

Chinese EFL Teacher Trainees' Perceptions of Writing after the Practicum

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Abstract—In teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), teacher trainees' knowledge about writing is little known in the literature. The study aimed to understand trainees' perceptions of writing and how the practicum shapes their thinking in the Chinese context. A self-developed questionnaire with 5-point Likert scales targeting natures, functions, and development of writing, and the basis of good writing was employed to collect data online. 204 EFL trainees answered the questionnaire in January 2017 just after completing their practicum. While most respondents held views conforming to present research consensus, some had difficulty recognizing multiple natures of writing. Participants paid more attention to the functions of writing concerned with the self and self-expression, and much less to those focusing on the addressees. They generally accept the facilitators to the development of writing, but highlighted coherence and cohesion, semantics, and length of a text as features of good writing. Specific English studies relating to writing and pre-service programs in general were found significantly weakly but not systematically related to participants' perceptions. The length of practicum, school level, school location, and school type did not make a difference in participants' perceptions of writing. However, the class size and frequency of teaching writing were associated with their understanding of writing. The findings suggest that the practicum is too short to contribute significantly to trainees' learning about writing. They concurrently raise questions and call for further research regarding trainees' relative inattention to the social and communicative nature of writing, and linguistic features of good writing.

Index Terms—EFL writing, perceptions of writing, Chinese EFL teacher trainees, practicum

I. INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the practicum has a crucial impact on teacher trainees' growth through their teaching practice and their future careers. In the field of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), research has shown that trainees experience a wide range of improvement in teacher beliefs (Yuan & Lee, 2014), teacher knowledge (Merç 2015), competence of teaching behaviors (Liyanağ & Bartlett, 2010), and consciousness and ability of reflection (Rass, 2014). However, the effect of the practicum on domain-specific areas of EFL is left out in the literature.

The practice of EFL learning and instruction in the basic education in China has long put emphasis on reading and writing skills. The trainees, especially those who finish their practicum, will start their teaching career normally in one year. Are they well prepared? Do they comprehensively understand these skills? However, the literature is missing out on Chinese EFL teacher trainees' knowledge about these skills. Thus, this study employed the case of writing skills as an exploratory investigation to understand how the practicum shapes trainees' thinking. Specifically, it aimed at examining Chinese EFL trainees' perceptions of writing especially in an exam-focused culture of language learning and instruction. The research questions guiding this study were:

- Do trainees recognize the multifaceted concepts of writing?
- Are trainees aware of possible functions of writing?
- What do trainees think help writing to develop?
- What do trainees view as contributors to good writing?
- Does personal background impact trainees' perceptions?
- Does the practicum influence their understanding of writing?

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A plethora of research has clarified writing from the perspectives of linguistics, cognition, and socialculture. In *A Study of Writing*, the most extensively cited book on writing for a long time, Gelb (1963) defined writing as "a system of human intercommunication by means of conventional visible marks" (p. 12). This notion implies a wide involvement of linguistic, social and cultural elements in the act of writing with its communicative purposes. Coulmas (1996) viewed writing as text-focused or product-oriented, regarding writing as the final and permanent version of written composition or discourse. It is believed that the successful composition is an interaction between the writer, the written text, and the reader (Osterholm, 1986, p. 119). Thus, writing is also a mental process, in which the writer puts thoughts into text for communication.

Hyland (2015) counted written texts as linguistic product: “Texts have a logical structure, they are orderly arrangements of words, clauses, and sentences, and following by grammatical rules writers can encode a full semantic representation of their intended meaning” (p. 4). Therefore, to be able to write effective texts, writers need to acquire knowledge of orthography, morphology (exactness, concreteness, conciseness, appropriateness, etc.), and syntax (length, variety, tense, structure, etc.).

Generally, writers are viewed as the departure point in composing texts. A wide range of research has put its interest in the writers’ cognitive processes of composing written tasks. Emig’s *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* in 1971 was considered as a benchmark of the cognitive view of the writing process. Afterward, Flower and Hayes’ (1981) model of the writing process was influential. Their model introduced an interactive flowchart constituting the task environment, the writer’s long-term memory, and the writing processes. This model suggests that writers have goals in mind and plan for the specific tasks and audience as well, translate their ideas into texts, then evaluate and revise their writing. The whole writing process is managed by a monitor.

Later, Hayes (1996) reconstructed the model of writing. The new model consists of two major parts: the task environment and the individual. For the former, the social environment regarding the readers of and collaborators in the writing was added; also, technology in writing was added to the physical environment. Obviously, Hayes’s model gave the focus on the individual part. It presented an interaction among four aspects: motivation and affect, working memory, cognitive processes, and long-term memory. The Hayes model noted that writing is a social construct and incorporated the audience and collaborators in the social environment, which is seminal for learning and teaching writing.

Indeed, a vast volume of research has tracked this predominant model of writing processes, targeting stage-oriented composing strategies with similar formulation and presentation. For example, Tankó (2005) addressed the complex activity of writing as a recursive process with three major stages: pre-writing, writing and reviewing (p. 26).

Writing, beyond an individual and interactional act, is also a social and cultural construction, “expressing a culturally recognized purpose, reflecting a particular kind of relationship and acknowledging an engagement in a given community” (Hyland, 2002, p. 48). It is “socially and culturally shaped and individually and socially purposeful” (Sperling, 1996, p. 55). Thus, the act of writing is not only limited to linguistic knowledge (grammar, vocabulary, etc.), neither discourse knowledge, such as genre and structure, rather, is a sociocultural practice in specific contexts for particular communicative purposes.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Instrument

In order to address the research questions, a questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire was literature-based and self-developed, including 26 items with 5-point Likert scales targeting the concepts of writing, functions of writing, development of writing, and basic components for good writing. Demographic information was also included. Given English is a foreign language in China, the questionnaire was translated into Chinese so that the participants may better understand the content and respond more effectively.

B. Participants

Convenience and snowball sampling were used. In total, 204 Chinese EFL trainees participated in this survey, 5.9% of them are male, and 94.1% are female. All of the participants entered the initial EFL teacher training courses in 2013 with a four-year program for Bachelor Degree of Arts. They are 20 to 25 years old ($M = 22$, $SD = .89$). The more detailed personal background is shown in Table 1 below. The participants answered the questionnaire just after finishing their teaching practice. The general information of the practicum is displayed in Table 2.

TABLE 1
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

Components	Contents
Gender	Male 5.9%, female 94.1%
Age	20-25; $M = 22$, $SD = .89$
Degree	BA programs
Years of learning English before going to university	3-17; Mode = 6, $M = 7.81$, $SD = 2.54$
English proficiency level	Intermediate (63.7%), Upper-intermediate (32.4%), Advanced (3.9%), Proficient (no)
Entering the EFL teacher training program	Sep. 2013

TABLE 2
GENERAL INFOAMTION OF PARTICIPANTS' PRACTICUM

Components	Contents
Weeks of the practicum	2-40; Mode = 8, M = 11.69, SD = 5.45
School location	In a provincial capital: 12.7%; in a city: 29.4%; in a county or town: 50.5%; in a village: 7.4%
School type	Public 84.3%, Private 15.7%
School level	Primary 21.6%, Junior 48%, Senior 30.4%
Class size	< 30, 6.4%; between 31 and 45, 29.9%; between 46 and 60, 50%; > 61, 13.7%
English lessons taught altogether	1-340; Mode = 20, M = 44.71, SD = 69.87
Time for teaching writing (%)	1-98; Mode = 20, M = 23.56, SD = 17.05

C. Procedures

The questionnaire was administered online. The platform is easily accessible. The data collection started in early and ended by the end of January 2017. Then, all data was downloaded, recoded, and transformed into SPSS 24. Various analyses were conducted, and relevant results are reported in the following section.

IV. RESULTS

A. Concepts of Writing

One hundred years ago, writing was seen as text linguistic product; then from the 1960s to 1980s, shifted to as cognitive activities (cf. Flower & Hayes, 1981) with the development of cognitive psychology; and then since 1980s and 1990s, writing has been seen as social communication and sense-making, and even broadened to cultural understanding (cf. Bhatia, 2014; Chapman, 1999; Grabe & Kaplan, 2014; Hyland, 2003; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; McComiskey, 2000; Miller, 1984; Prior, 2006; Swales, 1990). Are trainees aware of these linguistic, cognitive, and social-cultural natures of writing? Do they recognize them? Participants' recognition of the individual nature of writing is shown in Figure 1.

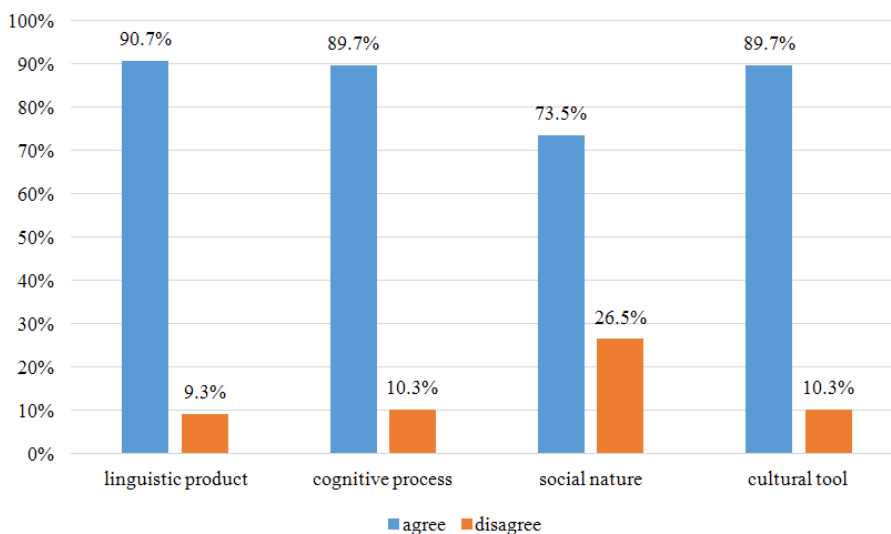


Figure 1. Frequencies of participants' recognition of the individual nature of writing

From the figure, we can find that 90.7% of the respondents recognized writing as linguistic product, 89.7% of them agreed respectively with its cognitive and cultural natures. While most respondents held views conforming to present research consensus, some unexpected results were also found. Trainees generally considered writing as a linguistic, cognitive and cultural tool, however, 26.5% doubted its social nature.

More importantly, do trainees really recognize writing as a multifaceted nature? So, based on figure 1, the 5-point Likert scales were recoded into 2-point scales, transforming 'strongly disagree, disagree, and uncertain' into "disagree", and transforming 'agree and strongly agree' into "agree". Then, it is found, for each participant, that how many natures of writing they recognized (see Table 3).

TABLE 3
FREQUENCIES OF TRAINEES' RECOGNITION OF THE MULTIFACETED NATURES OF WRITING

Facets of writing	Recognition (%)
4	65.7
3	22.1
2	6.4
1	2.0
0	3.9

Most respondents (65.7%) recognized all of the four natures of writing, namely, they view writing as a multifaceted concept. Slightly more than one-fifth of them were aware of three natures of writing. However, it seems that a minority of respondents were in trouble with identifying the multifaceted concepts of writing: 6.4% of them accepted two natures, 2% of them accepted only one nature, and 3.9% of them were not keen on any of these natures of writing. Thus, it merits further efforts to examining trainees' inattention to some of the natures of writing.

B. Functions of Writing

From the literature we know that writing as an activity can serve different purposes with its multiple functions (e.g., Bereiter & Scardamalia, 2013; Clark, 1990; Whiteman, 2013). These functions include: writing is a tool for thinking, communication, creation, proving students' knowledge at exams, addressing specific audiences, and of importance in one's career. Are trainees aware of these functions? Which is the popular pattern of writing functions in their choice? Trainees' acceptance of the individual multiple functions of writing is shown in Figure 2.

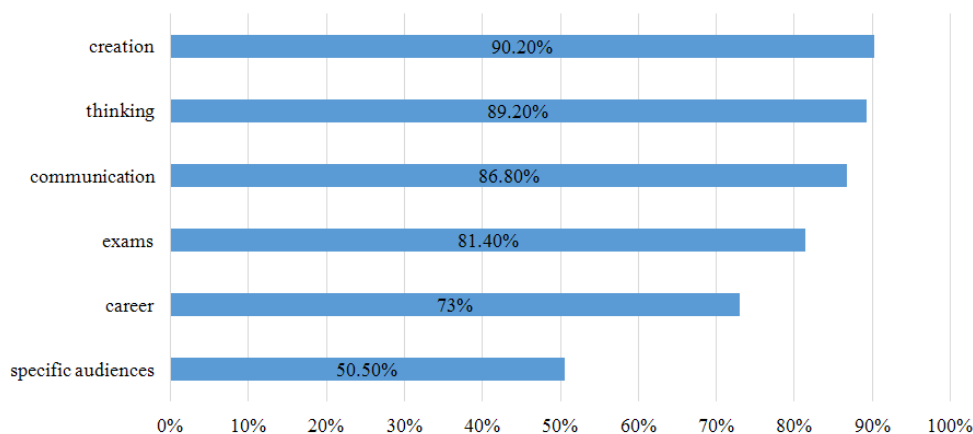


Figure 2. Frequency of trainees' acceptance of possible multiple functions of writing

The frequencies of acceptance of possible multiple functions of writing show that the participants tended to view writing as a tool for creation, thinking, communication, and exams, but they pay less attention to its function in one's career. Surprisingly, only half of the participants accepted the function of writing for addressing specific audiences.

Paired-Samples T-tests found that there are statistically significant differences among creation, thinking, communication, and exams, career, specific audiences. The mean for 'writing is creation' ($M= 4.35$, $SD= .883$) is significantly higher ($t= 2.293$, $df= 203$, $p< .05$) than that for 'writing is a tool for thinking' ($M= 4.24$, $SD= .822$), higher ($t= 3.684$, $df= 203$, $p< .05$) than 'writing is a tool for communication' ($M= 4.16$, $SD= .874$), higher ($t= 6.232$, $df= 203$, $p< .05$) than 'writing is for proving students' knowledge at exams' ($M= 3.97$, $SD= .904$), higher ($t= 7.618$, $df= 203$, $p< .05$) than 'writing is of importance in one's career' ($M= 3.88$, $SD= .934$), and higher ($t= 11.715$, $df= 203$, $p< .05$) than 'writing is for addressing specific audiences' ($M= 3.41$, $SD= 1.039$); the mean for 'writing is a tool for thinking' is significantly higher ($t= 4.335$, $df= 203$, $p< .05$) than that for 'writing is for proving students' knowledge at exams', higher ($t= 5.851$, $df= 203$, $p< .05$) than 'writing is of importance in one's career', and higher ($t= 10.128$, $df= 203$, $p< .05$) than 'writing is for addressing specific audiences'; the mean for 'writing is a tool for communication' is significantly higher ($t= 2.715$, $df= 203$, $p< .05$) than that for 'writing is for proving students' knowledge at exams', higher ($t= 4.522$, $df= 203$, $p< .05$) than 'writing is of importance in one's career', and higher ($t= 9.117$, $df= 203$, $p< .05$) than 'writing is for addressing specific audiences'; the mean for 'writing is of importance in one's career' is significantly higher ($t= 5.524$, $df= 203$, $p< .05$) than that for 'writing is for addressing specific audiences'; the mean for 'writing is for proving students' knowledge at exams' is significantly higher ($t= 7.802$, $df= 203$, $p< .05$) than that for 'writing is for addressing specific audiences'.

It is clear that the mean for 'writing is for addressing specific audiences' is significantly lower than all the others ($p < .05$). It can be drawn that the respondents paid more attention to the functions of writing concerned with the self and self-expression, and much less to those focusing on the addressees.

Besides, trainees' acceptance of possible multiple functions of writing is presented in Table 4. We can find that only slightly over one-third of the participants accepted all of the six functions of writing. It seems that a small number of

participants were in trouble with recognizing the possible multiple functions of writing, e.g. 4.4% of them were aware of none of these functions, 0.5% accepted only one function, and 2.9% accepted two functions, etc. Thus, it deserves further efforts to examine the diversion of their popular patterns of the multiple functions of writing.

TABLE 4
TRAINEES' ACCEPTANCE OF POSSIBLE MULTI-FUNCTIONS OF WRITING

Numbers of functions	Recognition (%)
6	34.8
5	34.8
4	14.2
3	8.3
2	2.9
1	0.5
0	4.4

Then, what is the relationship between the functions of writing and its concepts? It is expected that trainees' concepts of writing influence their acceptance of the functions of writing. The correlation coefficients are shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5
CORRELATION MATRIX RELATING CONCEPTS AND FUNCTIONS OF WRITING

	Linguistic product	Cognitive process	Social nature	Cultural tool
tool for thinking	.67**	.58**	.50**	.55**
communication	.57**	.57**	.56**	.55**
creation	.64**	.56**	.45**	.59**
exams	.53**	.41**	.40**	.47**
career	.44**	.46**	.44**	.49**
specific audiences	.30**	.31**	.32**	.34**

** $p < .01$

A high positive correlation (r value varying between .45 and .67). was found between participants' concepts of writing and writing as a tool for thinking, communication, and creation. A moderate positive correlation (r value varying between .40 and .53) was found between participants' concepts of writing and its exam and career functions. However, by contrast, a weaker positive correlation (r value varying between .30 and .34) was found between participants' concepts of writing and its function for addressing specific audiences.

C. Development of Writing

Based on research findings and instructional practice, there is a consensus that writing could be developed by intensive input from other language skills (e.g., Berninger, 2000; Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000; Scott & Windsor, 2000; Silverman, Coker, Proctor, Harring, Piantedosi, & Hartranft, 2015). Do trainees agree with this? What do they think help writing to develop? The Frequency of participants' agreement with the contributors to writing development is shown in Figure 3. As to facilitating the development of writing, most (95%) credited reading with transfer effects, but 13.7% doubted the efficiency of writing instruction, 10.8% that of writing activities, and 16.2% that of the transfer effects of speaking activities.

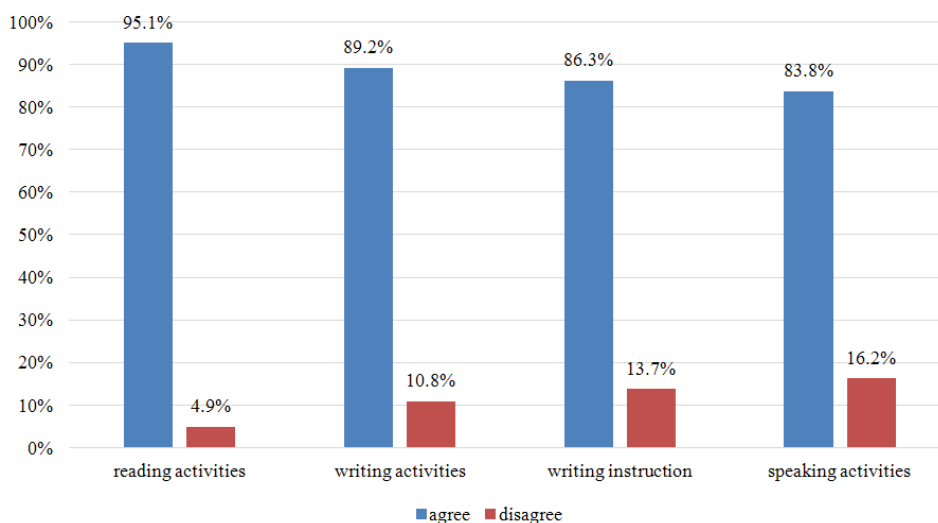


Figure 3. Frequency of participants' agreement with the contributors to writing development

A Paired Samples T-test found that the mean for reading activities (M = 4.45, SD = .78) is significantly higher (t= 6.147, df= 203, p< .05) than that for writing activities (M = 4.21, SD = .84), higher (t= 6.980, df= 203, p< .05) than

writing instruction ($M = 4.13$, $SD = .82$), and higher ($t = 7.111$, $df = 203$, $p < .05$) than speaking activities ($M = 4.09$, $SD = .81$); and the mean for writing activities ($M = 4.21$, $SD = .84$) is higher ($t = 2.507$, $df = 203$, $p < .05$) than speaking activities ($M = 4.09$, $SD = .81$).

D. Basis of Good Writing

Research has shown that content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and so on, are basic components for good writing (Tank *ó* 2005). Do trainees know what good writing is? The basic elements of writing are grouped into three levels: conceptual contributors (content, the structure of a text, the structure of a paragraph, the length of a text), linguistic contributors (style of language, grammar, vocabulary, semantics, cohesive devices), and coding contributors (spelling, punctuation, handwriting).

A regression analysis with the 'enter' method was run, it is found that each of the items (contributors) at different level contributes almost equally to the features of good text, i.e., each explained 7-9% of variance; Using the 'stepwise' method, it is found that 'the structure of a text, semantics, cohesive devices and the length of a text' ($\Sigma r^2\beta = .930$) explained together 93% of the variance. therefore, it is safe to say that the participants view coherence and cohesion, semantics, and length to be the greater contributors to the features of good writing.

E. Effect of Personal Background on Trainees' Perceptions

In this section, the effects of participants' personal background on their perceptions of writing are analyzed; the demographic elements include gender, English studies from pre-service programs useful for learning about writing, and preparedness of pre-service programs for teaching writing.

Effect of Gender

An Independent Samples T-test analysis found that the means for the male participants on all variables regarding perceptions of writing did not differ significantly ($p > .05$) from those of the female participants.

English Studies from Pre-service Programs Useful for Learning about Writing

In the pre-service EFL teacher education programs, there are various English studies which aim to help teacher trainees with learning and teaching writing. These English studies mainly include Literature, Phonology, Morphology, Lexicology, Syntax, Sociolinguistics, Semantics, Pragmatics, Text Linguistics, Applied Linguistics, etc. To what extent do trainees think these English studies have been useful for their learning and teaching writing? Do these studies influence their perceptions of writing?

A Pearson correlation analysis found that these English studies normally relate strongly to each other (see Table 6). Then, the original scales were recoded, transforming 'not useful at all, not useful,' into 'not useful', transforming 'somewhat useful, useful, and very useful' into 'useful', and keeping the original option 'probably I didn't study this'; the frequencies of participants' perceived usefulness of these studies for learning and teaching writing are shown in Figure 4. The frequencies show that respondents considered Literature and Syntax to be the most useful English studies from pre-service programs for learning about writing, that of Phonology to be less useful, compared to those of Pragmatics, Semantics, Lexicology, Morphology, Applied Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, and Text Linguistics. It is worth noting that some participants reported that they didn't study these English studies, which may be of interest for stakeholders in the pre-service teacher training programs.

TABLE 6
CORRELATIONS AMONG VARIABLES OF ENGLISH STUDIES FROM PRE-SERVICE PROGRAMS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Literature	1	.56**	.53**	.57**	.47**	.54**	.59**	.55**	.42**	.41**
2. Phonology		1	.51**	.50**	.40**	.47**	.53**	.49**	.36**	.43**
3. Morphology			1	.77**	.60**	.42**	.47**	.54**	.44**	.51**
4. Lexicology				1	.72**	.42**	.54**	.56**	.49**	.50**
5. Syntax					1	.40**	.53**	.51**	.52**	.46**
6. Sociolinguistics						1	.67**	.64**	.59**	.62**
7. Semantics							1	.82**	.67**	.59**
8. Pragmatics								1	.74**	.66**
9. Text Linguistics									1	.75**
10. Applied Linguistics										1

** $p < .01$

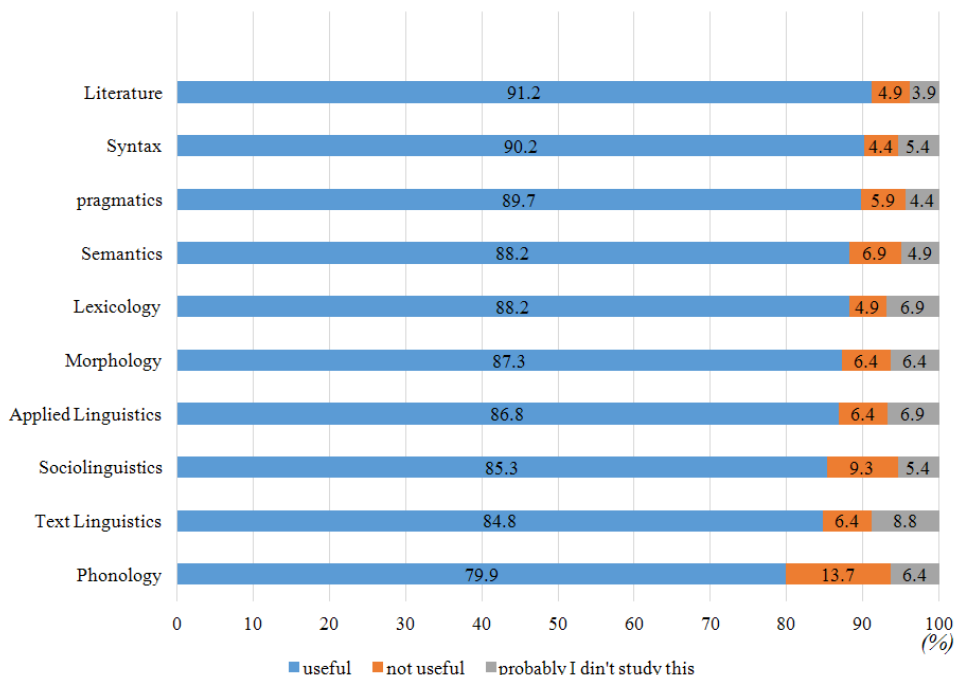


Figure 4. Frequency of participants' perceived usefulness of English studies for learning about writing

In addition, the correlation analysis found that participants' perceived usefulness of English studies from pre-service programs relate weakly positively but not systematically to their ideas of concepts of writing (r value varying between .15 and .26, $p < .05$); also, it relates weakly but not systematically to functions of writing (r value varying between .14 and .29, $p < .05$); it relates weakly but not systematically to development of writing (r value varying between .14 and .29, $p < .05$); and it relates significantly weakly but not systematically to basis of good writing (r value varying between .14 and .32, $p < .05$).

Preparedness of Pre-service Programs for Learning about Writing

The frequency of responses shows that 71.6% (56.4% perceive its contribution to a great extent, 15.2% endorsed completely) of the participants recognized the contribution of pre-service programs to their learning about writing. However, only a weak positive relationship was found between the contribution of pre-service programs and the participants' concepts of writing (r value varying between .14 and .18, $p < .05$).

Meanwhile, a weak and no systematic correlation was found between the contribution of pre-service programs and variables of functions of writing (it relates weakly to writing is a tool for thinking, $r = .17$; and a tool for communication, $r = .16$, $p < .05$). Similarly, it significantly but weakly relates to most variables of construct 'development of writing': speaking facilitates writing, $r = .16$; writing activities facilitate writing, $r = .17$; learning to write when taught to, $r = .17$; $p < .05$. Also, it relates weakly to some variables of construct 'basis of good writing' (vocabulary, content, cohesive devices, the structure of a text, punctuation, spelling, and handwriting, r value varying between .15 and .24; $p < .05$).

As for the other 28.4% of respondents, 2% doubt the effectiveness of pre-service programs, and 26.5% are uncertain about its role.

F. Effect of the Practicum on Trainees' Perceptions of Writing

Weeks (the length) of the practicum, school location, school type, school level, class size taught, and lessons of teaching writing are basic components of the practicum. In this section, the relationships between these components of the practicum and the variables of the constructs of concepts, functions, development of writing, and the basis of good writing are presented.

Effect of the Length of the Practicum

For a long time in China, the length of teacher trainees' practicum is around eight weeks or less. Therefore, based on the distribution of participants' reported weeks of practicum ($M = 11.69$, $SD = 5.46$, $Mode = 8$), the length of their practicum was classified into three groups: Group 1, less than eight weeks; Group 2, eight to 12 weeks; and Group 3, more than 12 weeks. An analysis of variance found that the means for each group did not differ significantly from one another ($p > .05$) on the variables of constructs of 'concepts of writing', 'functions of writing', 'development of writing', and 'basis of good writing'.

Effect of School Location

Due to the imbalanced development of education and uneven distribution of educational resources in China, schools in different regions probably have different educational perspectives and quality levels. Accordingly, trainees' conceptions of writing are supposed to be shaped differently due to their exposure to different school context in the practicum. In this study, 12.7% of participants taught in a provincial capital, 29.4% in other cities, 50.5% in a county or

town, and 7.4% in a village during their practicum. However, a one-way ANOVA found that there was no statistically significant difference among the means for participants in provincial capital cities, other cities, counties or towns, and rural schools ($p > .05$).

Effect of School Type

In this study, 84.3% of participants taught in public schools, and 15.7% in private schools in the practicum. Then, do school types have an effect on their perceptions of writing? An Independent Samples T-test found that there was no statistically significant difference between the means of participants who taught in public schools and those who taught in private schools ($p > .05$).

Effect of School Level

It is believed that trainees confront with different challenges in their practice teaching because they need to meet various learning needs of students with different writing proficiency levels. Therefore, it is assumed that trainees who taught at different school levels took different shapes of perceptions of writing.

In the current study, 21.6% of the participants taught in primary schools (grades 1-6), 48% taught in junior middle schools (grades 7-9), and 30.4% taught in senior middle schools (grades 10-12) in the practicum. An analysis of variance found that there was no statistically significant difference between the means for the participants taught at different school levels on variables of 'concepts of writing', 'functions of writing', 'development of writing', and 'basis of good writing' ($p > .05$).

Effect of Class Size

Then, it is possible that the class size influences trainees' thinking of writing because different teaching approaches are appropriate for a different quantity of student cohorts. In this study, participants generally had more than 30 students in their class. The class size was divided into four groups: Group 1: less than 30 students, 6.4 %; Group 2: between 31 and 45 students, 29.9%; Group 3: between 46 and 60 students, 50%; and Group 4: more than 61 students, 13.7%. Analyses of variance found that there were significant differences between the means of class size groups on some variables of concepts of writing, development of writing, and the basis of good writing. The means are presented in Table 7, 8, and 9.

TABLE 7
MEANS FOR GROUPS OF CLASS SIZE (NUMBER OF STUDENTS) ON CONCEPTS OF WRITING

Concepts of writing	< 30 (Mean)	31-45 (Mean)	46-60 (Mean)	>61 (Mean)
Writing is a linguistic activity			4.00	4.54
Writing is a cultural activity			4.00	4.54

On the construct of concepts of writing, a one-way ANOVA found that there is a significant difference between Group 3 and Group 4 [$F(3, 200) = 3.060, p < .05$] on the variable 'Writing is a linguistic activity'; the Tukey test found that the mean for Group 4 (4.54, $SD=.881$) is significantly higher than that for Group 3 (4.00, $SD=.890$). Also, there is a significant difference between Group 3 and Group 4 [$F(3, 200) = 3.979, p < .05$] on the variable 'Writing is a cultural activity'; the Tukey test found that the mean for Group 4 (4.54, $SD=.693$) is significantly higher than that for Group 3 (4.00, $SD=.867$).

TABLE 8
MEANS FOR GROUPS OF CLASS SIZE (NUMBER OF STUDENTS) ON DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING

Development of writing	< 30 (Mean)	31-45 (Mean)	46-60 (Mean)	>61 (Mean)
Students learn to write when they are taught to			4.03	4.54

On the construct of development of writing, a one-way ANOVA found that there is a significant difference between Group 3 and Group 4 [$F(3, 200) = 2.969, p < .05$] on the variable 'Students learn to write when they are taught to'; the Tukey test found that the mean for Group 4 (4.54, $SD=.744$) is significantly higher than that for Group 3 (4.03, $SD=.884$).

TABLE 9
MEANS FOR GROUPS OF CLASS SIZE (NUMBER OF STUDENTS) ON BASIS OF GOOD WRITING

Basis of good writing	< 30 (Mean)	31-45 (Mean)	46-60 (Mean)	>61 (Mean)
Length of a text			3.28	3.86
Punctuation			3.49	4.04

On the construct of basis of good writing, a one-way ANOVA found that there is a significant difference between Group 3 and Group 4 [$F(3, 200) = 3.181, p < .05$] on the variable 'length of a text'; the Tukey test found that the mean for Group 4 (3.86, $SD=1.145$) is significantly higher than that for Group 3 (3.28, $SD=1.018$). And there is a significant difference between Group 3 and Group 4 [$F(3, 200) = 3.434, p < .05$] on the variable 'punctuation'; the Tukey test found that the mean for Group 4 (4.04, $SD=.881$) is significantly higher than that for Group 3 (3.49, $SD=.920$).

Effect of Lessons of Teaching Writing in the Practicum

Trainees may learn about writing in their writing instruction, and their perceptions of writing might be affected by the frequency and intensity of their practice of writing instruction. In this study, participants were asked about the number

of English lessons they taught altogether during the practicum ($M = 44.71$, $SD = 69.87$; $Mode = 20$), and the percentage of their teaching time devoted to teaching writing ($M = 23.56\%$, $SD = 17.05\%$; $Mode=20$); then, the approximate number of lessons of writing instruction altogether ($M=8.19$, $SD=14.37$; $Mode=6$) emerged from the ‘number of English lessons altogether’ multiplies by the ‘percentage of teaching time devoted to teaching writing’. Then, the number of writing lessons was classified into three groups: Group 1: less than two lessons of writing instruction altogether, 29.9%; Group 2: two to six lessons altogether, 40.2%; Group 3: more than six lessons, 29.9%.

Analyses of variance found that there were significant differences between Group 1 and 3 on some variables of the concept of the basis of good writing. The means are presented in Table 10. A one-way ANOVA found that there is a significant difference between Group 1 and Group 3 [$F(2, 201) = 4.232$, $p < .05$] on the variable ‘length of a text’; the Tukey test found that the mean for Group 3 (3.69, $SD=1.009$) is significantly higher than that for Group 1 (3.16, $SD=.986$). And there is a significant difference between Group 1 and Group 3 [$F(2, 201) = 4.655$, $p < .05$] on the variable ‘punctuation’; the Tukey test found that the mean for Group 3 (3.85, $SD=.928$) is significantly higher than that for Group 1 (3.38, $SD=.840$).

TABLE 10
MEANS FOR GROUPS OF LESSONS OF TEACHING WRITING IN THE PRACTICUM ON BASIS OF GOOD WRITING

Basis of good writing	< 2 lessons (Mean)	2 to 6 lessons (Mean)	> 6 lessons (Mean)
Length of a text	3.16		3.69
Punctuation	3.38		3.85

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current study aimed to examine Chinese EFL teacher trainees’ perceptions of writing, especially in an exam-focused culture of language learning and instruction. In this section, discussion of the results and corresponding conclusions are made.

As to the multifaceted concepts of writing, participants generally viewed writing as a linguistic, cognitive and cultural tool, however, over one-fourth of them doubted its social nature. Besides, a few respondents have difficulty identifying and recognizing the multiple natures of writing. It reflects much or less the demerits of exam-focused language learning. Thus, further efforts to investigating trainees’ inattention to some of the natures of writing are needed.

With respect to possible functions of writing, participants reported a diversity of popular patterns of writing functions, but they emphasized those related to the self and self-expression and looked over those targeting the addressees. Results of correlation analysis reveal that respondents’ concepts of writing strongly relate to their perceived functions of writing. Participants’ perceptions of both concepts and functions of writing indicate that they tend to be self-focused and product-oriented, but audience-neglected.

With regard to the development of writing, participants were aware of the relationship between each language skill. They accept the facilitation of other language skills and writing instruction to the development of writing. Yet, they put the transfer effects of reading in a dominant position, which shows that there is a paucity of authentic language environment in a Chinese context where English is taught and learned as a foreign language.

In terms of features of good writing, participants highlighted the contribution of coherence and cohesion, semantics, and length of the text, but relatively ignored mechanics features of writing, such as punctuation, spelling, handwriting, etc.

Therefore, taking the abovementioned into consideration, a conclusion can be drawn that participants admit more traditional paradigms of writing, i.e., in the exam-focused culture and practice of language learning and instruction, they prefer to perceive writing as a linguistic product and cognitive activity. However, the communicative nature of writing cannot and should not be left out in any circumstance. This would be some implications for stakeholders in the EFL teacher training programs.

When looking at genders’ perceptions of writing, both male and female participants tended to understand writing in similar ways. In the light of English studies from pre-service training programs useful for learning about writing, frequencies of those agreeing with the usefulness were around 70% (from phonology, 52.9% to syntax, 79.4%). Here, significantly weak but not systematic correlations were found between these English studies and participants’ perceptions of writing. It is worth noting that few respondents informed that they did not learn these studies, which brings about an issue for prospective teacher trainers.

Results show that most participants endorsed the contribution of pre-service programs to their learning about writing. However, only weak effect of pre-service programs on participants’ concepts of writing was found; weak effect was found on variables of writing functions concerned with the self; no effect on the role of reading in facilitating writing was found; pre-service programs had wider effects on basis of good writing, but with relatively weak effect. It seems that the effect of pre-service education programs needs further attention.

In general, the length of participants’ practicum, school level, school location, and school type did not make a difference in their perceptions of writing. It might be the practicum is too short to shape their thinking. However, the class size was related to participants’ perceptions of writing: compared to those who had average number of students

(between 46 and 60) in their class, participants who had the maximum students in their class were more inclined to recognize the linguistic and cultural facets of writing, to agree with the effect of writing instruction on developing writing, and to acknowledge the text structure and punctuation as features of good writing. Also, the frequency of teaching writing influences participants' perceptions of writing on some variables of the basis of good writing: those who experienced more writing instruction tended to recognize the structure of a text and punctuation as features of good writing.

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