, 2006, p. 131). A specific example of how writing instructions impact students’ success in academic areas is illustrated in Zamel and Spack’s study (2006). Ming, the participant, showed development through the negotiated interaction between her and her instructors in writing:

[Ming] eventually succeeded in her academic work, in part through her own determination and effort, but especially when instructors assigned writing that was designed to help her learn the course material and construct knowledge- and when these instructors provided meaningful feedback that contributed to her growth as a thinker and writer (Zamel & Spack, 2006, p. 132).

This demonstrates that effective instructions and feedback enable students to perceive their affordances in language learning and possession of knowledge. A well elaborated instruction and immediate and constructive feedback make affordances more perceivable to students and easier to perform. The following part reviews previous research concerning how instruction and feedback become affordances and constraints to students.

**Faculty’s Instructions and Feedback**

Zamel and Spack (2006) claim that “teachers’ intentions, expectations, and approaches promote or undercut students’ performance and progress and either contribute to students’ sense of accomplishment or silence them” (p. 138), which indicates the importance of teachers’ instructions in facilitating students’ writing. Despite this, an effective implementation of WAC is up to how teachers assign writing effectively through giving writing assignments in a sequential order, relating writing to real life situations, and being consistent with the course objectives. Defazio, Jones, Tennant, and Hook (2010) imply that giving writing assignments in a sequential order is helpful to
build up students’ language skill gradually, as it enables students to learn from writing mistakes and avoid repeating those mistakes on the next assignments. The gradually increasing level of difficulty of assignments lessens students’ anxiety and fear in writing.

Valuable feedback offers students possible affordances in achieving writing to learn. Feedback offered by professors can help students improve their writing and understanding of content. However, Zhu (2004) mentions that in universities, not many second language students receive feedback from content course instructors who think that multilingual students’ difficulties in writing is a simple lack of general rhetorical and language skills. This point is exemplified by one of my participants. She mentioned in my interview that barely any of her teachers provide feedback to her writings. Sometimes there are even no corrections of grammatical errors. So usually when her writing assignments were returned, she only expected the scores and then put her writing aside, taking this response to mean that this homework was done. Lack of feedback deprives students of a chance to further improve their writing skills and bolster their comprehension of knowledge. This could be a constraint for the students in developing their language skills and might silence their voice.

Summary

To sum up, in this chapter, I introduced several concepts into my study, like WAC, writing to learn, genres, and affordances. In-depth, I discussed writing as a mode of learning and cultural discourses for multilingual international students. Some more areas need to be revealed through my analyses of my participants’ answers, for instance, the areas of improvement for composition classes. In the next chapter, I detail the design of the study.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this study, there is one principal research question and three ancillary research questions, as shown below:

Main research question:

What are the affordances and challenges that the three undergraduate multilingual international students (UMISs) encounter while writing across the curriculum?

Ancillary research questions:

1. What genres are the three UMISs introduced to in their curricula?
2. In what ways do the three UMISs perceive teachers’ instructions and feedback that assist them in improving their language skills and their understanding of course content?
3. What are the self-reported learning strategies they accrue in writing courses that are beneficial for their other class writing assignments in colleges?

To answer these research questions, the three UMISs’ experiences of writing across the curriculum are analyzed via the qualitative data collection, particularly semi-structured interviews and completed written documents from previous classes. Chapter three details the research design of the study. There are nine significant components discussed in this chapter: (a) research design; (b) research site; (c) permission from Institutional Review Board; (d) entering the field; (e) description of participants; (f) Methodological Challenge; (g) the procedure of data collection; (h) researcher as insider and outsider; and (i) the procedure of data analysis.
Research Design

The study is designed to discover the affordances and challenges that the three UMISs encountered while writing across the curriculum. However, the fact that each UMIS possesses a disparate level of English competence, educational background, and traveling experience diminishes any possibility to generalize the students’ experiences. Therefore, generalization is avoided in this study because one affordance picked up by a student may be a disturbance to another. For instance, one of my Chinese participants thought that her L1 (Mandarin) prevented her from writing academic English compositions. However, in a contrastive conclusion made by another Chinese participant, he bragged about his outstanding L1 writing capabilities as determinants to his “not bad” English writing ability. Although the two participants possessed the same L1, the former considered it more as a predicament, and the latter perceived it as a privilege. Thus, exploration of the experiences and attitudes of UMISs towards writing hinges on an appropriate research design, allowing for in-depth investigations of each case to bring each individual’s own voices, experiences, and perceptions to the fore.

In my study, I use the qualitative case study approach to answer the study’s central research question: What are the affordances and challenges that the three undergraduate multilingual international students (UMISs) encounter while writing across the curriculum? My reason for choosing this particular type of study is that case study “develop[s] an in-depth understanding of the case” (Creswell, 1998, p. 39). As mentioned in the previous chapters, each individual’s “perceivibility” of affordances varies in view of his/her cultural/linguistic/educational experiences and backgrounds, resonating with an assertion by van Lier (2000):
“[A]n affordance affords further action (but does not cause or trigger it). What becomes an affordance depends on what the organism does, what it wants, and what is useful for it…Parallels to language can easily be drawn. If the language learner is active and engaged, she will perceive linguistic affordances and use them for linguistic action.” (p. 248)

That is to say, given the same affordances, students will still receive and utilize the affordances differently. Thus, it determines that my research should be a qualitative case study underlining each individual’s case.

In addition, this study utilized collective-case-study approach by selecting “multiple case studies to illustrate the issue,” to “show different perspectives on the problem,” and to disclose the participants’ understanding of writing in their respective majors in a thorough and explicit way (Creswell, 2013, p. 99). Specifically, each participant in my study is a case, and “a comprehensive profile of each [case] was created” with the emphasis to each participant’s affordances and challenges while writing across the curriculum (Rajadurai, 2010). Then, I conducted a “cross-case” analysis and discussed the overlapping as well as different themes emerging from the cases (Creswell, 2013, pp. 99-100).

**Research Site: Western Pennsylvania University (WPU)**

Hall (2009) claims that the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of student population in classrooms manifests a trend that “multilingual students are part of the mainstream” in U.S. universities (p.37). The Western Pennsylvania University₃ (WPU) that I chose as the institutional site for this project is one such U.S. university. This

---

₃This is a pseudonym for the actual institution.
university is considered a predominantly white institution (PWI) with 74.65% of white, 10.06% of black, and 6.21% of international students enrolled in fall 2014. The uniqueness of the WPU is that in the past few years, the number of international students considerably mushroomed, partly because of exchange programs between schools like the exchange program between a university in Sichuan, China and WPU. In the U.S., the percentage of international students has increased by 2% from fall 2009 to fall 2014.

In 2014, there was a total of 500 undergraduate multilingual international students from 41 different countries, including Brazil, Australia, China, India, Denmark, Germany, Saudi Arabia, etc. Predominantly, 192 are from Saudi Arabia, 148 are from mainland China, 35 are from Taiwan, and 26 are from Japan. The popular majors among the undergraduate multilingual international students are Finance (17%), Respiratory Care (10.6%), Accounting (9.4%), and International Business (6.4%). Aside from the population, the research site initiated the WAC program two years ago and has since been working actively with the Department of Food and Nutrition. Professors from other majors, who teach the majority of undergraduate multilingual international students, are still excluded from this program. This requires more efforts that the WAC specialists at the research site have planned to make in order to advertise the student benefits of WAC among professors.

Permission from Institutional Review Board (IRB)

The first time that I submitted the research protocol for approval was in the early December 2014. I received an email asking for small revisions like substituting jargon with common words in the consent form. Soon, I resubmitted the revised IRB, and in the middle of December 2014, I received the permission from the IRB for the study. While,
in the course of full engagement in the study, I envisioned a clearer understanding of my study and realized the shortcomings of the design in interview questions and the decision on participant pool. Thus, I submitted a request for change in protocol to the review board in the middle of February 2015. There were two parts that I attempted to change: (a) expansion of the population to come from different multilingual writing sections (MLW) of 101, 202, or 121 as opposed to only Fall 2014 MLW 121 students as I originally planned; (b) revision of some interview questions.

The reasons for these changes only became clear following some preliminary data collection and interaction with potential participants. Firstly, as this study focused on undergraduate multilingual international students, I thought it would be better to expand my participant pool and look for different varieties of undergraduate multilingual international students. Next, and simply put, I experienced significant difficulty in recruiting the participants. After I introduced my research topic in the class, MLW 121 in Fall 2014, only two students showed their interests in the study. Others, most of whom are from Finance and Respiratory Care, refused due to one common reason, namely that they thought there was no writing in their content classes. And finally, after I reviewed the interview questions, I felt some questions were overlapping, and I needed more questions pertinent to my research. I revised some word choices to make the questions easier to understand for my participants. I received the final approval letter from the IRB in the late February 2015. The revised informed consent form and the final approval letter from IRB are attached to the study as Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively.
Entering the Field: As a Researcher and Participants

Before starting the process of interview, I contacted my participants and gave them elaborate accounts of the study through emails, phones, or face to face meetings at a quiet place. This preparation was beneficial for both my participants and myself. As a novice researcher, I had too many concerns in mind, as to “how to make my participants feel relaxed, how to elicit what I need from them, how…” My anxiety at that time was as great as it may be when I am to defend my thesis. This preliminary contact allowed mutual understanding between my participants and me, which, to some extent, enhanced my confidence and lessened my misgivings. Most importantly, my participants were well acquainted with my research topic. It alleviated possible stress felt by them, as most of them had never participated in a research study before. Also, through the process, I established solid confidence with my participants. All of the preparations were conducive to the overall pleasurable and efficient interview process. We met at mutually negotiated spaces, comfortable and appropriate for the interview, such as an individual studying room in library at a time convenient to each participant. As such, each interviewee was given sufficient time to share his or her opinion. All Chinese participants were allowed to use Mandarin in the interviews to articulate their opinions and minimize misunderstandings because of linguistic barriers.

Description of Participants

My parameters for selecting prospective participants were as follows:

1. Each participant is enrolled as an undergraduate student in the western Pennsylvania University.

2. Each of them self-identified as an English as a second language learner.
3. Each participant has taken MLW 101, 202, or 121 at the research site. At the research site, all undergraduate students are required to complete 101, 202, and 121; however, MLW 101, 202, and 121 are only designed for multilingual international students, though some exchange students who stay here for just one year may not take these classes. MLW 101 and 202 are composition courses, dedicated to teaching students writing skills. For example, based upon the online course descriptions from the research site, MLW 101 highlights to “use a variety of resources to create projects in a variety of writing genres. Resources for writing include but are not limited to memory, observation, critical reading and viewing, analysis, and reflection. Students use writing processes to draft, peer review, revise, and edit their projects” (p. 180). MLW 202 “serves as a bridge between Composition I and students’ professional writing. Develops rhetorical skills for informed inquiry. Also develops the following abilities: writing, critical reading, revising, citing and documenting, speaking and listening, and reflecting” (p. 181). MLW 121 “[i]ntroduces students to works of imaginative literature through a careful analysis of poetry, drama, and prose fiction (short story and/or novel) from a variety of periods and cultures, including texts by women and ethnic and racial minorities” (p. 180). However, there might be some variations tied to who teaches those courses. For instance, MLW 121, in which I was the course assistant, was an introduction class to English studies in which students were asked to write essays, letters, etc. and to utilize presentation skills. All three courses, in line with what McLeod and Soven (1992) address, are considered as “[undergraduate] writing course[s] that [aim] at introducing students to the general features of academic discourse” (p. 4). This criterion is significant, since only after
the students have taken these courses could they offer answers to the third Ancillary research question. Likewise, they could also give suggestions to improve the class.

4. Participants from majors other than English, such as Finance, Communication, Education, etc. are prioritized. This criterion is based on the definition of WAC which espouses the need to assign intensive writing to students outside of composition, literature, and other English courses (Melzer, 2009, p. 258).

5. Since this study focuses on writing experiences across the curriculum, it is reasonable that each participant must have completed certain kinds of writing assignments in other content courses, e.g. a case study in a business class, short answers in chemistry class, or a lab report in a biology class, just to name a few; however, the concept of writing is left to participants to define.

**Methodological Challenge**

Given the above mentioned criteria, I introduced the research study to the undergraduate multilingual international students in the ENGL 121 to which I was a course assistant. Only two students showed their interest in the study, one from China and another from Saudi Arabia. At the same time, I disseminated information about the study with the help of International Education office at the research site, which possessed the whole list of international students’ email addresses; however, no one contacted me within the following weeks. At last, I asked my friends to spread the information with their acquaintances. After this step, there were three more Chinese students included in the study. However, the Saudi Arabian student was unable to submit his completed written documents to me. Confidentiality was a concern, as most of his writing activities transpired in the hospital where he was an intern and all of his writing exercises, like
patient reports, were based upon real cases. In that case, I excluded the participant in my study. In addition, one of the Chinese participants was also exempted from the study since he has not started his major courses yet. At last, I had only three Chinese UMISs. Table 1 displays the participants’ demographic information.

Table 1

Profile of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>First Language</th>
<th>Other languages they also speak</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hui</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Art Education</td>
<td>Shenyang, China</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>English, vernacular Mandarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huang</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Art Studio</td>
<td>Anhui, China</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>English, vernacular Mandarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qing</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Sichuan, China</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>English, vernacular Mandarin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hui is from a rural area in Shenyang, mainland China. At the time of this data collection in 2015, she resided in the United States for four years. Before she came to the United States, she had taught ceramics in elementary school for five years. After her arrival, she studied at WPU’s American Language Institute (ALI) first for around one year. When the study was conducted, she was already a senior in Art Education at the research site. My second participant is Huang, from Anhui, mainland China. He has been at the research site for around four years, including the first several months during which

---

4 Pseudonyms have been used throughout the research study.
he studied at the ALI. He was a senior in Art Studio when I interviewed him in spring of 2015. Before he came to the United States, he was already an art major in a three-year technical school in China. As students at technical schools were required less proficiency in English and lower scores in English exams than students who went to four-year universities, he disclosed to me, “you know as an art major student in China, my English was very bad [when I came to the U.S.] I took language class, and then took the TOEFL and IELTS tests” (Huang, Interview, March 2015). Although he experienced difficulty in learning English in the United States, he seemed very confident and comfortable in speaking English now. He even offered an option to speak English during the whole interview as long as I asked him to, which is rare among Chinese students, especially when the researcher is Chinese, too. My last participant is Qing from Sichuan, China. She had been in the U.S. for three years and was a senior at the research site in 2015. Before Qing came to the U.S., she had met the minimum score on the IELTS test regulated by the research site; therefore, unlike the other two Chinese participants, she did not need to take language proficiency courses at the ALI. As a result, she was matriculated in her chosen degree program immediately at the research site. When the interview was conducted in spring of 2015, it was her last semester at the research site.

**Data Collection Method**

The qualitative data collection lasted over a period of three weeks from February 2015 to March 2015. Two primary techniques were adopted to gather useful information: semi-structured interviews, which were recorded with a digital audio recorder, and personal written documents from the participants’ previous writing practices.
Data 1: Semi-structured Interview

Polit and Beck (2006) defined an interview as “[a] method of data collection in which one person (an interviewer) asks questions of another person (a respondent): interviews are conducted either face-to-face or by telephone.” There is no scarcity of texts regarding the difference among structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. According to Whiting (2008), “[s]tructured interviews use a questionnaire format with closed questions and can be beneficial, particularly when participants have either a speech or language impairment. However, they are frequently used to generate quantitative rather than qualitative data” (p. 36). This means structured interview is a standardized protocol with predetermined lists of questions always in the same orders. Nevertheless, semi-structured interview was selected as the primary means of data collection in this study for several considerations. First, semi-structured interviews, as Barriball and While (1994) put it, “are well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers” (p.330, italics added by the researcher). That is to say, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to see what is in the participants’ mind. This feature of semi-structured interview satisfied my aspiration to know the three UMISs’ experiences and perceptions towards writing across the curriculum. Second, due to varied educational, personal histories, and cultural backgrounds, semi-structured interviews provide the space and freedom for me to delve deeper into the participants’ answers and ask them follow up questions, which allow the fuller understanding of each case and avoidance of standardization of data across cases.
Third, semi-structured interviews usually “organized around an aide memoire or interview guide,” which “contains topics, themes, or areas to be covered during the course of the interview, rather than a sequenced script of standardized questions” (Mason, 2004, p.1021). In this study, I listed several interview questions which are grouped into roughly five sections, in alignment with my research questions, including demographics, warm-up questions, understanding of WAC and its impact on UMISs, writing instructions and feedback, and the effectiveness of writing classes (refer to Appendix C for a complete list of interview questions). The logic behind the division is based upon my four research questions. Each section provides a general direction that can assist me to obtain relevant information from my participants; however, at the same time, semi-structured interview allows flexibility and interaction (Mason, 2004). This flexibility implies that informants still have opportunities to verbalize their experiences of writing across the curriculum in their own ways, rather than confined in the predetermined framework of meaning and understanding of the researcher. Besides, semi-structured interview encourages the generation of data interactively. In other words, the informants, to some extent, can provide the direction of the interview (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Thus, semi-structured interview respects the active engagement of each participant and acknowledges an in-depth analysis of each individual’s unique experiences of writing as well.

**Data 2: Completed Written Documents From Courses**

Among a variety of written documents in qualitative research, the participants’ writing assignments from different disciplines were collected as another source of data. By examining those completed written documents from different courses, I could
partially find out what was the most common type of writing, relating to the second research question: what genres the three UMISs are introduced to in their curricula? This could be lab reports, diaries, essays, etc. Besides, those written documents gave me a chance to probe into the kind of feedback that content course instructors provide. This is in regards to the third research question: in what ways do the three UMISs perceive teachers’ instructions and feedback that assist them in improving their language skills and their understanding of course content? Furthermore, although my primary data is from interview, the written documents play a vital role of supporting my analyses. For instance, my participant, Hui, said that most of her content class instructors only gave grades to her writing and nothing else, like suggestions or asking for further revision, which I corroborated through examination of the completed written documents she gave me. She gave me several written documents from both content classes and writing classes. As she said, there was no feedback on writing from content class, and some of the writing even has no grades. One of the limitations of this data source is that each participant provided me with different amounts of written work from one to four pieces, which makes this data source less convincing and valid. After the relevant data methods were selected, data were collected through four stages in the procedure, which is shown in the following section.

**Data Collection Procedure**

Four stages are included in the qualitative method of the study, which are chronologically organized: the test of the validity of the interview questions, interview, the collection of personal written documents, and transcribing. The detailed procedure is described below.
Stage 1: Field Test.

In this stage, a field test was implemented to ensure the “success in obtaining the desired information and allows problems to be worked out prior to the study” (Moore, Lapan, & Quartaroli, 2012, p. 256). After the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study, I found a participant who shared the similar background with target participants for this study. I explained to her the intention of my field test, and she showed her support to me. I asked her the questions that I designed for my target participants. As this was the first time I did an interview, my inexperience and uneasiness were transparent. The interview ended earlier than I intended, partly because my interview skills were underdeveloped. For example, I did not ask follow up questions based upon the answers she gave me, though I should have delved into some of the answers which were of interest. Although the semi-structured interview gave me the flexibility to do that, I did not follow it carefully. Instead, what I intended to do was to finish all the interview questions listed in the interview protocol within the limited time. This field test provided an opportunity for me to improve and practice my interview skills while becoming well acquainted with semi-structured interview format.

Stage 2: Interview.

Prior to the interview, I “[conveyed] to the participants the purpose of the study, the time the interview [would] take to complete, the plans for using the results from the interview” as I mentioned to them in our initial email or phone interactions (Creswell, 2012, p.221). They were welcomed to ask questions about the study, and at the same time, their confidentiality was explained. Then, I asked them to complete the consent form (Appendix A) and sign it. After that, I commenced the one-on-one interview with
each participant for around 30 to 40 minutes and audiotaped the questions and responses. I took care to follow up on ample (Creswell, 2012, p.225). Neither the order of the questions nor their exact order were fixed, as often the case with semi-structured interviews. The general, leading questions were always asked first, followed by questions for clarifications and prompting further questions (Zhu, 2002). To protect my participants, they had the option to either not respond to certain questions or have the recorder be turned off during parts of the interview when they felt uncomfortable to answer those questions, although this situation did not happen in the interviews.

**Stage 3: Collection of Completed Written Documents From Courses**

A day or two before each interview, I contacted my participants and asked them to prepare some completed written documents from their courses. The written documents should have been graded or read by their professors or peers, with or without comments. After the interview, I collected those written documents, scanned them, and returned them back if the participants would like to keep their original ones. In doing this, I strived to guarantee the validity of the information revealed through interviews. I attempted to “corroborate what is said through … document reviews” to verify the participants’ comprehension of the research questions from other perspectives (Moore, Lapan, & Quartaroli, 2012, p. 256). To be specific, their completed written documents are another source of data which can help me to explore the common types of writing used in different disciplines and the kind of feedback offered by content class instructors or other readers. The two sources of data-interview and the written documents can collaborate together to support my analyses in the later chapters. Table 2 describes the length of
interview time and the numbers as well as types of completed written documents they submitted to me.

Table 2

*Records of Interview Time and Completed Written Documents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Interview Time</th>
<th>Numbers of Completed written documents</th>
<th>Types of Completed written documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hui</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>- Argumentative essay from MLW 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Portfolio Reflective essay from MLW 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Art review from Sculpture class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Educational Philosophy from Educational Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huang</td>
<td>59 minutes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Short essay questions from Advanced Critical Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qing</td>
<td>46 minutes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Short essay questions from Business Law exam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stage 4: Transcribing and Translation.**

Transcription is an integral part of research study, and it plays an essential role in the initial phases of data analysis (Brooks, 2010, p.1228). Although transcribing is a time-consuming and complex task, it deserves the effort. As Bird (2005) puts forward, “transcription is the act of (re)presenting original oral language in written form....When representing an oral voice in written form, the transcriber becomes the channel for that voice” (p. 228). The statement reflects the view that data collection, transcription, and analysis will be affected both “by the processes through which transcription is achieved as well as the depth of the researcher’s engagement with these processes” (Brooks, 2010, 1227). Concurring with this statement is Kramsch’s (2003) assertion that transcription leaves researchers open to the pratfalls of their own assumptions:
Transcription, however, introduces a particular risk of prejudging outcomes, since in the transcribing process the researcher projects phonemes, features, or other categories upon the acquirer's speech output. As the acoustic signal of speech is analog in nature, transcriptions will reflect the researcher’s - not the acquirer’s - acoustic-phonetic perceptual category thresholds. (p.52)

Although there are potential risks in transcription, Brooks (2010) points out that transcription facilitates a close attention and a holistic comprehension about the data for the researcher when the researcher is also the transcriber (p. 1227). To represent the interview conversation with minimum locus of research influence and to stand for the participants’ voice and perceptions, the researcher in this study, who happens to be the transcriber, was fully aware of the importance to be impersonal and remain distant with the text in transcription.

All the three Chinese informants in my study spoke Mandarin during the interview, which means I had to make the extra effort to translate Chinese into English. The potential risk in doing translation is that “translation is based on interpretation, which is influenced by the interpreter’s ‘experienced knowledge’” (Kanno, 1996, p. 83, quoted by Sato, 2014, p. 32). More specifically, “translators bring their life experiences into their translations” (Kanno, 1996, p. 84, quoted by Sato, 2014, p. 32). Well acquainted with the risk, I translated the words from Chinese into English verbatim. I was very careful in word choices while translating since Chinese and English were from two different language systems. I tried my best to revivify the participants’ voice in a written text and also made sure the translation was understandable to my readers, especially in terms of syntactic reordering (Wang, Collins, & Koehn, 2007). Basically, I used literal translation
to maintain the original flavor. After the painstaking process of translation and transcription, I requested the assistance of a PhD candidate at the research site whose L1 is Chinese and L2 is English, for member checking. At the same time, I emailed the transcription to the participants for confirmation. In this regard, I attempted to retain the validity and credibility of the data. Through the act of transcribing, not only did I improve my translating skills, but also I caught many nuanced details which extended and enhanced my understanding about the three participants’ experiences in writing. To facilitate my analysis of data, I transcribed and typed all the digitally recorded interviews in a computer file for analysis.

**Researcher’s Insider and Outsider Positionality**

Prior to the discussion of my data analysis procedure, I feel obligated to clarify how I positioned myself in this study, how my positioning might result in biases in the analyses of the collected data, and what effort I made to minimize the biases. In this study, I perceived myself as an insider and an outsider regarding both the commonalities I shared with my participants and the differences among us.

I saw myself as an insider of this study partly owing to the fact that I was the researcher and also the researched. In Chapter One, I narrated and divulged my own bittersweet experiences as an UMIS who spoke both Mandarin, Chinese vernacular, and English in the United States at a Southern university, as a prior English major student now studying as a graduate student at the research site. As such, I constructed and transformed my identity in this research through “maintaining a self-reflexive stance” (Giampapa, 2011, p. 134). Due to my struggles in the U.S. academic field and the challenge by my previous professor regarding my legitimacy as an English speaker and
writer, my experience as a UMIS allowed me to easily build a trusting and reliable relationship with my participants. Besides, my identity as an international Chinese student, on one hand, facilitated my recruitment of participants, as it is shown that all my participants are Chinese. I think the allowance to speak Mandarin in the interview made them less stressed. Familiarity with Chinese culture and fluency in Mandarin provided me insider status, as I was able to “[elicit] culturally specific information, and [capture] subtleties in the focal students’ self-presentation and interactions” (McKay & Wong, 1996, p. 584). So to speak, my identity as a Chinese facilitated my interpretation of the interview, but at the same time, I might be too emotionally involved in the research study as an insider.

On the other hand, as a qualitative researcher, I tried to maintain the professional distance with my participants; however, I was frequently forced to be aligned with my Chinese participants. An example to this point is that they either used “Chinese people” or “we” to include me in their interview answers. To be specific, when I asked one of my participants why he thought his writing was average, he answered:

Because we are Chinese students, I think all Chinese students’ writing is okay although may not be very good…You know lots of Chinese graduates came here and wrote academic essays. As long as they had the key ideas, in the process of transition, they did not need much time. (Huang, Interview, March 2015, italics added by the researcher)

Following this statement, he stared at me and seemed to obtain consonance from me. Although I did not totally agree with his generalization, since this was not the focus of the interview, I nodded my head as a confirmative signal so our interview could continue;
therefore, my identity as an insider of the study is also imposed upon me by my participants because of our shared ethnic and linguistic background. The imposition of the identity on me echoes the situation Giampapa (2011) encountered as her participants in the research study “exercised power … and assigned identities to [her]” (p. 133).

At the same time, I am an outsider in the study. Although my participants and I are multilingual international students, we still have different majors, genders, ages, education histories, cultural backgrounds, etc., which differentiates each individual’s experiences while writing across the curriculum. Considering the complexity of human experience, most of time I was an outside researcher. Even though I consider myself as an insider around the Chinese participants, this does not mean I innately have “a closer understanding of the ‘lived experiences’ of the participants in my research” (Giampapa, 2011, p. 134). The position as an outsider enabled me to be aware of my biases in the study, which endowed me with agency to be in command of my study.

As an insider researcher, the depth and breadth of understanding I gained about my participants is enhanced, but questions of reflexivity, authenticity, and objectivity are raised as well. As an outsider of the study, I could be more objective in terms of data analysis; however, I may not have been able to solicit the Chinese students who agreed to participate without my status as an international Chinese student who can communicate in Mandarin. Therefore, my identity as an insider and outsider researcher played an intertwined role in my study. To be objective in the research study, I spent time reflecting upon and distinguishing what my participants expressed during the interview, what was indeed my interpretation, and what connections I perceived with my own experiences. I reread my analyses over and over again and deleted those observations relating to
personal interactions between the participations and myself outside of the interview (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I had to admit, however, that without either of these identities, this study would be incomplete and probably impossible.

**Data Analysis Procedure**

As Ary, Jacob, and Sorensen (2010) argue that data collection and analysis are not distinctly separate stages. Conversely, they believe “data analysis in qualitative research is often done concurrently or simultaneously with data collection through an iterative, recursive, and dynamic process” (p. 481). During the period of data collection, from February 2015 to March 2015, while I was conducting interviews and seeing my participants, I was also transcribing and examining the data simultaneously. Since I utilized collective case study in this research, I focused on each individual case first, found out the themes, and provided in-depth descriptions. Following was a cross-case study, which means that after I explored each case, I looked for overlapping themes and patterns across cases (Creswell, 1998). By the time I received the last interview data, I had already developed a thorough chapter for my results.

During the process of data analysis, I always kept my research questions in mind. After transcribing the interview, I realized that I have amassed a huge amount of information for each case. Hence, prior to partaking in the journey of reducing the data, I read through all collected information to obtain a sense of the overall data and looked closely at the responses from the participants. Meanwhile, I selected the words or sentences which particularly addressed the research questions and highlighted them. Then, I made comparisons among the cases and jotted down notes in the margins of interview transcriptions so as to valorize the repetitive patterns or categories emerging
across the four cases (Creswell, 1998, p. 140). Throughout the process, I effectively generated the seven codes defined and exemplified, as shown in Table 3 below. This table mainly serves to organize and compile my data in the next chapter (Chapter Four).

The participants’ experiences, structured around the seven codes, foregrounded the themes that are discussed in Chapter five, whereas the themes in Chapter five surfaced from those participants’ experiences but echo with literature.

Table 3

*Codes Generated From the Cases*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordances</td>
<td>Opportunities and benefits that were provided by external factors which can be defined as outside influence that can impact a student’s ability to achieve certain goals, including institutional environment, classroom environment, etc., or by internal factors which are “attributes of the individual that make a task more familiar or easier in some respect (e.g. prior experience, motivation, cultural relevance, interests, etc.)” (Cummins, 2006, p. 72)</td>
<td>The participant, Qing, thought that she had relatively higher English proficiency than other Chinese students, which was considered as an affordance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>Participants perceived difficulties or adversaries that they confronted while writing across the curriculum</td>
<td>The participant, Hui, felt hardpressed to write in her L2 because of the impact from her L1, which sometimes impeded her ability to write like an “American.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genres</td>
<td>Different types of writing to serve different purposes in context of classrooms;</td>
<td>The participant, Huang, said that in his major, he has done lots of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This also refers to different discourses that exist to both estrange and familiarize the students in a particular context presentations before which he would write down what he attempted to say in case of nervousness. Also, he said that he was quite familiar with the vocabulary in his major. However, when he socialized with people outside of his academic environment, he felt cumbersome.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers’ instructions</th>
<th>Guidance and explanations in details that teachers give to students, telling the students how writing should be done and organized and what should be discussed in the writing; instructions also turn out to be an efficient way to provide writing context to the students</th>
<th>Almost all the participants said their content instructors did not give many instructions while assigning them writing tasks.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>Responses received from peers or instructors to improve the accuracy and quality of writing and can be used as a basis for improvement for L2 students. There are different types and purposes of feedback, performing different functions</td>
<td>Most of the participants thought grades are the most common feedback from instructors. On one hand, grades can be perceived as the most direct and transparent measurement of students’ work; on the other hand, the lack of explicit and clear explanations disables students to improve their language skills and understanding of course content.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| The impact of composition class on writing in other courses | Emphasis on the transferability of skills, strategies, or resources that the participants learned or obtained from their composition class that can be continued to be applied | The participant, Hui, believed that the general format of writing she learned from and practiced in composition class can be employed in writing in other content courses. |
| **Suggestions for composition class** | Implications for improvement / a possible blueprint for the further development of widely administered composition classes across universities on the basis of students’ needs | Almost all the participants responded that in composition courses, the instructors need to teach English for specific purposes. |

At last, considering the needs of some visual readers, Figure 1 portrays how I went about analyzing my data was constructed:

**Summary**

*Figure 1*. The process of data analysis.

In this chapter, I clearly introduced an outline of my research design and the methodological rationale. In particular, I report the following: (a) my choice of research design, a qualitative case study; (b) my research site, a Western Pennsylvania University with ever-growing multilingual international students; (c) the selection of my
participants; (d) my data collection methods, semi-structured interview and complete written documents, and the rationale behind these choices; (e) the procedure of data collection, which contains four main steps; (f) and last, my positionality in my study and the procedure of data analysis. All the choices and decisions were provided with their theoretical support, in accordance with the nature of my study. In the next chapter the results of my study are presented.
CHAPTER FOUR

CASE PRESENTATION

Chapter four showcases the data collected from semi-structured interviews and completed written documents. Interviews varied in length from approximately 30 minutes to around an hour, and the completed written documents, as a complementary data source, were provided to me out of participants’ willingness. The three Chinese students supplied, more or less, one to four completed written documents from their composition courses and/or content courses\(^5\) that they took in the past. The comprehensive data analysis is presented participant by participant. Each participant is a single case, and each case is fully investigated and undergirded by evidence through the integral combination of interview transcriptions and quotes from completed written documents, “to allow for a textual representation of the participants’ voices, so that, even in an inevitably limited way, they emerge as people in the text” (Rajadurai, 2010, p.95). The rationale for presenting my participants in certain order is in line with the comprehensiveness of the information they provided to me. For instance, I presented Hui’s case first because her interview lasted 45 minutes and she gave me 4 completed written documents. So both the length of the interview and the number of written documents were in a balance. I was able to give a more confident and holistic presentation of the case than Qing’s case, presented last, with both less interview time and fewer written documents.

\(^5\) I realized that it was problematic to use “content courses” to exclude composition courses; however, there was the lack of a more appropriate term to refer to composition course and the other subject courses. So throughout the study, I continued using the terms but the problem should be pointed out for readers.
In addition, other research studies, speaking to the findings from the raw data, are inserted to enrich the data presentation. The process of data selection is recursive and painstaking, particularly when I determined which information is relevant to the thesis topic and what is immaterial. As a novice qualitative researcher, very often I found myself in a deadlock on the journey of trying to be creative rather than conventional, though not too “wild.” To strike this compromise, I organized my data in accordance with the order of my research questions; this way, I was able to present a panorama of each case within circumscribed time, concentrated on my research questions as listed below:

Main research question:

What are the affordances and challenges that the three undergraduate multilingual international students (UMISs) encounter while writing across the curriculum?

Ancillary research questions:

1. What are the genres UMISs introduced to in different curricula?
2. In what ways do the UMISs perceive teachers’ instructions and feedback that assist them in improving their language skills and their understanding of course content?
3. What are the self-reported learning strategies they accrue in writing courses that are beneficial for their other class writing assignments in colleges?

According to the research questions, seven categories are engendered: affordances, challenges, genres, teachers’ instructions, feedback, the impact of composition classes on writing in other content courses, and suggestions for composition class. For each case, I started with a brief introduction of the participants to provide context for my analysis, and then I depicted each case revolving around the aforementioned seven categories. At
the end of each case, a laconic overview regarding my own interpretation and understanding of each case is given as a synthetic evaluation of the case.

Hui

Hui is the first participant recruited in my study. I knew her from the MLW 121 class in which I was the course assistant and she was a student. At that time, our interaction was limited in the classroom. Tracing back to her experiences in China, Hui was an Art teacher in elementary school. When the research was conducted in spring of 2015, she had been living in the United States for four years. Coming to the U.S. with close to zero English, she studied at the ALI for a while before she was enrolled in the research site and began her undergraduate degree in Art Education. At the time of interview in 2015, she was a senior in the Art Education program at the research site. Because she had not passed her Praxis test yet, she had less course choices from the Department of Education but more experiences in writing in art courses like Art History, Ceramics, etc. Throughout the remainder of this section, I discuss the case focusing on the seven codes with evidentiary support from the collected data.

Affordances: the External and Internal Factors that Facilitate Writing

The affordances she encountered can be grouped into two categories: external factors and internal factors, which embraced several subcategories. The external factors are related to outside environment or resources existing to facilitate writing; the internal factors, borrowed from Cummins (2006), are “attributes of the individual that make a task more familiar or easier in some respect (e.g. prior experience, motivation, cultural relevance, interests, etc.)” (p. 72).
External Factors. There are total of three external factors in Hui’s case, including personal relationships and writing center for grammar checking, the assistance from her instructors and their tolerance of grammatical errors, and the nature of major: more reading than writing.

Personal relationships and writing center for grammar checking. In this case, Hui narrated that by recourse to her personal relationships -her husband and neighbors as well as the help from the writing center – she received abundant assistance in just checking grammar. When asked about her primary area of concentration when she writes, Hui expressed both her patience with grammar and diffidence in her English writing skills:

It should be [grammar]. I spent lots of time on grammar. I can check the structures of my essay. But for the grammar, after I checked it, I would go let my husband check it. After he read it, I would ask my neighbors to check, and then I went to writing center. (Hui, February 2015, Interview, italics are added by the researcher)

It seemed that she greatly prized and valued nativeness in seeking for grammar help and other English language related problems. For example, her husband and neighbors are native English speakers. Although these native speakers are less educated than Hui and her non-native English speaking classmates in the college, she relied more on them than

---

6 As indicated in earlier chapters, the completed written documents collected in the study are all in English, while the interviews are conducted in Chinese; therefore, the interviews have been translated from Chinese into English following Standard English though with some stylistic allowances.

7 Here and further on throughout the chapter, the italics added in interview excerpts in this chapter are to underscore the words which usually are telling information and to make the key information clearer to the readers, which might be helpful especially when the excerpts provided are lengthy.
her classmates. She elaborated on this point further, mentioning that as “a second language learner, if the other one is also a second language learner, he/she may not know what is right or wrong, and so it is not helpful [to ask them to check her grammar]” (Hui, February 2015, interview).

In terms of her indisposition to ask L2 classmates for grammar support, it is clear from the statement, that she perceives native English speakers to be more qualified in English teaching than non-native English speakers. The environment she was in, including the presence of her husband, her native English speaking neighbors, and writing center located on campus, facilitated her English learning. Whenever she made a grammar mistake, her husband would correct her, as she mentioned in one of her completed written documents that “I think my families help is very important to my first draft. They helped me check the grammar and words” (Hui, written documents: “Portfolio Reflective Essay-let kids play video games”). These resources, especially her native English speaking husband and neighbors, are the affordances which are not all available for other participants in this study.

_Tolerance of grammatical errors._ Another affordance that Hui obtained was from content class instructors who showed their sympathy as well as empathy towards multilingual international students, which, on one hand, were privileges for the UMISs while writing in their majors. For example, in exams, although she was not permitted to bring her own electronic dictionary, she revealed that “I could ask teachers questions. He also said if I have any question, I could ask him. But I could not bring electronic dictionary”, and besides, “if I missed a letter or more added a letter, he would still consider it as right. As long as he could understand the meaning, he would not deduct the
points” (Hui, February 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher). Suffice it to say that the instructors’ lenient attitudes towards grammatical errors and spellings empowered her as a multilingual international student while writing in this discipline. The professors’ attitudes towards her spelling problems are also accounted by Matsuda and Cox (2009), who state that “professors were able to overlook local errors—errors that do not directly affect meaning—such as articles, prepositions, spellings… professors tend to react more negatively to global errors—errors that affect the comprehension of meaning—such as the wrong word choice, word order, and verb tense” (p.47, cited by Santos, 1988, p.81). However, a problem emerged as well. The inconsistent standards existing between content class instructors and Standard English tests, such as the Praxis test are the problem which remains convoluted and untackled. In Standard English tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, and the Praxis test, which Hui is required to take in order to further her study in her major, misspelling and grammatical errors are not accepted. The professors’ apathy towards her grammatical errors might result in her negligence on promoting her English skills and her innocence on the reality outside of the classrooms. In this spirit, the affordance from content class instructors turned out to be a dilemma.

The nature of major: more reading than writing. The last external affordance Hui brought up in the interview was due to the nature of her major, Art Education. Her major can be divided into two parts - art and education. Albeit that some education courses required intensive writing like courseware design, art classes demanded more actual practice in handicraft such as making ceramics, drawing pictures, etc., which involved in almost no writing at all. Hui illustrated this gape when asked about the importance of writing in her major:
Yes, in art part, I did not have lots of chances to practice writing. In education part, I did have. In art part, some instructors just asked us to attend the lecture, and then write a reflection. But some did not require to write, just to attend the lecture. In education part, there were lots of writing. (Hui, February 2015, Interview)

The excerpt reflects the discourses in each course which draw clear boundaries between art and education, the two components of her major. Regardless of less writing, her major asked for more intensive reading than writing, which she perceived to contribute to her improvement of writing. Namely, the time she spent in constructing the same length of writing was shortened, implicating her enhancement on dexterity and fluency on writing:

I feel I write faster than before… before I had to spend several hours in writing for around 200 words. Now I can do it within 20 or 30 minutes… I think it is because I read more. I did not have many writing practices. (Hui, February 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher)

As the statements indicated, the nature of the major- requiring plentiful reading- is conducive to her progress in writing, which is also to say that reading and writing are entwined. Reading, as a way of acquisition, affected Hui’s literacy in writing. As she mentioned in her writing, she also realized that“[She does not] have enough reading quantity. In the future, [she] will to read more articles, learn writing language and with logic and structure” (Hui, written documents: “Portfolio Reflective Essay-let kids play video games”). The contribution of reading to writing, including the acquisition of discourses and awareness of different cultures in writing, would be further examined in other cases in the chapter.
External affordances rely on individual participant’s perceptions, while internal factors depend on participants’ capability to trigger them from memories or innate preponderance. Hui’s L1, Chinese, as a mediator and her personal experiences as writing fodders are her two perceived internal factors. More details are shown below.

I feel we learn English through Chinese … When I first started, I did not care about my grammar, I just wrote and used Chinese to replace English if I did not know the word, which I think was called free writing … but I did pay attention to the structures, which means how to write. After the free writing, I would revise those words left in Chinese and translated them into English and checked other grammatical issues. (Hui, February 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher)

Hui’s L1 - Chinese as a mediator. As the interview excerpt articulated, the significance of L1 in L2 writing was salient to Hui in the journey of her English learning and writing. While writing in content courses, she implied that she wrote first in the mix of Chinese and English such that her mind could flow without interruptions, and then once she completed the draft, she translated the Chinese into English. Using her L1 to write was essential for her when her English was not sufficient to convey her ideas accurately, particularly during her initial arrival to the United States. She used her L1 for “lexical-searching” (Wang, 2003, 349). As Van Weijen, Van den Bergh, Rijlaarsdam, and Sanders (2009) revealed that “L1 use is an indication that writers are finding it difficult to orchestrate their cognitive activities at a specific moment during the writing process” (p. 245). For Hui, the direct transition from writing in L1 to L2 made the completion of the writing in L2 possible, corroborating Wang’s (2003) statement that, “[c]omposing their
writing tasks in this way might have helped them overcome writing difficulties without exerting much mental effort” (p. 366). This demonstrates the strong positive correlation between L1 and L2, namely in that the maintenance and utilization of L1 benefits the development of L2 (Cummins, 2006). What is more, based upon the interview, Hui’s utilization of L1 was only constrained to her limited storage of lexes to translate Chinese into English in L2 writing, and because of this she perceived herself as an unskilled writer (Uzawa, 1996). However, whether Hui used her L1 for other purposes like idea generating, monitoring, and for other needs requires further investigation (Wang, 2003).

Notwithstanding that Hui conceded her L1 as a mediator through which she completed English writing, her L1 also boosted her writing and enabled her to learn English efficiently via the means of L1. For Hui, Chinese is not only a language, but also a culture or a discourse (Gee, 2015); Chinese as Hui’s L1 and primary discourse is indicative of the fact that Chinese and English cannot be translated directly, which indeed was problematic for Hui. This point was explicated in detail in the later section on Hui’s Challenges.

**Personal experiences as writing materials.** Personal experiences are another internal affordance that Hui possesses which helped her to write in her Educational Psychology course, and they also became her advantage over other students who had no teaching experiences and had to “assume” a prospective teaching context (Hui, February 2015, Interview). Hui thought that writing was all about experiences. Without those experiences, it was impossible to write an attractive and fascinating article: “Think about so many writers in China. Most of them were ‘educated urban youth’ who have
experienced the ‘going to the countryside.’ They had suffered so they knew [what to write about and how to write] (laughing)” (Hui, February 2015, Interview).

Here, Hui mulled over a special period of history in China when many intellectual and educated young students from urban areas in China in 1970s were forced to “work” in countryside and to “experience” life. Many of them, after returning to their homes, became writers revealing their hardship during that period of chaos in China. In this sense, Hui explained that personal experiences could be excellent writing materials, which foreshadowed the significance of Hui’s experiences as a teacher in an elementary school in China. Her personal experiences as a teacher turned out to be an affordance for her. She overtly acclaimed to support this finding in the interview, stating that “writing is all about experiences. Without those experience and setbacks, you cannot write well. Right?” (Hui, February 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher).

Another noteworthy evidence to reinforce this point is from her completed written documents. As I read through her writing for her Educational Psychology course, the whole essay reflected her teaching experiences and her interaction with her students: “Based on my art teaching experiences in an art training center, I realized that educational philosophy is very important, because it is about teachers’ beliefs in teaching which directly influence their ways of instruction” (extract from Hui’s completed written document, italics added by the researcher). In the following section after this statement, she depicted how she got along well with her students, helped them, and encouraged them to achieve their goals, all of which are recollected from her teaching experiences. Her experience was a unique treasure that she could utilize in her writing and which was
not possessed by everyone. Table 4 shows a conclusion of all the affordances Hui had while writing in Art Education.

Table 4

*Summaries of All Affordances that Hui Had*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affordance</th>
<th>External factors</th>
<th>Internal Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal relationship-her husband and neighbors, and the writing center for grammar checking</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hui’s L1- Chinese as a mediator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The assistance from and tolerance of grammatical errors from her instructors</td>
<td></td>
<td>personal experiences as writing materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The nature of her major: more reading than writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Challenges**

From Hui’s perspectives, linguistic incompetence, including grammar and vocabulary, cultural dissonance, and the influence from L1, are the three primary challenges for her in writing. During the interview, her answers towards the challenges in writing are more on writing in general than discussing the difficulties specifically in content courses.

*Linguistic incompetence in grammar and vocabulary.* Through the conversation with Hui, I obtained the impression that grammar and vocabulary are proposed as insurmountable obstacles for her to be confident in English writing. In Hui’s case, English has been reduced to the two components in her comprehension. That is to say, she believed that to grasp English is equivalent to the mastery of grammar and vocabulary. She complained that she had more to say than what she put into written
words and what she intended to express was not exactly what she had written down. In this regard, Hui stated that her “difficulty is not on content, I could write about anything. But I do not have enough vocabulary. So very often I used simple words. After finished the writing, I found my writing was full of simple words” (Hui, February 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher). Although she laughed out loud at her own statement, her frustration and depression at her perceived lack of vocabulary skills were palpable. Additionally, another perceived lack of skills in making complex sentences appeared in Hui’s response as, “I do not know how to construct complicated sentences, so I only use very simple sentences” (Hui, February 2015, Interview). In this respect, Hui’s vulnerability in writing is attributable to her perceived limited accumulation of vocabulary and skills in diversifying and complicating sentence structures.

Cultural dissonance. While talking about any challenge she noticed as an international student, she brought up the differing writing styles in China and in the U.S. She alluded to the difference, as “[i]n China, the writing is not restricted. You can have different format and styles. But in the U.S., there [are] restrictions.” Later she added that “[i]n the United States, you have to have a beginning, [middle] parts, ending, and other restrictions” (Hui, February 2015, Interview). Hui perceived that in China, the writing style is dynamic and fluid in nature, unlike standard American five-paragraph essay, which “includes a need for adequate supporting evidence and distinct beginning, middle, and end pieces of discourse with few digressions” (Connor, 2003, p. 232). But not all compositions and composition teachers adhere to the five paragraph genre. This partially illuminates Hui’s parochial perception towards writing in the United States and also reveals how limited her writing experiences is in different disciplines, resonating with
essentialism in regards to cultural difference in writing (Kubota, 2004). Her perceived difference between Chinese writing and English writing, among other differences, is a hurdle for her to write across the curriculum. Although no one written document she provided to me is in accord with the standard five-paragraph essay, I can see the organization of those written documents is in line with the general structure and formatting of introduction, details, and conclusion. For instance, in one of her completed written documents, she mentioned that, “In the first paragraph I introduced my text, summarize the main points. The second to seventh paragraph are my reasons to support my main point. At last paragraph, it is a summary description and deep thoughts about my point of view” (Hui, written documents: “Portfolio Reflective Essay-let kids play video games”). This written document is her reflection on another writing assignment which had at least nine paragraphs, but the general format is in line with the five-paragraph essay. I believe her perspective towards the standard five-paragraph essay in the United States is derived from her earlier impressions on writing in language institutes where this type of genre was given much emphasis.

Another cultural dissonance which Hui did not mention in the interview, but was brought up in her completed written documents, is citation. She pinpointed that to “find the resource is not a very difficult problem.” Instead, Hui had difficulty in utilizing other authorial voices: “I used many hours to find my references in the position of the article. Sometimes I found a very good reference, but reading my draft. I felt the reference did not fit my thoughts” (Hui, written documents: “Portfolio Reflective Essay-let kids play video games”). Citation was definitely a time-consuming task to Hui. Reading through her completed written documents, I saw some errors in her citations – she included
authors without quotation marks and sometimes with quotation marks but without in-text citations – which were prevalent in her one of completed written documents. As a Chinese student myself, I considered this difficulty as one of the cultural dissonances for two reasons. First, the style of citation in China and in the United States were different. Second, in China, using citations was not quite common, and plagiarism was punished but still prevalent in China. Therefore, how to cite an article appropriately in the United States is a new challenge to Hui, and it is definitely a culturally defined practice.

The negative L1/L2 relationship. As previously mentioned, L1 was an affordance to Hui while writing across the curriculum since she utilized her Chinese first and then translated the Chinese into English. In this section, she conversely divulged how her L1 impeded her L2 writing, stating that she “feel[s] we learn English through Chinese” (Hui, February 2015, Interview). Partially, she was saying that the influence from L1 writing ability, by means of which she developed her L2 writing, determined her English writing level, as she lucidly commented that “if Chinese writing is not good, [it] means your English writing is also bad…if I wrote well in Chinese while I was in China, my [English writing] would be different [now]” (Hui, February 2015, Interview). This interview excerpt insinuates that, except for her limited linguistic proficiency in L2, Hui also felt defeated by her writing ability in her L1. She was negatively affected her writing ability in L2, as she blamed her “poor” English writing to her just “so-so” L1 writing (Uzawa, 1996). The idea that her limitations in Chinese writing undermined her English writing illuminates that L1 and L2 are interdependent for multilingual international writers like Hui. This concept of L1/L2 relationship has been thoroughly investigated and elaborated by Cummins (2006) who stated that “Those who have strong L1 academic and
conceptual skills when they start learning English tend to attain higher levels of English academic skills” (p. 24). This explicates the necessity to maintain and promote the students’ L1 while learning and acquiring L2. Table 5 shows the challenges that Hui had while writing in her major.

**Table 5**

*Challenges for Hui While Writing in Her Major*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incompetence in grammar and vocabulary</td>
<td>Because she did not have lots of vocabulary, she had to use simple words throughout her writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural dissonance</td>
<td>She thought Chinese writing is more flexible than academic English writing in the U.S., which is considered an essentialism by the researcher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The negative L1/ L2 relationship</td>
<td>She believed that her L1 writing ability determined her L2 writing. Due to her poor L1 writing, she thought her L2 writing was unable to be good either.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Genres: Types of Writing**

As I discussed in Chapter two, genre is socially constructed and varies even in the same class taught by the same instructor across different semesters. Initially, I attempted to borrow Melzer’s (2009) way to categorize different types of writing, such as “the expressive function,” “the poetic function,” “the transactional function,” and “the exploratory function” (p. W 243); nevertheless, most of the participants’ writing was to inform what he/she has learned or to critique certain ideas, primarily with their instructors as their audience. In this example, the informational papers should belong to “the transactional function,” and the critiques belong to “the exploratory function.” But under the two categories, there exist more subtle differences. Melzer’s way of grouping
different types of writing based upon the audience of the writing and its function might be beneficial to make generalization, as it still blurs the boundaries within each function. Thus, I tried to explain each type of writing in more specific details to highlight the characteristics of each type of writing, rather than describing them based on the functions in general. For Hui, there are the genres of reflection, review, theory-to-practice, and essay questions.

Reflection is the most common type of writing she encountered while writing in different disciplines in her major—recalling fact through revealing previous experiences. She explicated that “after an art exhibition or an artist speech, professors asked for reflection” (Hui, February 2015, Interview). When I further questioned her whether the reflection was to critique her teaching methods, to envision what she would do in the future, or to depict factual incidents, she replied as follows:

It is just a reflection of fact. Reflect what I have done in teaching. For example, my previous students were very poor but they were very hard working, so I bought them books or if their clothes were worn, I would buy them clothes…. This is a concept in Education Psychology. After learning in this class, I understood what I did was right. (Hui, February 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher)

Reflecting on a similar experience in her past as a teacher, she wrote that “those students who loved art, they liked to do their work in their own ways. I gave them freedom and flexibility as best as I could. I only gave them feedback when they have critical mistakes on some techniques” (Hui, written documents: “Using Education Psychology in Teaching Fine Arts: My Educational Philosophy”). Notably, she recollected her way of teaching
which obeys the teaching principles of understanding students’ needs. In this respect, she made an effort to connect what she did before as a teacher with educational philosophy.

*Art Reviews* were another type of writing introduced to her in content classes. The reviews included two parts- descriptions of events and personal critiques. Reading through the completed written documents, I found out that there were two writing assignments named “Art Review Paper.” One was written after she listened to an artist’s speech, and another was written after she went back from an art exhibition. What Hui wrote in the review papers are just the depiction of the events, instead of personal evaluations of the events. In comments written on the paper, her professor who asked to add her own critique of the contents, for instance, how she understood the artist’s ideas or how she perceived the displayed arts, etc.

*Theory-to-practice* is the type of writing that Hui practiced in education classes. It was less frequently assigned than the reflection and review because Hui had not yet passed her Praxis test when this research study was conducted and most of her classes still pertained to art. Because of her past experiences as an art teacher in China, she was able to engage with the theory and philosophy of Educational psychology: “I had teaching experience before, so my writing was based upon my experience. But other students who do not have those teaching experiences have to ‘assume’ (Hui, February 2015, Interview). Due to her previous experiences as a teacher, she could analyze what she did before and combined theory with her practice, while her other classmates had to assume when and how to punish and reward their students.

*Essay questions* were the last type of writing that Hui discussed in the interview. In Art History class, the only writing practice was in responding to essay questions.
During the interview, Hui recalled the information she typically included in her responses to essay questions, as well as the overall format of the class:

There would be an art in the Power Point. Most of them, [the content-course professors] had talked about in class. I need to write out the time like when the art was made, who is the author, etc. Sometimes I need to write about the significance of the art. *Most of them are essay questions.*” (Hui, February 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher)

This essay exam requires good attendance and memory because as she said, “the artifacts the instructor showed in the PPT had been either discussed in class or showed in textbooks” (Hui, February 2015, Interview); thus, what she should prepare for the essay questions is memorization of all the key points, combining her own comprehension of the knowledge. This type of writing echoes what Melzer (2009) claimed in his study, that “informative assignments present students with an extremely limited view of academic discourse, asking them simply to display the ‘right’ answer or the ‘correct’ definition to the instructor through a recall of facts” (P. W245). It is worth noting that each content course had different discourses with distinct rules and styles – theory-to-practice in Educational Psychology class or essay questions in Art History class. Table 6 illustrates the types of writing completed by Hui.

Table 6

*Types of Writing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Writing</th>
<th>Explanations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Reflect factual incidents or previous personal experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Review</td>
<td>Recollect the events like an artist’s speech or an art exhibition and also need personal critique or evaluation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Theory to Practice Genre**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Apply theoretical knowledge to real teaching situations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Essay Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recalling what has been discussed in class and written in textbooks in the basis of understanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Teachers’ Instructions**

In general, teachers’ instructions can benefit or undermine students’ achievement in an assignment. An elaborate and specific instruction enables students to perceive their teacher’s expectations and requirements of an assignment and, more importantly, provides the relevant context to multilingual international students while writing. According to Hui, the content class instructors in her major are not strict in giving writing assignments, and their instructions are not clear. For instance, in a sculpture class, the instructor told her and other students that there would be two essays required for the class. After they attended the art exhibition and the lecture held at the research site, they needed to write reflective essays. Hui said the instructor informed them of the two events when the time was approaching, but he did not say anything more: “In major class, the professor told us this semester would have two reflective essays and when the lecture was. After we attended the lecture, we just wrote the essay and let the instructor read” (Hui, February 2015, Interview.). Hui complained that her “grades [were] always not high,” as a consequence of the lack of clarity in instructions. According to Hui, her instructor pointed out that she needed to add her own opinions, not just the descriptions of the events. However, this had not been elucidated before the instructor assigned the writing exercise, leading Hui to believe that her writing “was not [what] he wanted.” (Hui, February 2015, Interview).
However, compared with her perceptions of content class instructors’ less specific instructions, Hui referred to her instructor in composition class (MLW 101) as more strict: “[He told] us how to write, what to write, use what kinds of format, etc. How many grammatical errors will make your scores deducted” (Hui, February 2015, Interview). Obviously, Hui appreciated her MLW 101 instructor who gave detailed and explicit instructions. The gap between content instructors and composition class instructors while giving instructions embodies content course instructors’ lesser emphasis on writing. It may also be inferred that these content course instructors believe teaching writing is the composition class instructors’ responsibility.

Feedback

Feedback can be provided by peers or instructors with one sentence, two sentences, a long paragraph, or just grades. It could be about grammar issues or content. In short, there can be different types of feedback. Based upon Hui’s answers, most of the instructors in her content classes only gave scores, although one of the instructors gave her feedback asking her not just to talk about positive opinions, but to criticize as well. What is more, Hui made a comparison between her English instructors from MLW 101, 202, 121 and her content class instructors, stating that her “English instructors’ feedback was the best, [while] content class instructors’ feedback was not very helpful.” She also preferred the feedback she received on the technical aspects of her writing, stating that her instructors in MLW 101, 202, and 121 “gave very elaborate feedbacks [and] even the grammar has been corrected” (Hui, February 2015, Interview).

According to her responses, I looked for the evidence from the completed written documents Hui submitted to me. Among the three written documents from content
classes, two of them had no grades and no other marks made by professors to inform me that the essays had been read, and I had to get the corroboration from Hui that all of the written documents she gave to me were indeed returned from her instructors. The other one has both grades and short side comments like “weakness explain?”, “critique the artwork?,” “rephrase,” etc. (Hui, completed written document: “The New Vitality”). But there was no further specific feedback. Conversely, with one of the completed written documents from her composition class, “Let kids Play Video Games,” the instructor attached a very specific rubric for Hui’s construction of the essay. The teacher listed all the points for different parts like the logic of the essay, transition, citation, grammar, and format. This difference of giving writing feedback demonstrates the diverse emphasis of writing among composition class instructors and content class instructors.

**The Impact of Composition Class on Writing**

Composition classes in the English Department are partially designed to teach students basic writing skills, such as grammar, sentence structures, and structures of writing. ENGL 101, 202, and 121 also typically incorporate instruction on research skills like screening, synthesizing, and citing relevant materials, which prepares students to write in their content classes. For Hui, composition classes were helpful in teaching her the format of writing which she could imitate in writing in other content classes:

> English class mainly taught grammar, sometimes sentence structures, but not much […] Also the structures of the essay. In these ways, you will know how to write in other classes. […] Based upon the format I learned in those classes, I used them in writing in other classes. (Hui, February 2015, Interview)
Hui perceived the general process of writing an essay, including “brain-storming, outlining, thesis statement, topic sentence, [and] introduction-body-conclusion,” as “formulaic prescriptions” for transforming her ideas in different disciplinary writing (Uzawa, 1996, p.282). It seems that for Hui, there was no big difference between the format of writing in composition classes and content classes, a point later confirmed after I checked her written documents for MLW 101 and other content classes. She followed the same format, no matter if it was a review or a reflection.

**Suggestions for Composition Class**

As we spent some time talking about the instructions given by instructors, the discussion inspired her to give suggestions for instructors of composition classes. Specifically, Hui felt that “[instructors] should give strict requirements,” that they “should give students lots of writing practice,” and that, “although the students can still get the credits with “easy” instructors, they could not learn much from the instructors” without more direction. (Hui, February 2015, Interview). Hui thought that she could learn more from stringent instructors, and she appreciated those who gave more writing practices; therefore, she hoped her writing class instructors could be stricter and give more writing exercise. This point demonstrates that Hui was a believer in the axiom “practice makes perfect.”

**Overview of my Interpretation of the Data**

All of the findings responded to the study’s research questions, around which I presented Hui’s case holistically. However, during the interview, Hui did not distinguish the lines between content class writing and composition class writing practices. Pondering upon the specific experiences of English writing in diverse disciplines, Hui
expressed ambivalence, and most of time, she just addressed writing in general. Most of her comments were targeted at content class and composition class writing practices and stressed her identity as an L2 English learner. This probably illustrates that Hui has not been cognizant of the differences due to her perceived linguistic incompetence. Also, there exists another possibility that content instructors just considered writing as “addons” which fails to elicit “writing to learn” in content class pedagogy (Young, 1999, p.5); in this regard, writing assignments across disciplines become less meaningful and beneficial to undergraduate multilingual international students like Hui. Through the analysis of the types of writing she encountered, the writing format did not vary across disciplines, and her writing activities were very limited.

Her perceived challenges while writing in her major were grammar and vocabulary – considered to be two primary elements of English – contrasting with Kramsch’s (2006) concept of symbolic competence, which defines language learners as whole persons rather than just communicators and problem solvers. However, when I read through her completed written documents, I did not feel that either her grammar or vocabulary were awful, or no instructors mentioned her English skills as a deficit in her writing. There might be two explanations. One interpretation is that by means of the external affordances she had consulted or resorted to an expert, such as the writing center, her native English speaking husband, and her neighbors, before she handed in her writing. This affordance may indicate that her writing skill has not been objectively represented through those writing activities since they were polished and revised with the help of tutors or others. Another explanation could simply be that her English is better
than she thought and she was self-effacing; therefore, the real challenge she met was cultural dissonance.

To write for a specific class is to master the discourse of that class. To Hui, the discourses should include both cultural differences (e.g., different modes of thinking while writing in Chinese and in English) and also class discourses, such as instructors’ requirements and the “hidden curriculum” (see Rosenbaum, 1976; Anyon, 1980; Margolis, 2001; Lempp & Seale, 2004; Brown, 2015; Hafferty & O’Donnell, 2015 for more information about hidden curriculum).

**Huang**

Huang, at the time of the study in 2015, was a senior majoring in Art Studio. Coming from Sichuan, China, he had been at the research site for around four years, including one year at the ALI. Although we had no connections before, he impressed me the most, stemming from his poignant, perspicacious responses and comments during the interview. Notwithstanding his low self-esteem on his English – “when I was in China, my English was terrible, and now my English was just so so” (Huang, March 2015, Interview) – he was a sophisticated student in that he had a strong consciousness of diverse discourses that he encountered, existing across disciplines and even in his daily life. While he was somewhat confident in his everyday interactions, he expressed some gaps in his applicable vocabulary: “I think my daily conversation is okay….but the weak part is… *like menu, when I was in restaurants. … vocabulary on this part is very limited, but the academic vocabularies in my major I know a lot*” (Huang, March 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher).
Our conversation implicated Huang’s perceived weakness on vocabulary in different fields. In this case, he confessed that he was not proficient in vocabulary on food. Although he was well acquainted with the words from his content classes, since most of his social and academic life happened within his major, the world beyond was unfamiliar to him – for example, in a restaurant. The reason why he impressed me the most is due to the fact that he was the first participant of whom I asked the question, “how do you perceive your English ability” to distinguish his literacy in various situations. Huang’s previous response is in accordance with Cummins’ (2006) definition of “language proficiency” as a concept that “cannot be conceptualized outside of particular contexts of use and [people] can talk of different levels of accomplishment or expertise (or degrees of access) only with reference to specific contexts” (p. 55).

This concept required us to deconstruct or problematize the concept of language proficiency in general without mentioning specific contexts. Huang further elaborated on his awareness of academic discourses in his classes, illustrating this specific proficiency. When asked what types of writing he had experienced in college, he said, “you can say it depends on what classes you have... for example MLW 101, we did what the instructor asked us to do.” (Huang, March 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher).

Huang’s statement illuminates that the classroom discourses were determined by instructors, and his ability to perceive this affordance enabled him to succeed in his study.

He directly pointed out that different classes required different types of writing practices. Also, I checked his completed written document for Advanced Critical Art Writing. One of the questions asked was, “what procedures do you use in your working process?” His answer reflected that he had a clear perception of the procedures that
should be applied to create different art. For example, he used phrases like: “For drawing by colors I usually…” “If I am doing some 3D work or sculpture, I will…” “If I am doing the graphic design […] I will sketch my idea…” (Huang, completed written document: “Writing One”). The previous participant investigated prior to Huang’s case seemed less sensitive and lacking the incisive expression, both of whom only talked about genres of writing as a whole, never showing clear recognition of different disciplinary discourses that Huang noticed.

Besides, Huang believed that Chinese and English writing are interdependent and mutually affecting, which reconfirms Cummins’ (2006) assertion that “transfer across languages is two-way (from L1 to L2 and then back from L2 to L1)” (p.23) and is in alignment with “Chinese participants’ English writing [being] influenced by both English and Chinese” (Liu & Furneaux, 2015, p. 65). He conveyed that he had profound passion in Chinese literature, and this impact is applicable while writing in English, “because [his] Chinese literature level is high. There is a process of transfer [while writing in English]… but as long as you are familiar with it [, you will have no problem writing in English]” (Huang, March 2015, Interview). Huang believed that there was a transition between English writing and Chinese writing. Although “the transfer of literacy and concepts across languages” do not necessarily happen automatically (Cummins, 2006, p.21), Huang’s critical language awareness towards subtle nuances and connections among different languages sufficiently proves him as an insightful and sophisticated second language learner. Also, Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008) noted that “proficient L1 writers successfully transfer at least some of their writing skills to L2 writing” (p. 104), and multilingual international writers possess multiple competences while transferring
between L1 and L2 (Liu & Furneaux, 2015). In this regard, multilingual international students possess more innate resources while writing in L2, and it is also reasonable for them to maintain traces of their L1 in their L2 writing. In other words, being multilingual speakers per se should be considered as an affordance.

Huang conceded that English writing is much easier than Chinese writing because “the American writing is very straightforward. Every paragraph separates, but Chinese writing is in favor of metaphors and euphemism” (Huang, March 2015, Interview). As a multilingual international writer, Huang noticed and appreciated different cultures; nevertheless, his conception of cultural difference is a form of essentialism (Kubota, 2004). His understanding of grasping the transition between English and Chinese writing was most essential and problematic since, during the process of transition, the English tends to turn out to be Chinglish. This is also called “transfer error,” which alludes to the inclusion of different grammar rules within different language systems (Tseng, 2009, p.20). For instance, in Chinese, there is the absence of articles (a/an/the), which brings troubles to Chinese students while learning English and which they are unable to figure out based upon their intuition (Rafoth, 2015). During the process of transferring, there is the possibility to mess up those language rules, leading to confusion from certain readers. This is also one of the challenges Huang encountered while writing in different disciplines. When I checked his completed written document, one proverb stood out in the writing, which is “A good beginning is half success” (Huang, completed written document: “Writing One”). This is a very typical Chinese proverb that was translated directly into English, whereas there is a more native expression in English, which is “A good beginning is half the battle.” Although the English translation from Chinese by
Huang and the original expression in English were similar, some readers may prefer the “authentic” English expression, which might put Huang in disadvantage. Likewise, I will showcase Huang’s case based on the seven themes: affordances, challenges, genres, teachers’ instructions, feedback, the impact of composition class on writing in other content classes, and suggestions for composition class. Like Hui, Huang also provided his completed written document to me, but there was only one; thus, the information I can elicit from the completed written document is limited.

**Affordances: External Affordances and Internal Affordances**

Huang had more self-reported affordances than the other participants due to his awareness and more sophisticated ability to perceive different affordances, especially his imitation from reading, reliance on help from grammar checking websites, and use of the environment and people around him.

*External Affordances.* Six external affordances are included in Huang’s case: the imitation from reading; assistance from instructors, roommates, grammar checking websites, and writing center; the nature of the major; the “white”-dominant environment in his major; learning English formally in the United States; and the tolerance of grammatical errors from his professors.

*The imitation from reading.* Throughout the interview, Huang impressed me by being an assiduous student, and his strong desire to be an insider of the “American” culture lingered on me as well. When he discovered that his writing deviated from the so-called “American” style, he asked his professor for help. The following quote from the interview delineated what the professor told him:
My writing was still like Chinese style. Actually I talked to my professor about this, how to write like Americans, he said you have to read more. Sometimes I imitated the format, the style, and then write. (Huang, March 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher)

The strategy of imitation allowed Huang’s writing to be more “American” and acceptable by his professors who failed to understand his writing with Chinese styles and encouraged him to combine the two writing styles. Later, he added that “to improve writing you need to read books, especially the books related to your majors” (Huang, March 2015, Interview). This delivers the information that to better understand the discourse of the major is through intensive reading, as Cummins (2006) puts out that “if second language learners are to catch up academically to native-speakers they must engage in extensive readings of written text because academic language is reliably to be found only in written text” (p. 79). That is, extensive reading is a course for the students to comprehend and internalize the language of academic success. Huang benefited from reading and expressed his agreement with this facet of Cummins’s argument:

“for example, if I saw some nice sentences, I would jot down, which was very beneficial for me. Because the sentences were very precise and its format…, which can polish my writing. I very often imitated the writing style.” (Huang, March 2015, Interview)

Evidently, reading and writing are inseparable, and through reading, Huang discerned and recognized the discrepancy between Chinese patterns of writing and English ways of writing.
According to his narration, it was conducive to Huang’s academic success to be more close to the “Americans” as he expected and to enable him to be recognized as successful in his study. However, this also means that both Huang and his instructors considered his Chinese style of writing as deficient. Therefore, he had to eradicate his Chinese identity in his writing and to be more “American.” He might feel split between the two cultures, and is it a kind of assimilation in a negative way by asking students to get rid of their cultural heritage. Also, imitating sentence structures and appropriating them into one’s own writing should also be problematic as it is very likely to be seen as plagiarism and it does not reflect students’ own writing ability but how well they can imitate academic writing.

Assistance from instructors, roommates, grammar checking websites, and the writing center. Huang self-reported several divergent resources that are available around him and utilized by him, including the faculty and native-English speaking roommates, grammar checking websites, and the writing center, all of which became Huang’s back up when he needed help on English writing. Giving precedence to his instructors, Huang mentioned that he would “let [his] instructor read it first, if [the instructor] asked [him] to add more details or asked… some questions, [he] would revise it according to [the instructor’s] requirement” (Huang, March 2015, Interview). Next, Huang perceived his development as a writer to be impeded less by his generation of ideas than his control of grammar and mechanics:

I think I spent more time on thinking (ideas), and then I spent time in writing. My grammar is better than before. Before, I had lots of grammatical errors. Now I still do proofreading. Sometimes I asked my roommate who is an ‘American’ for help.
Sometimes I went to a grammar checking website. (Huang, March 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher)

He also showed similar reliance on the writing center for his practice of American academic discourse:

> [W]e have the *writing center*. All the students in that class need go to the writing center. I went there several times and it helped me a lot in language, but now I went there less and less because the writing is not so hard and myself can do it (Huang, March 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher)

The first response breaks the stereotype that professors judged international students based upon their English proficiency, at least in Huang’s case. Indeed, most of the teachers, according to Huang, are empathetic and considerate to their international students. His professor gave him adequate help in writing by means of reading Huang’s writing and willingly offering him suggestions for his further revision. This help, in turn, gave Huang much confidence when he submitted his assignment. The second interview response intimated that Huang took advantage of his native-English speaking roommates and an online grammar checking website to check his grammar when the other resources were not at hand. The last interview response revealed that the writing center, which provided professional tutors to aid international students like Huang, was helpful for him when he needed someone to proofread his writing. All of these resources enhanced Huang’s confidence in writing and made his study easier at the research site.

*The nature of the major.* Another affordance Huang referred to is the nature of his major, which does not entail lots of writing. Not surprisingly, this could be an affordance for Huang but also can be a hurdle to prevent him from improving his English writing.
On one hand, as a multilingual international student who was concerned about his grammar and punctuation, less requirement of writing in his major is an affordance to him. The following excerpt demonstrates this point perspicuously:

Our instructors do not require much writing. We read a lot, but whether you want to write or not it is up to you. Even when we have to write, we just focused on key ideas and just wrote several paragraphs or to create. We are not required to write reports. (Huang, March 2015, Interview)

Huang also mentioned that, typically, “there were errors everywhere” when he would write (Huang, March 2015, Interview). For this reason, less writing exercise should be an affordance to him since he would make lots of mistakes in his writing; however, on the other hand, due to the lack of writing, Huang felt his writing skills decreased and he cherished every chance he was asked to write. Huang stated:

“[B]ecause we did not have many writings in the major, writing practice in some of the major classes provided a chance for me to recall the writing strategies, maintain my English writing skills, and improve my English and practice the grammar.” (Huang, March 2015, Interview)

Thus, the shortage of writing was a double-edged sword for him. In other words, since the lack of writing in his major temporarily concealed his problem in writing, he would never be able to improve his writing skill without enough writing practice and setbacks.

The “white”-dominant environment in his major. Staying in an environment where most of the students are racially different might be intimidating and stressful, though to Huang, this was a more favorable rather than exasperating situation. He
perceived the “white”-dominant studying environment as an affordance, conveying his preference for “Bai Ren,” or a predominantly white group of interlocutors:

In my major, there is only one Chinese which is me, so I talked to Bai Ren a lot, like the Dean and my classmates. And my roommate is a Bai Ren as well. I have a good vibe to learn English. I came here by myself, not with a group of Chinese friends like others, so I could learn English faster than the other Chinese.”

(Huang, March 2015, Interview)

Huang’s definition of “white” is problematic, since not all white-looking students are native English speakers, there are Germans, French, Italians, and other Europeans as well. However, he intended to express was that he sees his classmates and faculty as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 2002). Compared with many multilingual international Chinese students who came to the United States with their Chinese friends or classmates, Huang came here alone and had more chance to converse with native-English speakers, which offered an opportunity for him to practice his speaking. As he believed that English skills are all related, his perceived improvement of speaking enhanced his writing to some extent, in line with his statement that “English skills are all interdependent. The improvement of speaking will help enhance writing ability” (Huang, March 2015, Interview). Moreover, Huhtala and Lehti-Eklund (2010) maintain that “[l]earning an L2 can also be seen as a process of becoming a member of a new culture. Becoming a member of a new (language) culture demands active work and interaction with the members of the new culture” (p. 279). This cultural membership bespeaks Huang’s active communication with the native English speakers and his fervent desire to be an insider of the “American” culture.
Learning English formally in the United States. Huang believed that realizing the importance of English and learning most of English after coming to the United States are affordances:

Learning English speaking and writing here [in the United States] is different with learning those in China. English speaking, for instance, learned in China is more formal than here. I heard my Chinese friends complained that the speaking they learned in China did not work out well here. (Huang, March 2015, Interview)

Huang discussed that English writing and speaking learned in China are much more formal and highly structured than in the United States. Although they are all English, Huang thought the Chinese English needed to be adapted to be American English. Since Huang learnt most of his English in the United States, he did not have the problem to adjust his “Chinglish” to the English acceptable in the United States. Again, this refers to different cultural discourses and the idea of world Englishes. English speaking and writing taught in China and in the United States are differentiated because English as a language containing each country’s culture and mode of thinking as well. Huang, who stated in the interview that he did not study English seriously in China, could study better English in the United States and was not affected strongly by Chinese English; thus, he experienced less stress in transforming between two different forms of English. To him, this was an affordance because he learned the “pure” English which is socially recognized and accepted in the United States. Huang’s perspective towards different types of English and “pure” English is not uncommon among multilingual international students who normally consider British and American English as Standard English or “pure” English. This phenomenon reveals linguistic imperialism propagandized through
the dominance of English taught and learned all over the world (Modiano, 2001; Phillipson, 2000).

Tolerance of grammatical errors from professors. Like the other two participants discussed earlier, Huang also met empathetic and lenient professors who thought more highly of ideas and critical thinking in writing than surface level elements like spelling, punctuation, etc. Huang stated in the interview that his “instructor was very good. When [Huang] told [his instructor] that [he] was worried about [his] grammar, he said he was not a grammar teacher. What he cared [about were] ideas” (Huang, March 2015, Interview). Huang was worried about his grammatical errors in writing, which discouraged him. However, the professor’s understanding buttressed Huang’s confidence in expressing his ideas in writing and underscored that the essence of writing is the ideas. This empowered Huang as an undergraduate multilingual international student. Although the professors’ tolerance of grammatical errors were affordances to him while writing, this tolerance might put Huang in a disadvantage when the environment changes. While I read his completed written document, I could understand what he tried to convey. Nevertheless, there were some very basic grammatical errors that occurred repeatedly and the professor did not point that out. For instance, Huang used six dots in the writing to express ellipses, rather than three dots. This reflects contrastive rhetoric between China and United States, since in China, ellipses are six dots while in the United States the ellipses were three dots. Also, he was not skillful in using passive voice and subject-verb agreement, such as “… an emotion need express” (Huang, completed written document: “Writing One”), rather than “… an emotion needs to be expressed.”
**Internal affordances.** The influences from L1 and Huang’s confidence in writing were two crucial internal affordances manifested in Huang’s case. More explanations are presented below.

The influence from L1: Chinese writing and English writing are mutual and bidirectional. In the interview, Huang expressed his belief that there are reciprocal impacts between Chinese writing and English writing. Since he thought Chinese writing was harder than English writing, Chinese students had no more difficulty in writing in English. While Huang considered his own English writing to be “average,” he perceived the rhetorical difficulty of Chinese writing as a positively contributing factor:

Because we are Chinese students, I think all Chinese students’ writing is okay although may not be very good [...] I think they are mutual. My Chinese writing is good, and my High school entrance exam in Chinese was good too. (Huang, March 2015, Interview)

Based upon the conversation, Huang generalized that all Chinese students could have at least intermediate English writing level. The reason might be connected to what he mentioned later in the interview, that “English writing is very straightforward” (Huang, March 2015, Interview). In other words, English writing is easier because Chinese writing appreciates connotations but English writing asks for forthright expressions. If a student has good Chinese writing, English writing will not be a problem. For most people, this idea is undeniably biased whereas Huang’s induction is closely shaped by his English learning and writing experience.

His confidence in writing. Another internal affordance is out of Huang’s confidence in his Chinese writing, which, in turn, built up his confidence in English
writing. For example, Huang’s personal writing projects familiarized him with the process of writing formally, which alleviated the later stresses of writing in the university setting:

I liked writing dairies before. My Chinese was good and I was interested in traditional Chinese prose. To me it was like chatting, but more formal in language when write it down […] you could add your own ideas…you could say it is like a game. So I had no stress in English writing as well, although grammar and vocabularies in the beginning are a challenge to me. (Huang, March 2015, Interview)

Huang compared writing to a game, indicating his enjoyment in both Chinese and English writing. Compared with those who hate writing, Huang’s voracious attitudes towards writing could be a catalyst to trigger him to invest in strengthening his English writing. His passion and love for Chinese writing sustained a solid foundation in his journey to learn English writing. Table 7 displays all the affordances that Huang discussed while writing in Art Studio.

Table 7

Overview of All Affordances that Huang Discussed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affordance</th>
<th>External Factors</th>
<th>Internal Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The imitation from reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance from instructors, roommates, grammar checking websites, and the writing center</td>
<td></td>
<td>The influence from L1: Chinese writing and English writing are mutual and bidirectional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The nature of the major</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The “white”-dominant environment in his major | His confidence in writing
---|---
Learning English formally in the United States
Tolerance of grammatical errors from professors

**Challenges**

For Huang, cultural dissonances and his diffidence on vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation were the challenges that he perceived to overcome.

*Cultural dissonances.* The difference in cultural backgrounds between his professors and himself was one of the vital challenges that Huang encountered while writing. The cultural gap stood out when his professors pointed out that they could not understand his writing:

> [American] writing has [its] own concepts […] the American writing is very straightforward. Every paragraph separates, but Chinese writing like metaphors and uses… it does not mean the Americans do not like this style of writing, the main point is they do not understand [my writing], so they do not like it. (Huang, March 2015, Interview)

Cultural and linguistic diversity widened misinterpretations and affected Huang’s performance in the classes, as his professors did not comprehend his writing.

Huang’s situation echoes what Kubota (2004) discussed, that “[c]ontrastive rhetoric research in essence treats the cultural difference that ESL students bring to learning as a barrier to becoming competent English writers” (p. 24). Similarly, Ochs (2003) expressed a similar sentiment, that “[t]hese cross-cultural differences often thwart the language socialization of novices trying to access second cultures” (p.115). In other
words, cross-cultural English writing leaves little room for multilingual international students to deviate from the conventions of English, and they must master the “written discourse structures of the target language” (Kubota, 2004, p. 24), which epitomizes conflicts of politics and struggles for power. Huang himself provided an even more detailed example:

[My professor] did not understand what I wrote, and he said my writing was not linear and straightforward, so he could not understand. Or sometimes we repeated a point twice to show the emphasis, but he thought that was redundant […] So I learned to be concise in writing and just keep those things which are necessary.

(Huang, March 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher)

Huang clarified the conflicts between the two cultures mirrored in writing, and the conflict is out of the professors’ “lack of knowledge or sensitivity to cultural difference… [which] leads to stereotyping the target culture” (Kubota, 2004, p. 25).

Huang later made an analogue in the interview to expound the disparity of the cultures, noting that “it is just like [the Americans] made a joke, but [Chinese students] do not laugh” (Huang, March 2015, Interview). The chasm between the two cultures blocked the smooth communication between Huang and his professors and also disabled them to be appreciative of the beauty of each other’s cultures. However, in this case, Huang was the one showing the willingness to learn and apprehend the “American” culture; the professors were averse to accept Huang’s English writing in Chinese patterns and only asked Huang to revise his writing to be close to the “American” style, as Huang claimed that “[his] professors would ask [him] to revise the writing until it is close to the American way” (Huang, March 2015, Interview). The imbalanced distribution of power
between Huang and his professors might be one of the reasons why only Huang endured the pressure and tried to understand the “American” culture, except for another reason that Huang disclosed:

Since I am in the United States now, I should learn the native way of writing and that is also why I am here-to learn from the Americans. (Huang, March 2015, Interview)

Huang’s statement indicated the essence of colonialism in present English teaching and learning. This statement brought to light one of the reasons why Huang rigorously tried to learn the writing style in the target culture and implicitly indicates the necessity to gain the cultural capital to be academically successful in the United States. However, he might feel powerless while adopting the way of writing and speaking of the target academic community, and, as Leki (1992) points out, “beyond a certain level of proficiency in English writing, it is not the students’ texts that need to change; rather it is the native-speaking readers and evaluators (particularly in educational institutions) that need to learn to read more broadly, with a more cosmopolitan and less parochial eye” (p. 134).

Vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation. Another challenge that Huang encountered is his perceived insufficiency in vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation:

I had lots of difficulties while writing, such as vocabulary, which everyone would have including the Americans; second is grammar. After I finished writing, there were errors everywhere. Third is the transformation of punctuations. (Huang, March 2015, Interview)

Grammar problems, punctuation, etc. seemed to be a common perceived challenge among the participants in the study. What is uncertain is whether they were really poor at
grammar or if their perceived linguistic identity as multilingual international students caused them to feel that they lacked the confidence in their grammar and punctuation. As I read through Huang’s completed written documents that he submitted to me, his grammar and punctuation were not “very bad,” as he had mentioned (Huang, March 2015, Interview). There were mistakes here and there but not big errors. For example, one of the sentences from the completed written document was “I have same experience with compose idea in the working process not only in the beginning” (Huang, completed written document, 2015). The correct expression should be “I have [the] same experience with compos[ing] idea[s] in the working process, not only in the beginning.” Nonetheless, the little mistakes should not affect understanding. Since Huang told me that he did not ask anyone to check his grammars on the completed written documents, I think he had at least advanced English proficiency in writing, and the perceived difficulties in vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation should not be a deterrent for him to write. Maybe these problems were just a norm for native and non-native English speakers alike while writing, as he commented that “everyone would have [problems in vocabulary, punctuation, and grammar] including the ‘Americans’” (Huang, March 2015, Interview). From this perspective, Huang freed himself to learn and speak English for his own purpose by claiming that native English speakers would make grammatical mistakes as well, showing his agency in language learning. Table 8 concludes the challenges that Huang confronted while writing in his major.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural dissonance</td>
<td>Cultural dissonance between Chinese and English widened misinterpretations as well as</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
affected Huang’s performance in the courses for his professors did not comprehend his writing.

| Vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation | Grammar problems, punctuation, etc. seemed to be a common perceived challenge among the participants in the study. Huang also said that he had difficulty in vocabulary, punctuation, and grammar, but while reading through his completed written documents, I discovered that his English was outstanding. |

**Genres: Types of Writing**

Huang self-reported several types of writing: presentations, critiques, reflections and summaries, short essays in exams, and systematic coding.

*Presentation* is a type of writing in Huang’s perception as it involves written draft for oral presentations. He stated that “In the beginning, [before presentations, he] would write whole paragraphs,” but this process was eventually reduced to simply writing words and phrases to direct himself (Huang, March 2015, Interview). Huang confessed that before he presented, he “would be nervous in front of people, do not know what to say, so [he would] have to prepare in advance, and then [he would] know what [he] wanted to say” (Huang, March 2015, Interview). He needed to prepare a draft, but gradually, after he was familiar with the procedure of presentations, he did not use drafts any more. One reason was that his English skills improved a lot; another reason was that he became more accustomed to the discourses in the major, and presentations were not as scary as he thought at the first time. Namely, he realized presentations in his major were freestyle and diverse, distinguishing with written text that emphasized a variety of constraints. He even mentioned that “[he] feel[s] it does not matter. Everyone could talk whatever they liked in the presentation,” and he came to this conclusion because “[he] was more familiar with the major” (Huang, March 2015, Interview). Therefore, whether
Huang would write whole paragraphs, several sentences, or key words depended on his confidence in the presentation.

_Critiquing_ was the most important and most frequently practiced genre in his content classes. He revealed that in his content classes, professors often asked them to criticize certain concepts which had been brought up by famous philosophers or artists years ago. He was required to add his own experiences to clarify his opinions in the writing, stating that “the instructor gave [him and his classmates] an article which had been written several years ago or even decades ago. [They] needed to critique the ideas in the article and also include [their] own experience with art (Huang, March 2015, Interview). This type of writing enabled Huang to develop and strengthen his ability on critical thinking.

_Reflection and summarization_ included the recollection of personal experiences and the ability to synthesize articles. The following excerpt offered Huang’s explanation of this type of writing:

After the reading, we just wrote. Most of time, it is a summary…not much writing. Sometimes, it was personal experience. We first used several sentences or several paragraphs to summarize an article or chapters. And then you need to add your own ideas and compare what the article said and what you thought. It is not just like or dislike. _It is a combination of summary and your own experience._ (Huang, March 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher)

_Short essay_ exercises often occurred in Huang’s exams. The general format was to list several significant points, and the essay would be graded based on how many
points Huang remembered and wrote out. The following statement expressed how he completed the short essay:

I actually could find the answers from the textbook and through attending the class because most of them have been discussed in class. The answers can be recalled. Like there were two pictures, and you need to compare them. What my instructor looked for was the key points... Your grades depend on how many key points you mentioned in the short essays. There is no need to add your own opinions or to critique. (Huang, March 2015, Interview)

Thus, this kind of writing practice was meant to test students’ understanding and memorization of the knowledge listed in textbooks and discussed in class and was also a way to check students’ attendance in the class. However, while it was a way of writing, it was not a way of composing.

*Systematic coding* is the most time-consuming type of writing that Huang was introduced to, which needs more attention, circumspection, and practice than other types of writing. In the class, Interaction Design, Huang was required to write precisely and accurately to design codes and make orders to computers:

Even you wrote dozens of pages, with just an error of punctuation, the computer would not work and you need to find out the error; otherwise, you need to rewrite the orders all together [...] You needed to be logic, and this is the same with the writing [in other genres] that you need follow the steps, reflecting American writing styles [...] each paragraph needs a statement like coding. You need a transition and each paragraph gives an order. (Huang, March 2015, Interview)
Figure 1 is an example of a downloaded systematic coding from a website for clarification.

![XML code](image)

**Figure 2.** Systematic Coding. This figure was retrieved from http://journal.code4lib.org/articles/4325. Niu & Hemminger (2010).

Huang mentioned that this type of writing taught him how to organize his ideas, noting interactions centered on the topic of systematic coding with classmates and friends who excelled in the genre (Huang, March 2015, Interview). No doubt, Huang benefited from this type of writing assignment and hoped that he could be as poignant and concise as his friend. Table 9 summarizes all the types of writing that were introduced to Huang in content classes.

**Table 9**

*Types of Writing that Huang Was Introduced to in Content Classes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of writing</th>
<th>Explanations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>Before a presentation, a draft was needed, including whole paragraphs, several sentences, or key words depending on Huang’s confidence in the presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critiquing</td>
<td>This type of writing critiqued certain concepts which had been brought up by famous philosophers or artists years ago,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and Huang was required to add his own experiences to the writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflection and summarization</th>
<th>It included the recollection of personal experiences and the ability of synthesizing articles.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short essay</td>
<td>This type of exercise often occurred in exams. The general format was to list several significant points, and the essay would be graded based on how many points Huang remembered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematic coding</td>
<td>This type of writing needed more attention, circumspection, and practice than other types of writing. In Interaction Design, Huang was required to write precisely and accurately to design codes and orders to make computers function.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teachers’ Instructions**

Huang said each professor gave instructions differently. For example, in American History class, his professor told him what kind of format he needed to follow, the minimum word limit, etc.; however, in Art History class, the situation changed:

…our instructor was very nice. He was not very strict. For example, we did not have to write very formal like in a certain format […] he did not require [MLA or APA formatting] as long as you put [researched authors’] names on. (Huang, March 2015, Interview)

Further, when Huang mentioned to his Art instructor that he was worried about his grammar, “he said he was not a grammar teacher. What he cared [about] were [Huang’s] ideas” (Huang, March 2015, Interview). This, to Huang, showed that not all professors like to give writing instructions, and Huang appreciated when instructors preferred to give feedback on either his content or his mechanics. Whether he was given writing
instructions or not, Huang was not affected much and would simply follow his instructors’ feedback to the best of his ability. In his opinion, fewer instructions meant the professor was nicer and more lenient towards international students. To him, giving instructions or not is just out of each individual professor’s habit.

**Feedback**

There were several different types of feedback mentioned in the interview, for example: feedback from instructors, such as grades or short comments; feedback from peers; and feedback from group discussion.

*Grades* were the most common and direct assessment of students’ work, and most of the time, grades were given by professors. It seems that each participant involved in my study has received this kind of feedback. Huang is no exception. Huang recognized a direct correlation between his graded work and his grade in the class, stating that he would make a conscious effort to work harder in a class after receiving less than an A on his work (Huang, March 2015, Interview). In turn, grades provided the most immediate and direct feedback to Huang, and the grades motivated him to study harder if they were not desirable.

*Short comments from instructors* were another type of feedback. Huang mentioned that sometimes professors, while grading or reading his writing, would give some comments on grammatical errors, sentence structures, or course contents, in order to address issues with conciseness or detail.

*Feedback from peers* is not a new type of feedback, but it was barely mentioned among my participants. Huang discussed one of the only instances, mentioning an activity in his 3D design course in which everyone needed to comment on each other’s
work. According to Huang, each student randomly selected another student’s final presentation to critique, and they then wrote feedback in paragraph form (Huang, March 2015, Interview). From Huang’s perspective, this type of feedback from peers was not as important as feedback from professors. Although everyone got feedback from his/her classmates, they did not listen to each other’s comments:

[T]hey believe they have their own styles. They do not care what you said or they would think ‘I learned art, and what I pursued was freedom’, so they would not read the feedback. Sometimes I would not read either. (Huang, March 2015, Interview)

However, if the feedback was from professors, Huang would pay more attention to it since “the instructors decided [students’] GPA” (Huang, March 2015, Interview). The authority of the reader decided whether or not the feedback would be valued and accepted by students, probably because teachers’ feedback was considered more effective and useful to students.

Feedback from group discussion only happened in one class in which the professor encouraged students to talk about their own writing within their team and the members in the group could give some comments and suggestions. According to Huang, this feedback was informal, and students did not actively participate in the discussion in light of Huang’s accounts. Apart from all the feedback mentioned above, there were instructors who did not like to give feedback. Inspecting the competed written documents that Huang gave to me, I noticed that there were no marked signs on some documents to specify that they were read by the instructor. Table 10 drew a conclusion of the types of feedback that Huang received.
Table 10

*Types of Feedback that Huang Received*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>The most direct and immediate assessment of students’ performance in a class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short comments from Professors</td>
<td>Short comments – one or two sentences – from professors pointing out the problems in a student’s work, such as grammatical errors and misunderstanding of course content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback from peers</td>
<td>Required as a form of class participation, but less valued by students than the feedback from professors, as peers have less power than professors to decide a student’s grades in a class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback from group discussion</td>
<td>Less common and less formal than other types of feedback, and not everyone in the group would give comments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Impact of Composition Classes on Writing**

Huang discussed that composition classes enlightened him on the topic of writing an essay and brought him into the field of learning writing *systematically*. Huang illustrated this point by mentioning his transition from the ALI to mainstream classes:

After my language class in ALI, MLW 101 was my first class in the university. It taught me what academic writing was because I never wrote a professional essay before […] It is a *procedure*, e.g. you did *the research first, and then organize your points, read some references, and last you wrote*. (Huang, March 2015, Interview)

In the composition class, Huang learned the process of writing an essay, and he also alluded that the practices of writing from composition classes helped him to form preferable habits in writing. Gradually, this habit enervated because, in his major, the writing differed from the writing practices in composition classes. The disconnection eroded his writing skills, “because most of time, [in his major classes,] [he] did not write,
especially those formal writing. Most of time, [students] just express [their] ideas. [Art studio] major is not like education classes which require lots of writing” (Huang, March 2015, Interview). The disconnection between composition classes and content classes left the benefits ephemeral. At the moment of taking the composition classes, Huang’s writing skill was enhanced, but when he started his content classes, his writing became less sophisticated and he saw less progress.

Suggestions for Composition Classes

Huang’s suggestions for composition classes include teaching more vocabulary, namely in the form of “vocabulary tests,” and providing more essay topics to students so they can have more choices (Huang, March 2015, Interview). For example, Huang found vocabulary tests to be particularly helpful in learning vocabulary in his content courses, because “this way, [he and his classmates] can enhance the memory and remember the words […] every time you want your students write better and better, but they only have very limited vocabularies. How could they write better?” (Huang, March 2015, Interview).

Further, Huang made a case for more inclusive writing topics as a mode of engaging majors outside of English in composition courses:

For the final essay in the class, I hope students could be given more topics. I do not want to be confined in limited topics […] Teachers could give specific page limits, like 5 or 6 pages, but they could expand the topics, not just relating to English majors but also some topics from other majors. (Huang, March 2015, Interview)
From the interview excerpts, Huang complained about the lack of vocabulary teaching in composition classes and pointed out that vocabulary was a core factor of writing. Specifically, he mentioned that if teachers intended to improve their students’ writing, vocabulary should be the foremost significant part to be accentuated. He was also averse to the essay topics assigned by teachers, which he thought should provide more flexibility and options to students. If possible, offering the topics from other majors might also be a good idea for arousing students’ interest in writing.

**Overview of my Interpretation of the Data**

Among the participants discussed so far, Huang had the most perceived affordances to facilitate his English learning and writing, and he was an actively engaged participant who could perceive a myriad of affordances for meaningful action and interaction (Van lier, 2003, p. 147). He seized the affordances in his environment, including the “white”-dominant classrooms and native-English speaking faculty and roommates. Through socializing with the native English speakers, he improved his English skills within a shorter period of time compared with other Chinese students. Also, he was conscious of the difference between Chinese and English writing and mimicked the English writing through intensive reading. Despite the existence of the cultural differences in two different languages and the his professors’ difficulties in understanding the culture that he attached to, he reclaimed a way to fix the gap and adjusted his writing to be comprehensible to his professors. He said that “[he] need[s] to master the transformation of the two languages. As long as [he grasped] that, English writing is not a big deal” (Huang, March 2015, Interview).
His meditations on English as a language and a culture evinced his maturity, sagacity, and astuteness as a multilingual international writer. Furthermore, he noticed the ubiquitous discourses in the English speaking environment and recognized that his literacy and academic socialization within campus, specifically in classrooms, was better than that outside of the school, such as in a restaurant. Albeit his comprehension of the distinction of writing in various disciplines was partial, as he conceded that the primary difference was vocabulary, his limited awareness of disciplinary discourses was offset by his agency in accommodation to the morphing classroom environment while writing across the curriculum. Therefore, as long as he acquired the vocabulary, he believed would have no essential hindrance in disciplinary writing, which implicates that vocabulary is the core assessment of the students’ L2 literacy and the most perceptible feature of written discourse in varying majors.

Qing

Qing, at the time of data collection in spring of 2015, had been at the research site for almost three years. When the research was conducted, she was a senior student, majoring in Accounting. She chose this major for several reasons. First, due to the competitive job market, she thought graduating from Accounting would make finding a job easier than other majors. Second, she believed Accounting asked for less writing but more calculations, which in her mind was less difficult as a multilingual international student. Third, the support from her family, who conceived accounting an ideal job option for girls in her culture, was Qing’s most cogent excuse. Interestingly but not surprisingly, Qing mentioned her awareness of her writing skills prior to her arrival at the research site:
Before I came to the U.S., my writing was better than speaking. But after I stayed here for a while, my speaking turned out to be better than my writing which became less skilled due to the lack of practice, I think.” (Qing, March 2015, Interview)

The atrophy of her English writing was due to the nature of her major where she had more presentation practices rather than writing practices; however, in China, English writing is perceived to be more essential than speaking, so that is why Qing said her writing was better than her speaking while she was in China. This affirmed what Cummins (2006) argues, that “the extent of mastery of formal [L2 academic skills] is directly linked to future educational and economic opportunities” (p. 104). In other words, different L2 skills like reading, speaking, listening, and writing, will be developed unevenly based upon the emphasis in education and job markets. Nevertheless, speaking and writing are equally important and should therefore be developed in a balance, such that writing can reinforce their academic language skills and also can negotiate their identity through writing (Cummins, 2006, p. 98). This intimates that Qing’s major should assign more writing practices to students, rather than assigning speaking exercise alone and ignoring the significance of writing in students’ life.

While this analysis seems reasonable from the researcher’s perspective, Qing expounded that “[she] did not write much even in [her] daily life, so it would not affect [her] daily life a lot. Besides, writing in [her] major has no help for writing in [her] daily life” (Qing, March 2015, Interview). Despite the importance of writing, the disconnection between writing in content classes and daily life might sap teachers’ passion in
incorporating writing into their syllabus and students’ enthusiasm in improving their writing. Qing conferred this feeling regarding her content instructors:

I do not think it was necessary to [add more writing practice in my major] because my major emphasize math, calculation. Writing was not very helpful and has nothing to do with my writing in daily life. (Qing, March 2105, Interview)

From another perspective, Qing’s response also reveals the existence of two different types of language- “language use in instructional domains” and “typical language use in face-to-face everyday communication”- which are dramatically divergent, in accordance with the concept of discourses stressing particular contexts (Cummins, 2006, p. 137).

In what follows, I delineate Qing’s case in light of the seven categories: affordances, challenges, genres, teachers’ instructions, feedback, the impact of composition classes on writing in other content classes, and suggestions for composition classes. Like Hui and Huang, Qing provided me with one completed written document from an exam. Unlike the completed written documents provided by Hui and Huang, on which there were no questions or teachers’ instructions included, Qing offered one in which I could read the teacher’s instructions and requirements for the writing part. I believe these comments might be crucial information for analysis.

**Affordances: External Affordances and Internal Affordances**

Like the other participants, to Qing, there are also external and internal affordances. To avoid repetition, I chose not to discuss the same affordances that I did with other participants. I would pay more attention to the ones that are particular to Qing’s case.
*External Factors.* External resources like grammar books and the writing center, flexibility in word choice and less concentration on grammar, and exposure to the academic mode of thinking before coming to the U.S. are the three core external factors embodied in Qing’s case.

**External resources like grammar books and the writing center.** Like the other participants who either used electronic dictionaries or other devices to check their grammar or vocabulary, Qing mentioned her favorite reference materials:

I normally use grammar books to check my grammar because it reinforced my memories of grammar. Some students did not like looking up handbooks because it took more time than google but I think I could take notes in the grammar book and next time I could review. (Qing, March 2015, Interview)

In her opinion, grammar books facilitated her writing and brought her convenience, and they could be used for taking elaborated notes for later reviewing.

Qing also mentioned her preference for one-on-one assistance, stating that “[she] used to go to the writing center to look for help” (Qing, March 2015, Interview). The writing center made her feel secured because she would not feel lost when there was someone there to answer her questions on grammar or other confusions in writing.

**Flexibility in word choices and less concentration on grammar.** Qing divulged in the interview that in one class, she had to memorize laws and regulations so that she could pass the class. However, one of the affordances in the class was that “[she and her classmates were] not asked to write out the exact law regulations word by word. Just writing out the general idea would be okay” (Qing, March 2015, Interview). No doubt, this was an affordance since memorizing hundreds of laws and regulations word by word
is time-consuming. But if students were only required to rephrase the regulations, it might be much easier. Furthermore, Qing mentioned that, in writing, her professors did not focus on grammar errors, but emphasized more on her ideas. Qing’s experience was such that, “[t]he instructors, either in exam[s] or in regular homework, said [she and her classmates] should not focus on grammar or words, just focus on content;” Qing described this as an “advantage” (Qing, March 2015, Interview).

For Qing, less focus on grammar enhanced her confidence in writing, especially in an exam in which she was not allowed to spend too much time on grammar checking and searching for words in the dictionary.

Exposure to the academic mode of thinking before coming to the U.S. Compared with the other three participants who had studied in the ALI, Qing possessed relatively more advanced English proficiency when she arrived in the United States and was exempted from taking courses in the ALI. She also studied in an English training center in China which prepared her to adjust herself in the academic field in the United States. This training was especially evident in her understanding of the different patterns of thinking in writing between China and the United States. The following interview excerpt demonstrates how the training in China facilitated her writing in the United States:

I would deliberately use their way of thinking, erasing the locus of Chinese way of thinking gradually. When I was learning IELTS [in China], our teachers have told us that we need to change our way of thinking, and during that time, my writing improved a lot [through the one year long training]. (Qing, March 2015, Interview)
Because of the preliminary preparation, she experienced fewer adversities in the United States, including the section of writing. She even noted that, “when [she] came here, [her] way of thinking was already Americanized, so that was not a problem [for her] to write [in the United States]” (Qing, March 2015, Interview).

Compared with my other participants who experienced a period of self-adjustment from Chinese way of writing to the “American” style, Qing had no significant hindrance in writing in the United States, and her privilege in China allowed her to have an easier life in the United States.

**Internal Factors.** Although Qing did not directly point out what internal affordances she had while studying at the research site, she did mention that she had relatively higher proficiency in English before she came to the United States than her other Chinese friends, making her studies in the United States much easier than the others. Table 11 shows all the affordances Qing discussed in Accounting.

Table 11

*Overview of all the Affordances that Qing Had*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affordance</th>
<th>External Factors</th>
<th>Internal Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resources like grammar books and the writing center</td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-perceived better English proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility in word choices and less concentration on grammar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to the academic mode of thinking before coming to the USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Challenges

From Qing’s perspective, the challenges while writing across the curriculum were the discrepancies in the level of difficulty between the textbooks and the homework, vocabulary and word choices, cultural dissonance, team work, etc. The following paragraphs address the challenges in detail.

The disconnect of the level of difficulty between the textbooks and the homework. When discussing challenge in writing, Qing disclosed that the level of difficulty in textbooks and homework were not consistent, which caused her to struggle in her homework; she mentioned that, “sometimes the questions in the accounting lab were harder than those in [her] textbooks, which was a challenge. [She] had to spend lots of time to write” (Qing, March 2015, Interview). She disclosed that they usually completed the textbook assignments in class and they would also get homework after class. But the difficulty level of the questions in textbooks was not in accordance with the level in homework, resulting in her failure to finish the homework.

Vocabulary and word choices. Other challenges common among international students are vocabulary and word choices. The following interview excerpts illustrate Qing’s difficulty in distinguishing oral vocabulary and academic vocabulary in writing:

Word choices like in a report, I should not use oral vocabularies which seems not very professional. But most of time, I could not distinguish what were professional, academic words and what were words suitable for oral communication. For example, I used to think “wanna” is a formal word for writing, but actually the formal one is “want to.” Because we very often use
wanna in speaking, I just messed up everything in speaking and writing. (Qing, March 2015, Interview)

Evidently, Qing had trouble in distinguishing colloquialisms used in speech, including slang, and formal vocabulary in writing, leading to another relevant challenge discussed below - the cultural dissonance felt by multilingual international writers who have no intuition or acquisition to help them discern the different usage of words in various situations.

_The cultural dissonance: different patterns of thinking in writing._ A common challenge brought up among the participants was the gap between their native culture and the new culture where they studied, represented by different ways of organizing writing:

Because we are not the native, our writing was not fluent and we had different writing logics […] for example, we would use _Chinese way of thinking in the U.S. academic writing_, which is unlike the American way of putting forward an idea poignantly. For example, _our Chinese liked to mention the main point of our idea at the last, but they like to point out first in the beginning and then gave explanation._ (Qing, March 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher)

What Qing intended to express is that Chinese writing usually put the most essential point at the end of the writing, while from the “English perspective,” the main idea is usually located in the beginning of the writing. Although this conclusion essentializes writing and culture, Qing got this impression out of her limited experience with the types of writing she was introduced to, most of which were essays or short answers.

_The consequence of less writing practices._ According to Qing, her investment of time on writing was derived from how much writing practice she got. After she
commenced her content classes, she had less and less chance to write, giving rise to her clumsiness in writing. She addressed this point in the interview:

At that time [taking the composition class], we wrote more, so I could wrote more fluently because I had that kind of feeling. I could write when I started. But now as there were less and less writing, I had to think longer like what words I should choose, what sentence structures I should use, something like that. (Qing, March 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher)

The excerpt from the interview demonstrated that, in Qing’s belief, more writing exercise could maintain her writing skills. However, due to the nature of her major, she was not given enough writing assignments to sustain her original writing abilities, let alone upgrading her writing skill. After a period of time away from writing, when she needed to write again, she felt encumbered by writing procedures.

*No connection among content classes in writing.* The lack of connection among writing in varying disciplines was another challenge for Qing because it meant every time she took a new class, she faced a new type of writing and had to spare extra time to accommodate herself to the new genre of writing:

Maybe it was harder to write in Auditing class because I never wrote that kind of writing before. Business Law was okay. […] Maybe there were some words in common, but most of the content is different and writing requirement varies as well. […] *I feel each class has different emphases, maybe some knowledge were in common but it was hard to find especially in writing the common type.* (Qing, March 2015, Interview)
On the whole, Qing’s statements argued that each class had its own discourses in writing. Owing to the divisions among discourses, it was almost impossible to encounter the same type of writing in different classes and was, no doubt, a tremendous challenge to her.

*Power asymmetry in group work.* Qing disclosed that in accounting class, there was bountiful group work. Sometimes, they needed to design a project together. Sometimes, they needed to write a report and present the results within a group. Team work can be less stressful when team members are willing to share their responsibilities. There is also the case that one or two of the team members are likely to do more work than the rest of the team members. They are team leaders or those who are considered as talented and brilliant. Qing likes to work together with Chinese students because grouping with members from the same ethnicity enables Qing to feel more comfortable and at ease, as she pointed out, “[she] preferred to group with Chinese students. Maybe it is because [she is] a Chinese as well. There may have less misunderstanding than with native English students” (Qing, March 2015, Interview). This statement differs from those in Huang’s case, as he showed preference to be with native English speakers.

Qing pictured herself as “not social,” which might be a crucial reason for her lack of comfort and confidence in group work. Another reason for her resistance to group work was her irksome experience in a team where she and another Chinese girl were grouped with some native English speakers. The specific example that Qing reported in the interview is shown below:

Actually, we did some interview, and then designed survey questions, and did the data analysis and lastly wrote a report […] we first did interviews. But most of time only the ‘American’ did. We just stood aside. They talked a lot. In fact, the
instructor has already designed the questions [...] *But most of time, the American did a lot.* (Qing, March 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher)

In the interview excerpts, Qing revealed that when she worked with native English speaking classmates, the classmates would work more and what she did was errant work like “standing aside,” meaning she just showed up for the interview but barely participated in the interview process. This could be an affordance, as she divulged that “[she] felt easy and relaxed because the Americans did all the work;” but at the same time, she also realized the disadvantage, as she may have lost the opportunity to enhance her interview skills (Qing, March 2015, Interview). Further, she added that when she and another Chinese team member uploaded their reports, “[they] were shocked because [the native English speaking team member] changed [their writing] a lot [...] although the general meaning was still from [Qing and her Chinese groupmate], sentence structures and word choices were changed a lot” (Qing, March 2015, Interview). Further, this team member did not get permission from them before he revised their writing. In this case, Qing’s distress and frustration can be understood in her refusal to be positioned in a marginal role by native English speakers and the power asymmetry in the group work. (Gallucci, 2015).

What the native English speaker did was reformulate Qing’s written report. Reformulation, according to the definition provided by Severino (2009), refers to “reducing the number of L2 features and increasing the number of native language features;” conducting the reformulation without the permission and engagement of the student will lead to “a loss of voice, ownership, authorship, or emotional and intellectual connection to the writing and how it was composed” (p.53). Albeit Qing was not
infuriated at that team member because “he was talented and maybe our writing did not live up to his expectation,” she was lightly offended since “he could tell us first because we put lots of efforts in writing this report” (Qing, March 2015, Interview). Thus, on one hand, working with other team members was an affordance, since team members can share responsibilities and help each other like revising grammatical errors. On the other hand, multilingual students like Qing whose L1 is not English were in a passive and inferior position, having less voice heard in a team and potentially losing many chances to learn new skills. Particularly, if the members in a group lacked team communicative skills, disputes within the team would be exacerbated. Table 12 presents all the challenges that Qing encountered while writing in her major.

Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The disconnect of the level of difficulty between the textbooks and the homework</td>
<td>She disclosed that usually the assignments on textbooks were easier than the homework. The difficulty level of the questions in textbooks were not in accordance with the level in homework, resulting in her struggle to finish the homework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary and word choices</td>
<td>Qing had trouble discerning the usages of words in different situations, like words appropriate for speaking and writing, leading to the challenge in writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cultural dissonance: different ways of thinking in writing</td>
<td>Chinese writing usually put the most essential point at the end of the writing, while writing in the Unites States liked to show the main idea in the beginning of the writing. This differentiation asked Qing to take time for adjustment. Although this statement about the culture differences in writing between the two countries was stereotyping and essentialism, she made this conclusion based upon her limited writing experiences in disciplines.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Less writing practices resulting in more time needed to think how to write

Due to the nature of her major, she was not given enough writing assignments to keep her original writing abilities. When she needed to write again, she felt unfamiliar with the writing procedures at which she was adept.

No connection among content courses in writing

There might be some connections in knowledge in different disciplines but it was rare to encounter the same types of writing in different classes, which meant every time Qing took a new class, she had to learn a new type of writing.

Power asymmetry in group work

As a multilingual international student, Qing was given errands in a team work, and her report was revised without her permission. Her voice as a multilingual international writer was silenced.

**Genres: Types of Writing**

The types of writing introduced to Qing were determined by the nature of her major. As she self-reported, there were three categories of genres: first, case studies represented a large body of her collaborative work, with two respective subcategories - small case studies in exams and case studies as homework with videos and website links; next, Qing reported collaborative work in writing a report and collaborative work in presentations; and finally, she discussed -calculation, filling out blanks, as well as matching information. More detailed explanations are as follows:

*Short case studies in exams* required students to analyze law problems in a case study by listing all the problems hinted in the case, delineating the problems and which laws they challenged, and connecting the problems with law regulations. One of the reasons to call it *short* case study is because the length of the analyses was typically half a page, mainly because of the time limit in exams. To Qing, it was an easy writing task,
as she stated that she had little difficulty analyzing and presenting her ideas (Qing, March 2015, Interview).

*Case studies as homework with video and website links* were another type of writing under the category of case studies and asked students to analyze law problems and research the relative information. The difference between short case studies in exams and case study as homework was that the former required less effort, while the latter necessitated more work after class, such as more details and more explanations in writing. Sometimes, if necessary, Qing needed to do some research about the case study. If there were videos or website links provided in a case study, Qing had to watch the videos and read through the websites. When she started to write, was required to include all she read in the analyses. Thus, this type of writing was more challenging and time-consuming but was also more rewarding, as it required Qing to utilize her different writing skills such as summary, comparison, etc.:

For this assignment, we even need to *do some research as we were given more time after class*. I think it is harder than the case study in exams, but I could learn more from this assignment because I read more and write more. (Qing, March 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher)

*Collaborative work in writing a report* is tantamount to the completion of a report with the effort from the whole team. Normally, each member in the team was assigned a part of the report to write and then the parts were pieced together to be a whole report. In this writing activity, team members benefited from reciprocal help:

We had four team members. My part was to do an analysis based upon SWOT [strength, weakness, opportunity and threat]. […] After we completed the report,
we uploaded it to the Google document. Our team leader revised a lot of what we wrote, including my grammatical errors and sentence structures.

However, Qing also mentioned some apprehension in her participation with other, native English speaking group members:

Even they had grammatical errors, I thought they were native English speakers. Their writing should be better than mine and I did not think they would like to listen to my advice. So I just pay attention to my own writing. (Qing, March 2015, Interview)

This statement indicated the perceived superiority of native English speakers and the inferiority of non-native English speaking students as evident in other scholarship. Qing conceived herself as an indolent and submissive team member due to her identity as a non-native English speaker. Thus, in team work, she only obediently listened to or accepted “help” from her team members.

*Collaborative work in presentations* included informal writing before the presentation. Qing mentioned that she would write sentences or key words for the preparation of the presentation:

 Normally in a group work, we needed to write a report together and then presented the result in front of the classmates. But we cannot just read our report, so I would write down what I needed to talk about, including some statistics, references, key words, and even some sentences. (Qing, March 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher)
Calculation, filling out blanks, and matching information were different types of writing exercises, but I grouped them together as one special type of writing because all of them required short writing like numbers in Qing’s major:

Sometimes we needed to fill out blanks in a table chart. We first need to analyze a statement, and then fill out the table about the tiered account which is about loaning. We calculated the numbers and matched the information. […] most of time, the table was already there, for instance, there would be some words like receivable or payable under which you need write the right number in the blank. The number sometimes you need to do some math, but sometimes you could find it directly from the statement. (Qing, March 2015, Interview)

This type of writing, involved with math, formulas, and equations, was particular to her major, and would probably not appear in a philosophy class, for instance. Qing was not sure whether writing numbers could be considered as a type of writing or not, and her concern was related to the definition of writing. If writing is seen as a complete essay or an article, what Qing referred to – calculating formulas on paper – is not writing. However, in a broad way, if writing means using any symbols to represent language in visual form, numbers should be counted as writing. Qing’s doubt about numbers as writing also implied the wide spread of the parochial definition of writing. Table 13 provides an overview of the types of writing that Qing was introduced to while writing in different disciplines in her major.
Table 13
Overview of the Types of Writing that Qing Discussed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of writing</th>
<th>Explanations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short case studies in exam</td>
<td>It required students to analyze law problems in a case study, including the process of listing all the problems hinted in the case, explaining the problems, delineating the problems, which laws were challenged, and connecting the problems with law regulations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study as homework with video and website links</td>
<td>A type of writing under the category of case studies asked students to analyze law problems and research the relative information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative work in writing a report</td>
<td>It is tantamount to complete a report with the effort from the whole team. Normally, each member in the team was assigned a part of the report to write and then they pieced the parts together to be a whole report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative work in presentation</td>
<td>This type of writing includes informal writing before the presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculation, filling out blanks, and matching information</td>
<td>These were different types of writing exercises, but I grouped them together as one special type of writing because all of them required short writing with numbers in Qing’s major.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers’ Instructions

Qing thought that content course instructors did not give any instructions while giving writing assignments:

In the exam, there were just normal instructions which asked us to read and analyze. But most of time, instructors did not give us any instructions. […] So I
just wrote out each problem based upon my own understanding of [what might be the right format to present my answers], and I would wrote out all the knowledge I could think of. (Qing, March 2015, Interview, italics added by the researcher)

This elucidation showed two situations. First, when instructors gave instructions for writing assignments, Qing thought the instructions were just “normal” (Qing, March 2015, Interview). Qing did not clarify her definition of “normal” instructions; this might mean normative instructions in her major. This speculation could be validated through investigating the completed written document she provided to me. In the exam paper, the instructor listed two instructions: “Write answer on the back of the exam,” and “in terms of the accounting system failure, please discuss what went wrong and how you fix it” (Qing, March 2015, completed written document). For the latter instruction, the professor emphasized that “I just need to know that you recognize the problem(s) and solve them” (Qing, March 2015, completed written document). The instructions are short but very concise, telling students what the instructor looked for from their answers. This type of instructions was common in Qing’s major – diagnosing problems and offering solutions.

Second, in another situation, when instructors did not offer any instruction for writing short answers, Qing wrote out the answers based upon her comprehension of the questions and guessed what might be the point the instructors attempted to test students. A tedious but safe way was to write out all the points she could remember. It seemed that clear writing instructions were not emphasized in the major.

**Feedback**

Talking about the feedback Qing received from her instructors, she divulged the difference between instructors from content classes and composition classes. Specifically,
she addressed what she perceived to be their attention to her identity as an international student:

[Qing’s instructors from content classes] never point out my grammatical errors
maybe they saw my non-American names, probably, but I was not sure. But in my
English class, my instructor would mark out all the errors in grammar or words.
But my instructors in major class never did that. (Qing, March 2015, Interview, italics
added by the researcher)

She disclosed that the instructors from content classes never marked out her grammatical
errors in writing, while her instructors from composition classes would point out the
ersors.

Regarding Qing’s statement, It seems to be the norm that correcting students’
grarnmatical errors is only the responsibility of instructors from composition classes,
which is in contrast to Cummins’s (2006) claim that “educating bilingual/ ELL students
is the responsibility of the entire school staff and not just the responsibility of ESL or
bilingual teachers,” meaning “that ‘mainstream’ classroom teachers must be prepared to
teach all the students in their classrooms” (p.36). Although teachers from composition
courses are not necessarily ESL or bilingual teachers, they are more considered as
English language teachers, and the stereotype remains that helping multilingual
international writers improve their English proficiency is only the obligation of teachers
from English departments. Also, she added that “most of the time, there was no feedback
in content classes, but in composition classes, there was at least grades” (Qing, March
2015, Interview). This implied that, to Qing, composition class instructors gave more
feedback on writing than instructors from content classes, and grades are a common type of feedback from instructors.

In addition, Qing talked about nominal feedback; that is, in team work, the instructor asked each team member to write feedback about other team members’ performance in the group work, including that person’s responsibility in the team and his/her performance. I called it ‘nominal’ because the feedback did not go back to the students but was directly submitted to the instructor, and it was never returned. Therefore, it was more like an anonymous evaluation of each member’s performance in a team and perceived by the instructor as a reference while assessing each student’s performance in team work:

For the feedback we wrote about our team members, we focused on the process like what did that person do during the process and what was his or her responsibility. Did he or she participate actively or not, something like that. But we did not read the feedback written from our team members. (Qing, March 2015, Interview)

Rather than providing students with their classmates’ feedback about their work, this instructor instead used this feedback to provide them with a numbered participation grade. Although she did not get the feedback from her team members, in that class, she at least obtained the feedback from her instructor which she thought was very helpful.

The Impact of Composition Classes on Writing

Qing thought the role of composition classes for the writing in other classes was little, and she believed there was no big influence on writing in content classes because “they were different classes. The way of thinking and format [were] all quite different.
Besides, the content [was] different as well, and instructors’ requirements were also diverse” (Qing, March 2015, Interview). This unveils the discourses in different classes. One possible benefit for the writing in content classes might be “the kind of feeling [in writing]” (Qing, March 2015, Interview). She did, however, recognize a disconnect in her writing abilities after her English composition courses were behind her:

> When I was taking the composition classes, I wrote a lot, so if I need to write in other classes, I could just start. But now as there were less and less writing in my content classes, I had to think longer like what words I should choose, what sentence structures I should use, some like that. (Qing, March 2015, Interview)

Qing’s statement is in concert with the concept of ‘working memory,’ about which De Silva (2015) argued that “successful writing depends on the ability of the writer to retrieve and apply relevant procedures, schemas, facts and episodes through working memory” (p. 301). This hinted that the less and less writing activity in content class weakened her ability in writing obtained and enhanced in composition classes.

**Suggestions for Composition Classes**

According to Qing, her suggestion for more effective composition instruction among UMISs was to link the writing in content classes with that of composition classes, mentioning that instructors “should talk about what is the emphasis of writing in each major and what professors expect in writing like format, etc.” (Qing, March 2015, Interview). Remembering the feeling of being lost when starting papers for her content classes, Qing thought that composition classes should prepare students for the writing in their own major because “most of the instructors from content classes did not give instructions for writing’ (Qing, March 2015, Interview). Therefore, she thought
composition classes should take the responsibility of introducing students from different majors to diverse types of writing.

**Overview of my Interpretation of the Data**

Overall, as a student from Accounting, Qing was introduced to very disciplinary-oriented genres of writing, and most of time, the writing assignments she encountered dealt with numbers and law analysis. The requirement for intensive writing was rare, which caused her ebbing writing skills, whereas, since she had more chance for presentations, her speaking was enhanced and strengthened at the cost of weakened writing. To better balance her language skills, more opportunities for writing should be added in her major. The predicament was that she had not realized the significance of writing, owing to the fact that the writing in her major showed little connection with the writing in her daily life. According to Qing, “in [her] daily life, for example, on Facebook, the writing was totally different with writing in [her] major, so there [was] no need to give […] more writing assignments” (Qing, March 2015, Interview). The disconnection between these two discourses of writing shaped indicated to Qing that it was not necessary to have more writing practices. With Qing as a primary example, researchers must find and enhance the link between different writing in different discourses and the connection between writing in composition and content classes. What’s more, particularly in Qing’s case, the division between native-English speaking students and non-native English speaking students in a classroom embodied significant and pervasive power asymmetry, another factor to be addressed at the individual classroom level. Table 14 presents a visual overview of the three cases in the basis of the seven codes for the convenience of the readers.
### Table 14

**Overview of the Three Cases in the Basis of the Seven Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Affordances</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|       | Hui   | **External affordances:** | - Incompetence in grammar and vocabulary  
- Cultural dissonance  
- The negative L1/L2 relationship |
|       | Huang | **External affordances:** | - Cultural dissonance  
- Vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation |
|       | Qing  | **External affordances:** | - The disconnect of the level of difficulty between the textbooks and the homework  
- Vocabulary and word choices  
- The cultural dissonance: different ways of thinking in writing  
- Less writing practices resulting in more time |

- **External affordances:**  
  - Personal relationships - her husband and neighbors, and the writing center for grammar checking  
  - The assistance from and tolerance of grammatical errors from her instructors  
  - The nature of her major: more reading than writing  
  - The imitation from reading  
  - Assistances from instructors, roommates, grammar checking websites, the writing center  
  - The nature of the major  
  - The “white” dominant environment in his major  
  - Learning English formally in the United States  
  - Tolerance of grammatical errors from professors  
  - Resources like grammar books and the writing center  
  - Flexibility in word choices and less concentration on grammar  
  - Exposure to the academic mode of thinking before coming to the U.S.  

- **Internal affordances:**  
  - Hui’s L1 - Chinese as a mediator  
  - Personal experiences as writing materials  
  - The influence from L1: Chinese writing and English writing are mutual and bidirectional  
  - His confidence in writing  
  - Self-perceived better English proficiency
| Genres | -Reflection  
-Art Review  
-Theory to Practice Genre  
-Essay Questions | -Presentation  
-Critiquing  
-Reflection and summarization  
-Short essay  
-Systematic coding | -Short case studies in exams  
-Case studies as homework with video and website links  
-Collaborative work in writing a report  
-Collaborative work in presentation  
-Calculation, filling our blanks, and matching information |
| Teachers’ instructions | -The content course instructors in her major are not strict in giving writing assignment and the their instructions are not clear  
-Compared with the instructions given by composition class instructors, those given by content course instructors are less specific | -Each professor gave instructions differently, and not all professors like to give writing instructions. But Huang appreciated both situations. | -Instructors did not give any instructions while giving writing assignments or just “normal” instructions |
| Feedback | -Grades with few comments given by content course instructors  
-Composition course instructors gave elaborate feedback | -Grades  
-Short comments like one or two sentences from instructors  
-Feedback from peers  
-Feedback from group discussion | -Qing divulged the difference between instructors from content classes and composition classes, and it seems to be the norm that correcting students’ grammatical errors are only the responsibility of instructors from composition classes |
| The impact of composition class on writing in other courses | -Composition classes were helpful in teaching her the format of writing which she could imitate in other content classes. | -The practices of writing from composition class helped him to form a habit in writing but gradually this habit weakened because in his major, the writing is different with the writing practices in composition classes. -Composition classes introduced resources available to him on campus. | -Qing thought the role of composition classes for the writing in other classes was little, and she believed there was no big influence on writing in content classes. |
| Suggestions for composition class | She hoped that her writing class instructors could be stricter and give more writing exercise. | Composition classes should teach more vocabulary and providing more essay topics to students. | Qing suggested that writing in composition classes should be connected with the writing in content classes, and composition classes should prepare students for the writing in their own major. |

**Summaries of the Four Cases**

I presented each case – participant by participant – owing to my desire to give each participant a voice, as Liu and Furneaux (2015) reported that “L2 writers from certain language/culture backgrounds [are considered] as a homogeneous group and thus […] no attention [is paid] to the potential individual differences of the participants” (p. 67). Each individual participant encountered diverse affordances and challenges. Besides, their perceptions of affordances and challenges varied as well, out of various educational backgrounds, English proficiencies, living environments, etc., and based upon the recognized affordances and challenges they reported to me. However, it is not hard to find that there is no dearth of similarities among their writing experiences, such as the
hindrance from cultural dissonances, the lack of vocabulary, various discourses in disciplines, and so on. Of course, they also obtained assistance from their instructors, tutors, friends, and other resources, which made their study and writing in the United States easier. No doubt, some of their statements about their writing experiences in different disciplines contained stereotypes, essentialism, and biases. For instance, all the Chinese participants delivered that Chinese writing is euphemistic and English writing in the U.S. is quite straightforward. These rules do not apply for all Chinese and English writing for sure. To some extent, their perceptions were shaped by their limited writing experiences in content courses and how they were taught in the United States and in their own countries. These concerns were chiefly reflected in their overly emphasized concerns towards grammar, the long-lasting loophole in second/foreign language education hinging on standardization, and “Nativeness” as the recognizable and acceptable criteria for success (Kramsch & Steffensen, 2008). In the three cases, all the participants thought highly of nativeness of English and positioned themselves as incompetent and inferior to native English speaking students. Therefore, further investigation is merited regarding how content course instructors positioned themselves as facilitators in a classroom to minimize this imbalance.

What is more, through the participants’ narration, several points deserve to be put forward: participants attributed their increased writing skills to their intensive reading, as in Hui and Huang’s cases. Also, the L1 and L2 relationship while writing in L2 was both positive and negative to the participants. To those who have more advanced English proficiency, the usage of L1 in L2 writing was not confined to direct translation but instead appeared to take the form of discourse adjustment, although this was not
mentioned among the participants. In addition, some participants were in favor of looking for native-English speakers for help when they encountered difficulties in writing. Although all of them went to the writing center before, not all of them were willing to be there. In most of the cases, they were required to attend the writing center by composition class instructors.

Towards the writing genres that participants were introduced to in their majors, a profound difference of emphasis was shown among different majors. For example, the most common type of writing that Huang encountered was reflection, whereas Qing was frequently asked to write collaborative business reports and do presentations. Nonetheless, there were also similarities, such as Huang’s short essay and Hui’s essay questions. Even though I named their writing differently, there are overlapping features. The reason for me to give the similar writing practices different names is because of my respect to my participants’ interpretation. Last, what composition courses provided them was a kind of formula; they consented that the courses taught them the writing procedures – how to start the essay, how construct the middle part, and how to end the essay – which was a skill that they transferred while writing in other content courses.

To clarify, all of the affordances my participants possessed were the strategies they accrued, either introduced in classrooms or discovered individually, to support their writing and learning in the United States. However, even though they gained assistance from the external environment or from self-equipped abilities, they still confronted marginalization and stigmatization. These pervasive hegemonies occurred when their cultural experiences and understandings were in conflict with their instructors and native-English speaking classmates, which happened conspicuously in Huang’s and Qing’s case.
Duff and Talmy (2011) argue that if “learners are positioned in disadvantageous ways and thereby silenced by their interlocutors (e.g., instructors, peers), either knowingly or unknowingly, the students’ opportunities for learning, participating in classroom discourse, and feeling like they are legitimate speakers may also be stifled” (p.105). In the same vein, Toohey (1998) claims that “if students are made to feel like outsiders and illegitimate users of language, their prospects for long-term language learning success are compromised” (cited in Duff & Talmy, 2011, p.105). To varying degrees, multilingual international students are conceived as outsiders and illegitimate L2 users, as was happening to multilingual international writers in the United States like Huang and Qing. Educators and multilingual international writers must convene to overcome the dilemma, therefore situating the students in a more equal footing with native-English speaking students while writing across the curriculum and participating in classroom activities.

In addition, the assistance and tolerance from professors towards the participants’ grammatical errors and other language problems are problematic and should also be argued dialectically. McKay and Wong (1996) contend that “colonialist/ racialized discourses can coexist with attitudes and behaviors that are usually interpreted as tolerant and culturally sensitive,” and that “the nature of discourse shapes the term in which an individual perceives the world, regardless of conscious intentions” (p. 585). That is to say, it is likely that the professors’ tolerance and empathy towards the multilingual international students might be out of their internalized ideology that the students as nonnative English speakers are incapable in English and should be treated differently, with lenience as a tacit practice. Consequently, multilingual international students will be
generalized, disenfranchised, and denigrated as those who need sympathy and help in the cyclical reproduction of this problematic ideology.

In the next chapter, given the individual cases detailed in Chapter four, I discuss and analyze the common themes across them. The following themes, in conversation with the literature in Chapter two, are explored in Chapter five: (a) affordances and challenges: volatility of affordances; (b) Writing Across the Curriculum: writing-to-learn and writing-to-communicate; (c) Discourse: cross-cultural discourse; (e) Discourse: Second Language Acquisition; (f) Discourse: BICS and CALP; (g) Disciplinary discourses: genres; (h) Instructions and feedback: composition course instructors VS content course instructors; (i) Strategies learned from composition class: needs analysis of English for Academic Purposes. What is more, recommendations for further study and limitations for the study are examined as well.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this study, I concentrate on exploring the affordances and challenges of three undergraduate multilingual international students (UMISs) while writing across the curriculum. In the previous chapter, I presented the results from semi-structured interviews and completed written documents in the light of my own interpretation and comprehension of the data. The findings substantiated that each individual participant, regarding their varying educational, cultural, and travelling backgrounds, had contrastive experiences in writing and particular perceptions towards writing activities in their majors. This diversity in participant responses resonates with my choice of methodology to first unfold each case (each individual participant is a case) in-depth in Chapter four.

In this chapter, I extract overlapping themes manifested in the three cases. As such, the findings displayed in Chapter four are descriptive and exhaustive, while the themes enumerated in this chapter are conclusive and laconic, showing the connection between the findings and the theoretical framework reviewed in Chapter two as well. New theories consistent with the findings are included in the chapter as a complementary source to undergird the findings. At last, limitations of the study and implications for future research are inexorable and delineated in this chapter as well. All the findings and conclusions engendered from the study are restricted to the writing experiences of the three participants alone, not applicable to the whole population of UMISs. This chapter will begin with the summaries of the data and discussions of emerging themes from the cases for the research questions in the study:
Main research question:

What are the affordances and challenges that the three undergraduate multilingual international students (UMISs) encounter while writing across the curriculum?

Ancillary research questions:

1. What are the genres UMISs introduced to in their curricula?
2. In what ways do the UMISs perceive teachers’ instructions and feedback that assist them in improving their language skills and their understanding of course content?
3. What are the self-reported learning strategies they accrue in writing courses that are beneficial for their other class writing assignments in colleges?

After the meticulous elaboration of the themes, recommendations for teaching pedagogies, topics for further research, and limitations of the study are expounded.

**Emerging Themes From the Research Findings**

Before discussing the themes, I want to reiterate the importance of my positionality as an insider of the study. Sharing the same ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds with the three Chinese participants facilitated my interpretation of the data. For instance, Huang’s use of *Bai Ren* to address native English speakers, Hui’s uncertainty and difficulty in using citations, Qing’s unpleasant encounter with native English speaking students, and so on, were captured and delineated in the study due to my insider position as a Chinese. It is not exaggerated to say that my insider positionality made this thesis possible and more interesting.

There are seven themes generated in the study as listed: (a) affordances and challenges: volatility of affordances; (b) Writing Across the Curriculum: writing-to-learn and writing-to-communicate; (c) Discourse: cross-cultural discourse; (d) Discourse:
Second Language Acquisition;(e) Discourse: BICS and CALP; (f) Instructions and feedback: composition course instructors VS content course instructors; (g) strategies learned from composition class: needs analysis of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). More details and elaborations will be presented below.

**Affordances and Challenges: Volatility of Affordances**

As mentioned earlier, each participant embraced disparate affordances and challenges while writing in disciplines for different reasons, though it also occurred that certain affordances, such as assistance from instructors, roommates, and the writing center, tolerances of grammatical errors from professors, and the nature of the major, were similar among the four participants. Some challenges, like grammar and vocabulary, the lack of connection among content courses, and cultural dissonance, were repetitively brought up across the cases. Probing into these common affordances and challenges, they need to be examined dialectically. More details will be sketched and explained below.

The concept of affordance and its feature of volatility have been fully discussed in Chapter two. By definition, an affordance is closely tied to the specified environment which provides an opportunity that a particular perceiver can utilize (Gibson, 1979). In this respect, affordances will morph in alignment with the matrix-environment and be confined in specific time and space, which, to some extent, explicates the volatile attribute of affordances. The volatility of affordances is embodied in two ways in the current study.

Firstly, there is always a side effect of an affordance, indicating the significance of recognizing the underlying obstruction behind an affordance. On one hand, the external affordances mentioned by the participants, including the writing center, the
professors’ tolerances on the students’ grammatical errors, and the usage of technologies, enabled the students to be confident on their writing and remedy their linguistic incompetence. On the other hand, such challenges indicate their dependence on the external affordances and the ignorance of or weakened passion on self-improvement and self-actualization. This struggle was illustrated in Hui’s case, as the Art Education major student lacked motivation in learning English until she had to pass the Praxis test. The presence of the writing center and the tolerance from professors on grammar were the embodiment of a culturally friendly and academically inclusive atmosphere in the research site. However, these affordances also rendered an excuse for some of the participants’ negligence on investment in language skills, since they could resort to those external affordances for assistance. This also might be one of the reasons for Hui’s high achievement in her content courses, with an average GPA of 4.0 but also with low self-esteem to pass a standard language test. The shift of environments from an international-student-friendly campus to a test center, which has stricter and more objective assessment on students’ academic performance, disabled the Hui to keep the privilege granted in the previous context.

Professors’ tolerance to UMISs grammatical errors and the nature of the majors acted as similarly problematic affordances. The Art studio major, Huang, underscored that his professors never commented on his grammar and spelling, which he perceived as an affordance. Although he perceived his own writing skills as limited, the nature of his major entailed less writing than speaking, which was just like Qing’s major of Accounting; less writing requirements became an affordance to them. However, from another perspective, if Qing failed in writing a report to prove her work, how could her
employer rely on her? Therefore, the volatility of affordances determines that affordances are temporary and context sensitive. The participants were satisfied with their situations at the research site, though they seemed to lack foresight for their futures. Hence, the ability to see through an affordance and to realize their root causes should be underscored among the students. In other words, affordances need to be perceived dialectically by instructors and students.

It is not as though the participants were overtly told that writing was not important in their majors, since the undergraduate catalog in the research site even states that all students must complete at least two courses designated writing intensive, one of which had to be taken within their major (WUP undergraduate catalog, p. 43). This designation means writing is still a significant and highlighted skill in the particular university setting. However, this does not increase the students’ attention towards writing. One possible reason is that writing has not been constantly and widely practiced across the curriculum, which specifies the necessity to implement WAC in the majors.

Second, the volatility of affordances was revealed through its variation from person to person. This point was also briefly brought up in Chapter three, in which I utilized examples from Hui and Huang’s cases to explicate the opposite impact of L1 and L2 on their writing experiences. In this section, I selected another example to demonstrate the idea. In the interview with Huang, he expressed his preferences of the “white-dominant” environment in the Art studio major, which supplied convenience for him to learn English and allowed him to catch up with “American” culture easily and quickly. In Qing’s case, working with native-English speaking students did not help develop her skills in writing or interviewing, since all the errands were left to her while
her “white” teammates would correct her grammar and change her ideas in a collaborative report without informing her in advance; for more vital and meaningful tasks, such as interview, her groupmates excluded her from participation. Hence, the volatility of affordances through the analyses is “personally sensitive” as well.

In addition, it is noticeable that I used quotation mark while using the word *white*. During the interview, the Chinese participants liked to refer to native-English speakers as “bai ren,” which means “white” people. It is very problematic because not all native-English speakers in the United States are “white”, and not all “white” people are native English speakers. At the same time, Qing was discriminated against as a non-native English speaker, which brings up another problem; even with more writing exercise conceived to increase the students’ voice and agency in classrooms, the power imbalance illuminated by the work distributions within a team with both native and non-native English speaking students deserves more attention.

**Writing Across the Curriculum**

According to Young (2011), it is not uncommon for content area instructors to assume that senior students should know what teachers expect from their writing and what should be considered as a good writing; hence, as is the case with Hui from Art Education, there exists some hidden curriculum (Brown, 2015; Giles & Hill, 2015) in writing that confused and floundered the students as competent writers. One explanation germane to this failure was that Hui and her instructors are from different contexts of culture, meaning their attitudes towards effective writing in different content areas differ (Freeman & Freeman, 2008). Hence, the instructors need to provide explicit instructions to students, particularly when the diversity in a classroom is salient. Another potential
explanation is that, as all the participants in the study conveyed that their writing skill was not satisfactory, a need exists to implement the WAC program in the research site. One of the criteria to participate in the study was that students need to have taken MLW 101, 202, or 121. However, the generic skill of writing mastered in those courses cannot always be successfully transferred to writing in all disciplines. Although the students are required to take two writing-intensive courses to be able to successfully graduate, relying on the two writing-intensive courses to strengthen students’ writing skills and arouse their attention towards the importance of writing is almost impossible, indicating the need for course content instructors to work with WAC specialists to require more writing across the curriculum in majors. All of these commentaries indicate that content area instructors from all departments need to teach students how to write, rather than placing this solely as the obligation of the teachers from English department.

Young’s (2011) definition of WAC is that “students use written language to develop and communicate knowledge in every discipline and across disciplines” (p. 3), and he perceived that “effective writing assignments are not ‘add-ons’ to fulfil a writing requirement or to generate 20 percent of a final grade” (p. 5). His description of writing in WAC overtly rebuts the writing activities designed by the content instructors in this study. As reported by the participants, not much attention was given to writing assignments in their majors in terms of the simplified writing process and the paucity of specific and transparent instructions, elaborate feedback, and communication across disciplines. The reason for this negligence toward writing could mainly be derived out of content instructors’ concern on allotted time in teaching content knowledge. But indeed, teaching writing and incorporating writing with content will not reduce the time in
teaching content knowledge. This preservation of content class time is a product of the
two components of WAC – writing-to-learn and writing-to-communicate – which take up
different roles in cultivating students’ writing skills and build upon the comprehension of
course content.

Writing-to-learn has been discussed in Chapter two, described as a way “to please
the writer by leading to new discoveries, information, perspectives,” while writing-to-
communicate is “to please the reader in providing new discoveries, information,
perspectives” (Young, 2011, p. 11). The purpose of writing-to-learn does not have to be
formal and academic, whereas writing-to-communicate should be a “thoughtful, crafted,
final product” (p. 12). In light of these definitions, the writing practiced by the
participants is prone to “writing-to-communicate,” as it intended to fulfil content
teachers’ purpose to “‘test’ students’ knowledge of textbook or lecture material,
situations in which the teacher[s] [know] the right answer and [are] just checking to see if
the students know it too” (Melzer, p. W251). Such content knowledge checks were
exemplified by the short answers practiced by Hui from Art Education and case studies
practiced by Qing from Accounting. In most cases, the participants have not had any
particular experience in writing-to-learn. However, it is important to have both formal
and informal writing exercise in a classroom to promote students’ thinking.

Indeed, there are many successful cases in writing-to-learn from different content
areas, such as the one-minute essay in a mathematics class, poetry writing in an
accounting class, a biology class, and a psychology class, and note writing in an
electrical engineering class (for more details on how to design writing-to-learn
assignments, please refer to Young, 2011). However, the literature on WAC does not
overtly point out how multilingual international students can be empowered through these activities and how course content instructors teach those students and assess the students’ performance in classroom. One suggestion given is that when students practice writing-to-learn, they should be allowed to use their L1 which can support them to write and generate ideas more comfortably. Also, the permission of the judicious use of L1 might empower multilingual international students in classrooms, elucidating the characteristics of writing-to-learn as an informal process to facilitate the students’ production of fine writing.

As a WAC scholar, Young (2011) puts forward a writing process for writing-to-communicate, including “planning, drafting (including audience-related issues), revising, editing, proofreading, and publication” (p. 45). The proposed writing process is not fixed but in flux, tied to the course goals in each class; the last step, publication, is seen as a desired goal for writing. During this writing process, Young (2011) does not suggest content teachers to give grades until the final product, and the grades should not be split. Namely, to give two grades for content and English respectively would send a mixed message to students, as the two parts should be considered as an integrated whole (more details on writing-to-communicate, please refer to Young, 2011). Most of the participants’ writing practice discussed in the current study was, to some extent, close to writing-to-communicate but not writing-to-learn. Therefore, how to combine writing-to-learn and writing-to-communicate in content courses requires the cooperation between content class instructors and WAC specialists.

WAC is developing all the time. As reflected in the participants’ accounts that the nature of their majors determined the frequency of their writing practice, the focus of
skills to be enhanced in each major is different. Therefore, aside from WAC, there are Communication across the Curriculum (CAC) and Electronic Communication across the Curriculum (ECAC) (see Steinfatt, 1986; Cronin & Glenn, 1991; Morreale, Shockley-Zalabak, & Whitney, 1993; Reiss, Selfe, & Young, 1998; Dannels, P., 2001; Dannels, D., 2002; Dannels & Housley Gaffney, 2009). The promotion of the two programs will not threaten the importance of writing in WAC but rather also recognize the importance of other language skills such as “oral communication, visual communication, critical thinking, collaboration, problem-based learning, and other active learning strategies” underscored in different disciplines (Young, 2011, p. 55). Actually, all of these programs (WAC, CAC, ECAC) are congruent in “promot[ing] active inquiry, sincere communication, collaboration, and problem solving” (Young, 2011, p. 56), and some of the teaching strategies mentioned in WAC are transferable to the other two programs. Therefore, deciding which program will be optimal for specific content area instructors depends on their educational goals, and a few adjustments in a WAC program according to the nature of majors is acceptable.

**Discourse: Cross-cultural Discourse**

Discourse, briefly mentioned in Chapter two along with the concept of genre, is worthwhile to be put forward alone and fully examined in this chapter in regards to a key theme reflected in the data. The challenges that the participants encountered while writing across the curriculum, including incompetence in grammar and vocabulary, the lack of connection among content courses, and cultural dissonance, can be elaborated upon by means of Gee’s Discourse analysis. Gee (2015) reiterates that Discourse, more than language per se, is a particular social behavior that a community is able to identify
and accept as meaningful or appropriate ways of thinking, saying, valuing, and doing. It functions as a means to categorize and discipline people in different contexts according to internalized and implicit “theories” or “ideologies” (p. 11). Discourse is omnipresent, such as in a company, bank, church, school, conference, classroom, bar, etc. People, performing varying roles in a society, have to cater to different Discourses in all kinds of occasions and places in order to be welcomed (Gee, 2015); however, Discourse is not transferable among different fields, leading to conflicts and marginalization in different communities. Thus, becoming acquainted with various kinds of Discourses is a prerequisite to succeed or be accepted in a community, and the only way to acquire Discourses is “[to be] socialized or enculturated into a certain social practice” (Gee, 2015, p.53).

In the current study, the four participants confronted two essential Discourses – “cross-cultural” Discourse and disciplinary Discourse – as they wrote across the curriculum (Gee, 2015, p1). Cultural dissonance perceived by all of the participants while writing across the curriculum is the best example to demonstrate cross-cultural Discourses. Participants claimed that the ways of writing in their native countries are different from those in the United States. To see what I mean, consider an example regarding different patterns of writing in China and in the United States. Qing, the Accounting major, demonstrated her perception of how Chinese and U.S. students write, stating that Chinese writing usually puts the most essential point at the end of the writing while U.S. English writing likes to show the main idea in the beginning of the writing. These two written Discourses exist respectively in two nations, alluding to two contrastive cultures. Although Qing’s oversimplification of writing in the two divergent
countries is problematic, her understanding was shaped by her writing experiences and the education she received. The best way to recognize cultural differences and acquire discourses is through immersion in the target activity, and writing is no exception. To learn how to write in an “American” way, the students need to be given more chances to write and practice.

**Discourse: Second Language Acquisition**

Discourse has profound impact upon second language acquisition. In terms of learning a language, Gee states that, “English, for example, is not a monolithic thing. Each and every language is composed of many sub-languages that, is many different styles or varieties of language” (p.101). These languages are also known as “social languages,” acquired only through practice in the society (Gee, 2015, p.101). In Huang’s case, he preferred the “white” dominant study environment, concurring with what Gee pinpointed, that “one always and only learns to interpret texts of a certain type in certain ways through having access to, and ample experience in, social settings where texts of that type are read in those ways” (p.53). Nonetheless, the danger of immersion in the new environment is that the students might be enculturated and assimilated in the U.S. culture and may possibly discard their native culture if they attempt to better converse with their supervisors and professors. This cultural assimilation may continue if they attempt to write like native English speakers, adopting English selves at the cost of their original identities. On this subject, Gee (2015) remarked that “Discourse patterns are among the strongest expressions of personal and cultural identity… changes in a person’s discourse patterns- for example, in acquiring a new form of literacy- often involve a change in a person’s identity” (p.91). Different ways of sense making is a problem for students who
come from other Discourses, as they very often will be conceived as less intelligible and exceptional in the community.

**Discourse: BICS and CALP**

In the current study, all the participants blamed their perceived insufficiency in writing partly on their lack of enough vocabulary, expressing their desire to grasp more vocabulary. In regards to this phenomenon, I attempted to elaborate on the concepts of Discourse in different contexts with the ideas of basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) brought up by Cummins (2006). As previously mentioned, each discipline has its own culture, including content-specific vocabulary. Students who are from Accounting might not be able to understand the terminologies from Art. Even within the same major, different courses will always engender different vocabulary for students to master. This relates to different discourses in each course, major, department, and school. For example, Huang from Art studio complained that although he was familiar with the words from his major, he felt awkward and frustrated when he was in a restaurant. He did not know much vocabulary outside of his academic world. His situation is in concert with the BICS and CALP coined by Cummins (2011), which are new concepts that I want to introduce into the study.

Put simply, the difference between BICS and CALP is the distinction between conversational and academic proficiency acquired in schools. Generally speaking, BICS is easier for second language students, while it normally takes 5 to 7 years for second language students to catch up with their native-English speaking students in CALP. One of the essential reasons is that BICS is more concrete and context-situated, while CALP is less contextualized and cognitively demanding. The reason for Cummins (2006; 2011)
to bring up the two concepts is to bring attention to the fact that second language learners with highly contextualized conversational proficiency in daily life or peer-appropriate fluency in L2 do not reflect their attainment of more abstract academic language skills in L2, and vice versa. Huang’s case demonstrates how this disparity might create a dilemma with a higher level of CALP but a lower level of BICS. In other words, multilingual international students who have reached the level of conversational proficiency might still have difficulties in accomplishing academically oriented tasks, or vice versa. Therefore, it is a stereotype to judge students’ writing ability based upon their conversational skills. If they are neglectful or ill-informed of the gap, whether intentionally or unintentionally, scholars and educators will only disfranchise students in academic settings by unfairly assessing their academic writing abilities.

What is more, Cummins (2006) notes that vocabulary is the main indicator of students’ level of BICS and CALP, as he states that vocabulary has a “strong relationship to both overall cognitive abilities and academic development” (p. 132). He notes further that students’ need for vocabulary is “infused across the curriculum in virtually all subject areas. Therefore, students’ knowledge of the vocabulary associated with particular curriculum areas [...] can potentially be assessed as an indicator of their knowledge of the concepts taught in these curricular areas” (p. 142). That is to say, in different disciplines, vocabulary is the core component of varying contexts, discourse conventions, and one of the main indicators of students’ BICS and CALP. Thus, it is reasonable to consider the participants’ requests for vocabulary in content courses, and more attention should be granted to enlarging and enhancing students’ mastery of vocabulary in disciplines. Likewise, Cummins (2006) claims that lexical knowledge is
one of the core components to “[estimating] the broader construct in an effective (and cost-efficient) manner” (p. 127). Teachers’ instructions as a form of context can provide contextual support ameliorating cognitive demands in writing, which might make the task more comprehensible and straightforward for the students.

**Instructions and Feedback**

Talking about teachers’ instructions and feedback, the three participants made comparisons between content class instructors and composition class teachers. A common conclusion was that teachers in content courses do not give many instructions in writing, as Hui complained in the interview. The consequence of the lack of clarity in instructions was that “[her] grades are always not high” (Hui, February 2015, Interview). Compared with teachers in content courses, instructors from composition classes were perceived by the participants as stricter and more conscientious. However, not all of the participants were concerned about instructions; the other two participants held neutral attitudes as to whether they were given specific instructions or not. But the fact remained that they would still ask for clarification if they encountered any difficulties while writing or they would put more effort in writing to include everything that they thought their instructors expected to read.

Another congruent agreement among the three participants was that content course instructors do not give much feedback and they rarely corrected grammatical errors. The most common feedback they received from content class instructors were grades, with or without short comments. Most of the participants admitted that they would pay more attention to the instructors’ feedback, rather than that of their peers. In fact, grades as a form of feedback usually came after the last step of the writing process,
conveying the message that the writing was done. Students who received this kind of grade had less motivation and inspiration to do further revision, making the writing less meaningful, especially when they were not involved in many writing processes like drafting, editing, revising, etc. Compared with the feedback from content course instructors, the participants thought much more highly of the feedback from composition class teachers, as indicated in Qing and Huang’s comments in the interview. This discrepancy between content class instructors and the composition class teachers in giving feedback partially reflected content class instructors’ unwillingness to spend too much time on writing and their consideration of writing assignments as just “add-ons” (Young, 2011).

**Strategies Learned From Composition Class**

Based upon the comments from the four participants, what they learned in composition class was plentiful, including different formats, procedures of writing, and grammar. However, those skills learned from composition class unable not fully utilized due to the disconnect between writing in content classes and composition classes. For example, in composition classes, Huang learned the process of writing an essay, and he also alluded that the practices of writing in composition classes helped him to form a habit in writing. But gradually, this habit weakened because, in his major, the writing was different from the writing practices in composition classes. The disconnection eroded his writing skills. Because of the gap between composition classes and content courses, the participants asked for English for academic purposes (EAP). EAP rejects generic teaching but asks for specificity, as Hyland (2002) claims that “[d]isciplines have different views of knowledge, different research practices, and different ways of seeing
the world, and as a result, investigating the practices of those disciplines will inevitably take us into greater specificity” (p. 390). Therefore, EAP targets students’ needs in specific situations (see Swales, 1990; Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1991; Hyland, 1994; Jordan, 1997; Benesch, 2001; Hamp-Lyons & Heasley, 2006; Harwood & Petric, 2011 for more information about EAP). The participants in the study had all started their degree programs, meaning they all passed language proficiency tests. In order to address the participants perceived gaps, EAP classes are needed for undergraduate students as one of the degree courses. That is to say, in this particular university, EAP classes should run alongside other degree courses, not for the students’ language development, but particularly for their acquaintance of disciplinary discourses, preparing them for more advanced and demanding major courses.

So far, the themes generated from the cases shared some similarities in concept. For instance, considerations such as discourse, genre, and EAP ask for the analysis of students’ needs and provide conventions and specific guidelines for students while assigning them writing exercises. Nonetheless, there are other issues embedded in those concepts, respectively. For instance, the conventions in a community that allow members to build their solidarity, decide their alignment, and (re)construct their identities – otherwise known as a Discourse – should not solely endeavor to assimilate multilingual international students by forcing them to give up their original identities, but should also accept diversity and co-construct identities with newcomers. In this regard, innovation and vigor can be infused into the academy and break the cycle of normative marginalization in academic settings. The implementation of WAC is also an essential way to emancipate multilingual international students with varying English proficiency.
levels, especially in the phase of writing-to-learn which proffers them opportunities to utilize their L1.

**Implications and Recommendations for Further Studies**

This study comes up with various theoretical implications, especially in regards to the potential synthesis among varying theoretical approaches. Considering these theoretical syntheses, I suggest a collaboration among programs in scholarship, including the cooperation between WAC specialists, Second Language Writing (SLW) experts, and Writing Center scholars at the research site, in order to facilitate multilingual international students in writing across the curriculum. Further, I broach possible pedagogical implications for educators who are attentive to multilingual international students’ classroom needs. Theoretically, this study intensifies the call for a combination among different theoretical approaches, like genre analysis, EAP, and WAC, to writing research. As alluded to in the study, participants have diverse and multiple needs at the same time while writing in different disciplines which might not be able to be satisfied within a single theoretical framework (e.g., the participants attempts to learn more vocabulary in their content courses and to write like “Americans”). The research study reflects that the participants experienced different genres of writing and discourses inside and outside of their majors. Their needs are not monolithic. Thus, it is very reasonable to combine different theoretical approaches in one exercise to meet students’ divergent needs and requests. In other words, research studies on writing should go beyond one theoretical concept and bring a more multidimensional and dynamic approach into writing research.
Hence, this study is indicative of the need to develop culturally inclusive WAC programs with the collaboration of scholars from ESL related fields, such as Writing Center specialists and scholars from the ALI at the research site, among others. This collaboration can address the weaknesses from both fields, as WAC works more with teachers and ESL related fields focus more on students (Zawacki & Cox, 2011). From the data presented in Chapter four, it is not hard to see multilingual international students’ concerns in writing in divergent curricula. Most of these concerns relate to their English language skills, including their vocabulary, grammar, spelling, etc. and their desire to take EAP classes in their degree programs. Their ability to write across different disciplines is, to a great extent, based upon their English proficiency. Unlike native English speaking students, multilingual international students have to overcome the cultural dissonance embroiled in different discourses between their own cultures and the United States, as well as the discourses spread across different classes. Further, they need to conquer their linguistic barriers, which consistently challenged them prior to and after their arrivals in the United States. The challenge is not limited to the students, but also extends to their instructors, who have to adjust their teaching pedagogies to meet the students’ needs. Hence, voices from the students and teachers are equally important for the success of the implementation of WAC at the university. As a pilot study, this research investigates and unfolds the students’ writing experiences at the research site, offers insights to the WAC and SLW/Writing Center scholars, and also indicates the pressing need for the experts from those fields to work together to “assist [multilingual international students] and their teachers as they face the challenges of writing and teaching with writing in their courses” (Zawacki & Cox, 2011). Educators and
researchers who are interested in finding out more about multilingual international students’ writing across the disciplines can resort to the special issue edited by Johns (2005).

This study also points to four pedagogical recommendations for teachers to apply to classroom teaching. First, teachers should provide explicit instructions for students, especially when there is great diversity in the classroom. As each course has its discourses, instruction is one way to demystify those Discourses and make the rules transparent for multilinguals. In this study, some of the participants stated that they failed to achieve desirable grades in writing because they believed their professors made the instructions vague and elusive. This finding suggests that educators should give straightforward guidelines to students to facilitate their accomplishment in course work.

Second, offering exhaustive and different types of feedback to students and adding editing activities in the process of writing are tantamount to giving second language students another chance to revise and polish their writing, to learn from their writing experiences, to enhance their comprehension of course content, and to improve their language skills. Meaningful feedback motivates students to pursue better achievement and engagement in learning and writing. As one of the important stipulations of WAC, “[the] best way for teachers to help students develop the discourse component of grammatical competence [is] through work on editing their writing to improve the organization and the links among the different parts” (Freeman & Freeman, 2008, p. 59). Different types of feedback should also be encouraged, such as direct and indirect feedback, because each type of feedback serves different functions to assist the students’ learning (see Bao, 2015 for more information).
The third pedagogical suggestion is to enhance students’ awareness of genres and discourses through extensive and intensive reading. “Read and Retell,” developed by Brown and Cambourne (1987), might be a good way to start for course content instructors, as it might enable students to obtain a better “understanding of the different academic genres” (p. 99). Through extensive reading, content course instructors can also better enhance students’ mastery of content-specific words and general academic words by way of encouraging classroom discussions and teaching individual words (see Freeman & Freeman, 2008, for more detailed information). It is important to “activate [students’] prior register and knowledge” to assist them to learn the target language and knowledge, meaning that teachers need to recognize and accept students’ home culture (Hall & Navarro, 2011).

Last but not least, the content instructors need to pay more attention to the boundaries between native/non-native English speaking students, creating an equal and well-structured learning environment for multilingual international students. In doing so, the teachers would “facilitate [multilingual international] learners' attempts to gain legitimate peripheral participation in the new learning community,” allowing them to “gain access to this community of practice,” improving their language proficiency, and expanding their knowledge-base (Rich, 2005).

**Future Research Directions**

Apart from the aforementioned recommendations, in the process of this research study, I encountered several problems for which I am unable to offer answers. The first problem is the disconnect between consistent writing practice. That is, the composition classes were useful and helpful to improve the students’ writing skills, but after they
started their content courses, there was a lack of connections between the writing in composition classes and content course classes. How to bridge the gap of the writing practices between composition classes and content courses is a paramount question.

Second, the existence of double standards inside and outside of the campus seems to be an issue to the participants. One of the affordances addressed by my participants was the lenience of their professors towards their grammatical errors, leading to what Hui’s belief that “[he] did not really learn English” (Hui, February 2015, interview). The professors were so merciful, they did not care about spelling as long as they knew what the students intended to express. Also, there was the writing center to help students polish their writing before submitting their writing assignments. According to Hui, she failed the Praxis test for she never really studied English very well. So how could educators solve this dilemma? And how can educators assess the academic excellence of multilingual international writers who experience culturally-based differences in the United States? In other words, how to balance the assessment among different forms of culture-coalesced writing is another question that requires further. These questions emerged from the research study but remain unaddressed due to limited time and limited methodological inquiry.

Although in-depth qualitative research does not lend itself to large numbers of participants, I still believe that richer information regarding the students’ writing experiences should be revealed and more voices from multilingual international students be heard. As such, this belief encourages me to continue the study in the future by recruiting different multilinguals, and I hope that it will encourage other researchers to pursue this topic as well. Lastly, teachers’ perceptions and experiences while working
with multilingual international students are invisible in this study, which requires further endeavor. Possibly, researchers can also work on native English speaking students’ perceptions towards multilingual international students in a classroom to provide a more holistic view of multilingual international students’ writing experiences across curricula.

**Limitations of the Study**

The study has two limitations that I can think of so far, but maybe there are more limitations that I have not realized yet. First, the diversity is lacking among my participants. During the initial level of recruitment, only those who were familiar with me agreed to engage in the research and all of them were Chinese. Students from other nations are underrepresented in the study. Second, there are considerable limitations from my data transcription. Because all of the Chinese participants spoke Mandarin in the interviews, I needed to translate their Chinese to English in the transcription. No doubt, there would be some errors in my translation due to linguistic barriers.

**Concluding Remarks**

Throughout the nine months’ commitment and endeavor, I realized this research study has become an integral part of my MA TESOL professional life. In the first several months when everything about the study was fuzzy and unclear to me, I was panicked and haunted; I could not get rid of it while walking and even dreamt about it at night. I had solicitude when the deadlines for each chapter were approaching. Gradually, I learnt to get along with it and accommodated my life to its presence. More importantly, it became a process of self-discovery and self-enrichment. Being a researcher, as McMillan (2015) claimed, has “provided [me] with a strengthened sense of agency and empowerment, as well as a sense of professional responsibility” (p. 58). This resonates
with my experiences as a student-researcher. This study provides a space for me to investigate, analyze, and bring up my own theory. The whole process of interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, presenting, and discussing became a cornerstone on which my confidence as a novice researcher is boosted; my understanding of the field of TESOL and composition has become transparent, and my pedagogy as well as philosophy on teaching writing is more concrete. I feel the passion to utilize the theory and the pedagogy in my future teaching career. Additionally, my persistence to be part of the academia is much stronger, rather than less, after the conduction of the study because I am aware that only through this way could I hear more voices from the bottom of the education system and be more attentive to students’ concerns. Although it is the end of my thesis, I know it is a new beginning of my academic life. There will be more challenging and difficult issues waiting for me, but I know I will enjoy and cherish those experiences at last.
References


doi:10.11247/jssdj.61.1_95


Emig, J. (1977). Writing as a mode of learning. College Composition & Communication,


Appendix A

Consent Form

**Title:** Writing across curriculum: experiences of undergraduate multilingual international students

**Investigator:**

Zhenjie Weng, Graduate student in MA TESOL  [BJCV@iup.edu](mailto:BJCV@iup.edu)

Gloria Park, Ph.D. Associate Professor in English Department [Gloria.park@iup.edu](mailto:Gloria.park@iup.edu)

**Overview:** We are inviting you to participate in a research study we are conducting on students who registered in ENGL 121 course in Fall, 2014 or who have taken MLW sections of 101 or 202. This study will pivot around undergraduate multilingual international students’ understanding of writing across curriculum (WAC), through investigation of types of writing they employ in their disciplines i.e. business and science; the contributions of WAC to their English language development; and the learning strategies they accrue in writing courses that benefit their writing in other classes.

If you agree to participate, we would ask this of you: Participate in a 30 to 40 minute interview at a time that is convenient for you, and interviews will be audio recorded; and provide any writing assignments you still keep; if you want to keep your originals, we will photocopy this material and return the originals to you.

**Risks and Benefits:** Potential risks may be time spent talking, which might be emotional at times. This in turn can inform issues of curriculum development, method of teaching, and teacher preparation.

**Confidentiality:** The information we receive from you will remain confidential since we will provide each person with a pseudonym that only you and the investigators will know. However, once the data collection is completed, then we will destroy all documents that have any identifiable information.

**For more information:** Please contact Zhenjie Weng ([BJCV@iup.edu](mailto:BJCV@iup.edu) or 724-467-9518) should you have any questions. It is important to note that Dr. Park will not know who decides to participate until your grades have been submitted. The survey and the interviews will take place with Zhenjie Weng once you have completed Dr. Park’s class. Once you have informed about the study, I will ask you for your writing assignments in other classes deemed appropriate for this study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with me. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time by notifying one of the Principle Study Investigators, Dr. Gloria Park and Ms. Zhenjie Weng. In addition, those students who are currently in any of Dr. Park’s courses will be recruited after their grades have been posted. Upon your request to withdraw,
all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement below.

**Principle Study Investigators:**

Ms. Zhenjie Weng  
MATESOL Program Student  
Research Assistant  
**BJCV@iup.edu**  
724-467-9518

Dr. Gloria Park  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
Graduate Programs in Composition & TESOL/MATESOL  
English Department  
Leonard Hall 110  
Indiana, PA 15701  
**Gloria.park@iup.edu**  
724-357-3095

*This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (phone: 724-3557-7730)*

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:**

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed consent form to keep in my possession.

**Name (please print):** ________________________________

**Signature:** __________________________________________

**Date:** _______________  
**Phone where you can be reached:** ________________

**Best days and times to reach you:** __________________________________________

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

**Date:** _______________  
**Investigator’s signature:** ____________________________
Appendix B

IRB Approval

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Stright Hall, Room 113
210 South Tenth Street
Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705-1048

December 8, 2014

Zhenjie Weng
47 Regency Square
Indiana, PA 15701

Dear Ms. Weng:

Your proposed research project, "Writing across curriculum: experiences of undergraduate multilingual international students," (Log No. 14-327) has been reviewed by the IRB and is approved as an expedited review for the period of December 8, 2014 to December 8, 2015. This approval does not supersede or obviate compliance with any other University requirements, including, but not limited to, enrollment, degree completion deadlines, topic approval, and conduct of university-affiliated activities.

You should read all of this letter, as it contains important information about conducting your study.

Now that your project has been approved by the IRB, there are elements of the Federal Regulations to which you must attend. IUP adheres to these regulations strictly:

1. You must conduct your study exactly as it was approved by the IRB.
2. Any additions or changes in procedures must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented.
3. You must notify the IRB promptly of any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects.
4. You must notify the IRB promptly of any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in items 2 or 3.

Should you need to continue your research beyond December 8, 2015 you will need to file additional information for continuing review. Please contact the IRB office at irb-research@iup.edu or 724-357-7730 for further information.

The IRB may review or audit your project at random or for cause. In accordance with IUP Policy and Federal Regulation (45CFR46.113), the Board may suspend or terminate your project if your project has not been conducted as approved or if other difficulties are detected.
It is strongly recommended that all researchers and their advisors complete CITI on-line protection of human subjects and responsible conduct of research training. The training is available at http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=93408 and there is no charge to you.

While not under the purview of the IRB, researchers are responsible for adhering to US copyright law when using existing scales, survey items, or other works in the conduct of research. Information regarding copyright law and compliance at IUP, including links to sample permission request letters, can be found at http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=165526.

I wish you success as you pursue this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Roberts, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Professor of Criminology

JLR:jeb

Cc: Dr. Gloria Park, Faculty Advisor
Appendix C

Interview Questions

**Semi-Structured and Unstructured Interview Protocol:**

These questions are engendered based on the research questions. The questions are divided into five sections, including demographics, warm-up questions, understanding of WAC and its impact on UMISs, writing instructions and feedback, and the effectiveness of writing class.

**Section I: Demographics:**

1. What is your pseudonym (name) and birthplace?

2. How many languages do you speak, and how long have you been in the U.S.?

3. What is your major and standing (freshman/sophomore/ Junior/ Senior)?

**Section II: Warm-up questions:**

1. How do you perceive your English language proficiency? (fluent, intermediate, limited) How do you consider your writing skill?

2. What types of assignments (homework) do you usually get in your major?

3. How important is writing in your major? Do you have a lot of chances to practice your writing skill in your major?

4. Which part did you spend more time on while writing, content or grammar?

**Section III: Understanding of WAC and its impact on UMISs**

5. What types of writing have you engaged in at college? For instance, you write for your teachers, classmates, etc.

4. What are the functions of writing in your major?

5. How did these writing practices contribute to your understanding of the class content, participation in class, development of your language skill, etc.?

6. Have you encountered any difficulties while writing? Did any challenges exist you think due to who you are as an international student? For instance, your educational backgrounds, disciplinary culture, and language proficiencies might become the challenges for you to obtain good scores in writing.
Section IV: Writing instructions and feedback

6. Did your instructors provide elaborate/strict writing instructions? How did it help/impede your understanding of writing assignments and affect your writing scores?

7. Do you think your instructors emphasize more on content or grammar? How did it affect your confidence in writing?

8. When your instructors graded or read your writing, in your opinion, did they consider your status as an international student?

9. Did your professor give feedback to your writing? Was it helpful and effective to improve your language skill or for your understanding of course content?

Section V: The effectiveness of writing class

10. Did you feel that composition class was helpful to your writing in other classes?

11. If yes, what kinds of writing strategies/skill you accrued in the writing class that was beneficial for your writing in other content class? For example, it can be task management skill, rhetorical skill, etc.

12. If not, do you have any suggestions for the writing class?

13. Is there anything that I have not mentioned but you want to talk about?