
Embracing the Diversity: Learning from EFL Students' Self-Selected Reading and Writing¹

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Introduction

It has been observed that the use of pre-set textbooks is the basic requirement for L2 learners of English writing. This requirement is from an assumption that EFL students feel incapable of deciding about what they would like to write. Some researchers believed that L2 writers' incapability mainly came from their lack of lexical expressions and grammatical structures (Leki, 1992; Raimes, 1985; Zamel, 1983), and a reemphasis on vocabulary memorization and syntactic analysis was a common solution. Other researchers, who emphasized a reading-writing connection, attributed L2 writers' difficulty in writing to their lack of reading experience (Belcher & Hirvela, 2001; Carson & Leki, 1993; Grabe, 2001, 2003; You & Chou, 2004a); consequently, providing the assigned reading became the usual treatment. However, both of these approaches, skill-based instruction and reading-based instruction, are still teacher initiated and teacher as feeder, which makes L2 student writers disown their autonomy in learning. What would happen if L2 student writers had their own choice to select reading and writing themes and topics? Would they know how to self-select their own reading and writing? Would that freedom in decision making motivate them? Would students' preferences be different from the content of pre-set textbooks? Even though some teachers have implemented self-selection of topics for writing instruction, we do not

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yet know much about the different effects between using pre-set textbooks and students' self-selection.

This study attempted to explore the effect of self-selection on EFL student writers by comparing the self-selected topics and themes with the content of pre-set textbooks. It is hoped that the analysis will bring new insights to EFL writing educators in their attempts to design writing courses and choose materials for writing instruction.

Literature Review

Self-Selected Topics

The advantages of students' selecting their own topics have been studied and continually confirmed in the L1 context. Shippen, Houchins, Puckett, and Ramsey (2007), in their report on the preferred writing topics of L1 urban and rural middle school students, mentioned that the freedom of topic choice was critical to student engagement and writing production and that the combination of interest and topic knowledge "enhanced lower performing students' written expression" (p. 59). Similarly, Manning (1999) noticed that each of her students had hundreds of topics from his or her own life. When students chose their own topics, their writing "possessed a voice and had rich description because the pieces reflected the prior knowledge of the student" (p. 130). Furthermore, Manning stated that students needed help to successfully figure out their own topics and needed encouragement to build their confidence in writing. To Manning, all students possess good topic ideas and the teachers' responsibility is to help them uncover their hidden topics.

Street (2005), teaching university students, also witnessed the power of self-selection and decided to make a change in his teaching. He said:

Finally, I decided what mattered most was whether my students could write well, not whether they appreciated my favorite works of literature. So I changed gears and scrapped the literary-analysis approach, instead offering my students the chance to explore topics that interested them. I began to listen more and talk less, asking my students what they knew and cared about. . . . They became my teachers, allowing me a unique glimpse into their lives outside of school. . . . Slowly . . . my students began to write with greater interest and skill. . . . My

reluctant writers began to see me as a teacher who supported their development as writers while valuing their interests as unique individuals. . . . They inspired me to understand the critical link between identity and writing. (p. 636)

Street's change helped him see his students' potential and possibilities.

However, it has been a controversial issue whether or not to allow L2 students to select their own reading and writing topics. The strongest argument is probably the dialogues between Tony Silva (1997, 1998) and Nathan Jones (1998, 2001). Valuing learner-centered learning, Silva (1997) claimed that students should have the chance to choose their own topics. He stated, "It seems most reasonable and motivating to have students choose their own topics, those in which they have a sincere interest and some intellectual and emotional investment" (p. 362). Furthermore, he believed, from his own experiences, that with their own topics, students would write better texts "that are well informed, skillfully crafted, very persuasive, and incredibly moving" (p. 362).

On the other hand, Nathan Jones (1998) strongly disagreed with Tony Silva's statement about providing students freedom for topic selection. Jones argued that assigning important and comprehensive themes could enhance the teaching and learning of ESL/EFL writing fundamentals. Although he thought some freedom of topic choice might be appropriate, he claimed that too much freedom might be "confusing, annoying, and even debilitating" (p. 340) because some students who were extremely anxious might waste much time searching for a proper topic for their papers. To Jones, students' unlimited freedom on topic selection seemed to be equal to teachers' giving up the responsibility on instruction and guidance. But to Silva (1998), since "students' motivation increases when they are allowed to choose topics that are important to them" (p. 346), the teachers' responsibility should be "facilitating rather than controlling" (Silva, 1997, p. 362).

Self-regulated Learning

Self-regulation is the self-directive process in which learners' own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors transform their mental abilities into academic skills so as to attain their self-set goals. This definition was proposed by Zimmerman (1989) and has been discussed by many researchers (Reeve, Ryan, Deci, & Jang, 2008; Risemberg, 1993; Schunk, 1990; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998; Zimmerman, 2000, 2002). As Zimmerman, Bonner, and Kovach (1996) have suggested,

self-regulated learning leads students to determine their learning objectives, monitor their learning process, and evaluate their gains and progress. In addition, since writing relies largely on the processes of planning and then initiating and sustaining that plan, researchers have placed their emphasis on how self-regulated learning helps learners become engaged readers and writers with abilities such as goal setting, self-control, and self-reflection (Harris, Graham, Mason, & Saddler, 2002; Horner & Shwery, 2002; Zimmerman, 2002; Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997). According to Paris and Ayres (1994), students have the potential to become reflective and self-regulated learners, and self-selected goals usually strengthen their curiosity and motivation in the learning process. Holec (1981) suggests that students who practice self-regulated learning are responsible for all of the decisions concerned with their learning. Self-selected topics would, therefore, be considered one of those decisions in the learning process.

Studies conducted by Taiwanese researchers show positive outcomes from applying self-regulated learning in various English courses (Lee, 2001; Li, 2006; Shen, 2002; You & Chou, 2002, 2004b). Lee (2001) investigated 23 students from an institute of technology and found that “through autonomous learning, [students] were led to become more intrinsically motivated” (p. 149). The study done by Shen (2002) added that “having students share successful learning strategies could be a part of autonomous learning” (p. 218). Thus, creating the opportunity for self-directed learning and encouraging sharing and interaction among learners can be a way to foster successful learners.

Self-selecting topics is one important element of self-regulated learning. It involves learners understanding their own ability, interests, and beliefs in the possibility of reaching their goals. Though it is indeed well documented that self-regulated learning promotes motivation and learning outcomes, little research directly examines how self-selecting reading and writing topics influences student writers and their writing, and even less focuses on the possibility of using self-selected reading in EFL writing classes. This paper, therefore, investigates the features of EFL student writers’ self-selection and discusses the integration of topic self-selection into EFL writing classes.

The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. If given the opportunity, would EFL student writers be capable of selecting their own reading and writing topics?
2. Would students' self-selected topics be different from the content of pre-set textbooks in terms of genres, themes, and the level of proficiency and difficulty?
3. How would this freedom in decision making influence EFL student writers' perspectives of their own learning, especially their reading and writing?

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were EFL students from two private universities in northern Taiwan. All participants completed, between the years 2003 and 2007, a reading and writing project that involved topic self-selection. The total number of participants was 151 and included 25 non-English majors, 72 English majors, and 54 applied foreign languages majors. Most participants were sophomores and a few were juniors. All participants attended sophomore English writing courses, which are usually titled as English Writing (II), Intermediate Level.

Materials

The materials used in this study included students' self-selected reading and writing themes (see Appendix A) and 10 EFL writing textbooks frequently selected for the sophomore English writing class over the past four academic years (2003–2007) across five universities in northern Taiwan. The textbooks mainly focused on paragraph-to-essay writing but a few covered either paragraph or essay writing (see Appendix B).

Students' portfolios were also collected to investigate their perception of self-selection. The completed portfolios contained different types of writing (essays, journals, theme responses), self-selected themes (reading list, articles, responses), sharing and feedback (author-chair drafts, feedback to others' sharing, peer and self-evaluation), and a preface and table of contents.

Procedures

The researcher collected students' self-selected themes and topics from those who completed reading and writing projects that involved self-selection of the theme and made a list of all the themes and topics, from the most frequently chosen ones to the least frequent ones (see Appendix A). The researcher also collected 10 English writing textbooks that were frequently used for Taiwanese university sophomores and made a list of all the themes and topics selected in these writing textbooks (See Appendix C).

In order to investigate the similarities and differences between the two categories, students' self-selected themes and topics and the pre-set textbooks' themes and topics, the researcher compared the top ten frequently chosen themes, genres, and levels of reading difficulty and compared the data across participants' self-selections and the EFL writing textbooks. In addition, the researcher read through each participant's portfolio to see whether the participants integrated their interests and concerns into the themes and topics they selected and to see how they viewed this freedom of choice.

Data Analysis

The data were coded and compared to see the similarities and differences between themes chosen by the participants and those presented in the textbooks. The researcher evaluated the various texts that students read and categorized them into themes. When there was a degree of similarity across two different themes, the researcher would make a decision on whether or not to combine the two categories. All category names for themes came from the students. For example, some students read articles related to technology and created a theme title of "Technology and Science," and other students read articles related to future life in a technology era and created the theme title of "Future Life." On the surface, these two themes appear to belong to different categories, but the articles within the themes discussed a similar issue—technology. Thus, these two themes were placed into the same category, "Technology." However, theme titles like "Literature" and "Classical Masterpieces" appeared similar, but further investigation revealed that the articles under the theme title "Classical Masterpieces" were not literary works but famous speeches.

Therefore, rather than merging “Classical Masterpieces” with “Literature,” the former was combined with the category “Speech.”

Reading texts were categorized into genre type, such as short essay, longer essay, story, news, report, or letters. Since EFL students are usually afraid of and even avoid reading a long text, the criterion for the level of reading difficulty was the total number of words in a text.

The portfolios were also analyzed for students’ reactions to self-selection. The three categories that emerged from the portfolio analysis were (1) the integration of personal interests and concerns into theme selection, (2) students’ view of this freedom of choice, and (3) the influence of this freedom of choice on students’ learning. The Nvivo7 software was used for this qualitative analysis. In addition, the role of teacher as researcher helped provide in-depth observation and understanding of the participants’ self-selections.

Results

More Diverse Themes

Table 1 shows the top 10 themes chosen by students and the top ten themes contained in textbooks. Only 5 themes (technology, business, people, arts/entertainment, and health) overlapped between students’ choices and textbook themes. Among the top 10 themes chosen by students, there were 5 themes (travel, movies, life, culture, and books) that did not appear within the top 10 themes of the frequently used writing textbooks. (For a complete listing of self-selected and textbook themes, see Appendices A and C).

Far Extended Genres

Table 2 indicates that the genres of the reading articles in writing textbooks mainly belonged to short essay. Some of them were letters, advertisements, and biography; others were categorized as news articles, folktales, fables, and poems. However, the self-selected reading articles contained a wider selection of genres. In addition to those genres included in textbooks, there were longer essays, longer book reports, story, novels, song lyrics, movie scripts, speech, and so forth.

Table 1. Top 10 Self-Selected Themes and Pre-set Themes

Ranking	Self-Selected	Preset
1	Books (223, 13.92%)	*Technology (26, 8.81%)
2	*Health (144, 8.60%)	Education (24, 8.14%)
3	Travel (41, 8.42%)	*Business (21, 7.12%)
4	*People (119, 7.11%)	City (20, 6.78%)
5	*Technology (103, 6.15%)	*People (18, 6.10%)
6	Movies (93, 5.56%)	Communication (17, 5.76%)
7	Life (92, 5.50%)	Family (16, 5.42%)
8	Culture (78, 4.66%)	*Arts and Entertainment, Psychology (15, 5.08%)
9	*Business (67, 4%)	Advertisement, *Health (11, 3.73%)
10	*Arts and Entertainment (63, 3.76%)	Jobs (10, 3.39%)

Note. Mark (*) refers to the themes overlapped.

Table 2. Self-selected and Textbook Reading and Writing Genres

Types of Genres	Self-Selected R/W	Pre-set R/W
Short Essay	Yes	Yes
Letters	Yes	Yes
Advertisements	Yes	Yes
Biography	Yes	Yes
News	Yes	Yes/No
Folktales	Yes	Yes/No
Fables	Yes	Yes/No
Poem	Yes	Yes/No
Longer Essays	Yes	No
Longer/Book Reports	Yes	No
Story	Yes	No
Novels	Yes	No
Songs Lyrics	Yes	No
Movie Scripts	Yes	No
Speech	Yes	No

Level of Difficulty

The average length of the reading articles in writing textbooks was 413.67 words per article (see table 3). The shortest one, “Machu Picchu, Peru,” in *College Writing 3*, was 30 words, and the longest one, “Weasel Words,” in *Refining Composition Skills*, was 3,050 words.² However, the average length of the self-selected reading articles was 1,124.57 words per article. The shortest one was a 113-word humorous poem and the longest one, containing 16,789 words, was a longer essay titled “College Woe.” It should be noted that the top self-selected theme, book, was not included in this average length calculation.

Table 3. Length of Self-selected and Textbook Readings

	Shortest	Longest	Average
Self-Selected	113	16,789	1,124.57
Pre-set	30	3,050	413.67

Note. Numbers refer to words per article. Books, the top self-selected theme, are not included.

Highly Connected to Personal Interests and Concerns

Students’ portfolios revealed that 136 out of 151 participants (90 percent) integrated their personal interests and concerns into their theme selection. Only 5 out of 151 participants (3 percent) clearly expressed that they chose themes that were convenient. These participants did not think of selecting personally interesting themes, but they would like to try in the future. The rest of the participants, 10 out of 151 (7 percent), did not mention anything related to this integration (see table 4).

Table 4. Integrating Personal Interests and Concerns into Theme Selection

	Yes	No	Not Mentioned	Total
Frequency of Integration	136	5	10	151
Percentage of Integration	90.01%	3.31%	6.62%	100%

2. For full citations of these textbooks, see Appendix B.

Discussion

Uncovering Potentials

The most popular assumption that made writing instructors resist student self-selection of reading and writing was that students did not have the ability to make good selections. These opponents believed that EFL student writers lack linguistic proficiency and background knowledge and thus did not know what reading articles or writing topics might be suitable for them. If students were forced to make their own selections, most would be trapped into fake reading or plagiarism (Jones 1998, 2001).

However, this study provided a different view on this issue. Students' self-selected themes revealed their ability to make selections. Although 5 out of the top 10 themes they chose were different from the top 10 themes used in writing textbooks, they did cover many of the popular and interesting themes such as education, city, family, jobs, work, and so on (see Appendix A). If writing instructors consider the pre-set textbook themes as proper themes, there should be no reason to deny the capability for self-selection of EFL student writers, whose self-selected themes had a 50 percent overlap with these textbooks.

The more exciting finding, however, was not this similarity but the differences shown in students' self-selected themes. Students chose hundreds of different themes based on their interests, needs, and curiosity. They made their selections according to their personal concerns rather than randomness. For example, they read articles about health because they or their family suffered from certain diseases (05-Emily; 05-Tim; 06-Dominique; 07-Una)³. Alice from the class of 2007 was a good example. She wrote:

It often takes a long time for me to fall asleep at night, so I want to figure out the reasons. I searched the theme about sleep disorders. Finally, I found some articles from MSN's Health and Fitness center. After I finished the reading, I realized that "sleep" is really profound knowledge. Sleep can affect our memories, hearts, and even the health of our teeth. (07-Alice)

3. The coding for students' portfolios is the year and the student's name, e.g. 05-Emily is Emily from the 2005 class.

They read about animals because some of them were interested in raising a pet or needed to know how to take care of a pet (04-Robert; 05-Nicole; 06-Lindy). Robert, in his reading response, mentioned:

I always want to keep a dog, though I don't have one now. . . . The article "Great activities you can do with your dog" shows me how to play with it so that it will not feel bored. Dogs need a lot of exercises . . . and the article "Golden Retriever Breed Standard" contains many professional information about dogs' breed. After reading it, I can tell the breed of a certain dog! (04-Robert)

They read about natural disasters because they just experienced an earthquake, a typhoon, or a tsunami (04-Eros; 04-Jean; 04-Rachel). Jean wrote:

I choose this theme, natural disaster, because that recent news on TV all report about the earthquakes. When I saw the news, I couldn't help but [cry]. The earthquake, which occurred in South Asia, has taken away about 5,000 people's lives. Many tourists died when they were taking a trip, and many people lost their beloved families. I couldn't imagine what I would do if I were there. (04-Jean)

The same reasons could be applied for other themes such as technology, travel, cultures, people, and so on. Students' selections reflected their interest in the world around them and their capability to make choices.

As for the top theme selection, books, students exhibited their extreme potential. While many instructors doubted that EFL students would like to read English books, both fiction and nonfiction, these EFL student writers provided a surprising finding: books were the top theme selection. Within the category of books, students mostly made literary selections. Many of them chose Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays with Morrie* or *Five People You Meet in Heaven*, as well as the best sellers *Who Moved My Cheese*, *Chicken Soup for the Christian Teenage Soul*, or *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Some chose famous children's storybooks like E. B. White's *The Trumpet of the Swan*, and some took a risk to read more advanced novels like *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Color Purple*, *Anne Frank's Diary*, or Philip Pullman's fantasy trilogy *His Dark Materials*. According to the BBC's "Big Read Top 200" and *Time* magazine's "All-Time 100 Novels," those literary works are popular among and suitable for university students in terms of content and linguistic complexity. Students

read these novels thoroughly and wrote their summary and responses wholeheartedly. Jo's response to the book *The Color Purple* is one example:

“It’s about life. It’s about love. It’s about us.” These are some of the many lines written about this book. I agree most heartily. I just finished reading this book, a book I feel is a must read for all people. This book has opened my eyes to the outside world in more ways than one. . . . This book is written in letter style. Celie writes to God and her sister Nettie, the two people she trusted the most. . . . I try [to] picture myself in her shoes; an absolute impossibility, yet what happens in this book happens to a lot of people. Celie has a tremendous amount of courage and strength to be able to move forward and never lose faith. I felt speechless after I read this book. There is an enormous amount to be grateful for in this life, especially in our lives. I not only learnt in more detail to be thankful for what I have, but also to cherish every breath and to give freely and willingly. The bad I do unto others will come back tenfold. The good I do, someone, somewhere, will one day notice and be grateful. (05-Jo)

Their writing revealed their understanding of the content, and their sharing with peers helped them think further and more profoundly (04-Leslie; 05-Jenny).

Jones (2001) strongly doubted, saying, “giving students a lot of freedom in selecting paper topics can be counter-productive, as the freedom could lead to confusion and frustration among those who may need more guidance and direction” (p. 8). However, with a close look at EFL student writers’ self-selection in this study, no one could deny that EFL student writers do have the potential to make their own choices with reading and writing.

Enhancing Motivation

Though Jones (2001) severely challenged Silva (1997, 1998) for not providing any evidence to prove that freedom of theme selection is a stronger motivator for students, the results in this study indeed show the influence of self-selection on learning motivation. From the diversity of their themes and the extended length of their reading and writing, it suggests that students’ motivation was enhanced.

From the perspective of diversity, students’ self-chosen themes reflected not only their concerns but also the integration of their interests and learning, and such

combination made learning meaningful to students (04-Sandy; 05-Evie). Many of the students mentioned that they had never had such opportunities to integrate their interests into English reading and writing and that they had never recorded their true feelings in English writing class (05-Eve; 05-Jessie; 06-Roanna). Most students felt amazed that they were allowed to select themes without restrictions because they had never had this freedom in their previous learning experiences. One student, Sabrina, mentioned, “If I can combine my interest with my writing project, I will be full of happiness!” Jerry, another student, stated strongly, “I have to write some articles related to my interests; otherwise, it would be non-contents in my articles—people read them, but no ideas flash into their brains.” Alice’s comments subtly described students’ inner desire in learning:

I always integrate my interest and curiosity into my theme reading project. Whenever I felt interest in some issues, I would want to make thorough investigations. I would look for related articles or information from the Internet or the library. Though it may take time to search, I really enjoyed it. That was because sometimes I could find unexpected and fascinating knowledge during the process. Therefore, I believe that the interest and curiosity could provoke my motivation all the time.

Setting these students free from assigned themes and genres aroused their willingness to try something challenging and thought provoking.

From the perspective of the extended length of their reading and writing, the self-chosen selections were a lot longer and more complex than the pre-set ones. Both reading a long text and writing a long article need patience and passion, which are characteristics of a motivated learner. Without patience, a student would have difficulty reading through a long text. Without passion, a student writer would struggle to stay up all night to compose a long article. If something real does not touch or resonate with them, they would not try with all their might to dig into the reading text or express themselves well in writing.

In brief, as Silva (1998) emphasized, “students’ motivation increases when they are allowed to choose topics that are important to them” (p. 346), and that can be applied to both reading and writing. This is supported by Manning, who said, “Students taking responsibility for choosing topics in writing is as important as choosing the books they read” (1999, p. 130).

Empowering Learners

“Choosing a topic is simple for some writers, but a problem for others. This challenge plagues writers of all ages” (Manning, 1999, p. 130), but once they overcome the problem, they definitely grow. As writing educators know, choosing a topic is not an easy task though the freedom uncovers potential and promotes motivation. However, it is the process of overcoming difficulty that empowers students. The act of choosing a theme involves many tasks simultaneously: getting to know oneself, being tolerant about uncertainty, and being appreciative of diversity.

Getting to know oneself may not seem to be an issue for university students, but it actually is, especially when they have seldom tried making a decision by themselves. It was heard often, when students were first provided with choice, that they did not know what to choose and why they had to choose on their own (06-Susie; 06-Jacelyn; 07-Melissa; 07-Nina). They even whined, opposed the freedom, and preferred to revert back assigned topics. They did so not because they had no ability to choose but because they had no chance to practice making a choice. Freire (1998) explained this in a clear way, “No one is first autonomous and then makes a decision. Autonomy is the result of a process involving various and innumerable decisions” (p. 98). Furthermore, Freire suggested that “autonomy is a process of becoming oneself, a process of maturing, of coming to be” (p. 98). Since such maturity does not happen on a given date, it should be worthwhile to prepare a pedagogy of autonomy to stimulate decision making, responsibility, and respect for freedom.

The tolerance of uncertainty is a must in both personal growth and professional development. Students feel anxious in their learning mainly because they expect a concrete answer from an authority figure such as the teacher. Such expectation causes the sense of uncertainty and secretly deprives of their independent thinking. By helping students make their own choice, students regain the chance to practice the critical thinking and to cope with the multiple answers for controversial issues. The freedom they get from writing class benefits them in the extended field of learning.

Students learn to appreciate the diversity in the process of topic selection. Since there is no single assigned topic from the teacher, students start opening their eyes and mind to test all the possibilities (05-Megan; 05-Michelle Wu; 06-AI; 07-Patrice; 07-Lily). Their taste is enlarged and their contact is extended.

With sharing and responding among peers, they exchange ideas and swap themes and topics. They learn from one another and get to know unfamiliar issues and even unfamiliar classmates. The bias they previously held, such as someone not being their type or a certain topic being not interesting, are broken, and they start noticing that the unfamiliar peers and themes might be the secret garden they have never touched. Such taste of appreciation could not be cultivated in the class with assigned topics.

To conclude, the answer to what this study brought to us as English writing educators was the confirmation of EFL student writers' potential and ability to choose their own themes, and by so doing, they would be motivated in learning and be empowered in both personal and professional development. After all, "education is not an affair of 'telling' and being told, but an active and constructive process" (Dewey, 1966, cited in Shor, 1996).

Conclusion

This study showed that EFL students' self-selected reading and writing genres and themes were more diverse and at a higher level of proficiency and difficulty than those of pre-set textbooks. This discovery casts doubt on the assumption that EFL students are incapable and unwilling to select their own topics for reading and writing. It also suggested that cultivating the opportunity for self-regulated learning activates students' potential and strengthens their motivation within the learning process. The findings provide insights for English writing educators, who may, in the future, bravely encourage students to have their own choice when reading and writing. With careful guidelines and sincere support, the application of self-chosen themes can be successfully carried out.

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Appendix A

Table 5. Top 35 Self-selected Themes

Ranking	Theme	Frequency	Percent
1	Books	233	13.92%
2	Health	144	8.60%
3	Travel	141	8.42%
4	People	119	7.11%
5	Technology	103	6.15%
6	Movies	93	5.56%
7	Life	92	5.50%
8	Culture	78	4.66%
9	Business	67	4%
10	Arts and Entertainment	63	3.76%
11	Food	61	3.64%
12	Society	50	2.99%
13	Sport	44	2.63%
14	Politics	44	2.63%
15	News	42	2.51%
16	City	41	2.45%
17	Songs	39	2.33%
18	Environment	39	2.33%
19	History	36	2.15%
20	Fashion	34	2.03%
21	Festivals	34	2.03%
22	Animals	31	1.85%
23	Arts	30	1.79%
24	Education	25	1.49%
25	Family	22	1.31%
26	Relationship	22	1.31%
27	Diet	19	1.14%
28	Discovery	19	1.14%
29	Love and Beloved	19	1.14%

30	Gender Differences	18	1.08%
31	Perfume	17	1.02%
32	Friendship	16	0.96%
33	Speech	16	0.96%
34	Natural Disaster	15	0.90%
35	Marriage	15	0.90%

Appendix B

Table 6. Frequently-used English Writing Textbooks

No.	English Writing Textbooks
1	Ruetten, M. K. 2003. <i>Developing Composition Skills</i> . 2nd ed. Boston: Thomason/Heinle.
2	Smalley, R. L., M. K. Ruetten, and J. R. Kozyrev. 2001. <i>Refining Composition Skills</i> . 5th ed. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
3	Zemach, D. E., and L. A. Rumisek. 2003. <i>College Writing</i> . Oxford: Macmillan.
4	Hartmann, P. 1999. <i>Quest: Reading and Writing in the Academic World</i> , bk. 2. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
5	Nuttal, G. 2006. <i>College Writing 3</i> . Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
6	Fellag, L. R. 2002. <i>Write Ahead: Skills for Academic Success 1</i> . White Plains, NY: Pearson.
7	Pavlik, C., and M. K. Segal. 2007. <i>Interactions 2 Writing: Paragraph Development and Introduction to the Essay</i> , Silver ed. New York: McGraw-Hill ESL/ELT.
8	Blanton, L. L. 2001. <i>Composition Practice</i> , bk. 3. 3rd ed. Boston: Thomson/Heinle.
9	Spaventa, L., and M. Spaventa. 2001. <i>Writing to Learn: From Paragraph to Essay</i> . New York: McGraw-Hill.
10	Folse, K. S., A. Muchmore-Vokoun, and E. V. Solomon. 2004. <i>Great Essays</i> . 2nd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Appendix C

Table 7. Top 30 Pre-set Themes in Textbooks

Ranking	Pre-set Theme	Frequency	Percent
1	Technology	26	8.81%
2	Education	24	8.14%
3	Business	21	7.12%
4	City	20	6.78%
5	People	18	6.10%
6	Communication	17	5.76%
7	Family	16	5.42%
8	Arts and Entertainment	15	5.08%
9	Psychology	15	5.08%
10	Advertisement	11	3.73%
11	Health	11	3.73%
12	Jobs	10	3.39%
13	The Natural World	9	3.05%
14	College Stress	9	3.05%
15	Sensory Loss	7	2.37%
16	Ancient Mystery	7	2.37%
17	Friendship	7	2.37%
18	Experiences	7	2.37%
19	Personal Reflection	6	2.03%
20	Money	6	2.03%
21	Leisure and recreation	5	1.69%
22	Memorable Events	4	1.36%
23	Academic Achievement	4	1.36%
24	Celebrations	4	1.36%
25	Important Places	3	1.02%
26	Campus	3	1.02%
27	Time	3	1.02%
28	Tastes and Preferences	3	1.02%
29	Essay	3	1.02%
30	Ceremonies	1	0.34%

About the Author

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