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# Writing their way to the university: An investigation of Chinese high school students' preparation for writing in English in high schools, cram schools, and online

Cong Zhang  
*Purdue University*

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GRADUATE SCHOOL  
Thesis/Dissertation Acceptance**

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By Cong Zhang

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WRITING THEIR WAY TO THE UNIVERSITY: AN INVESTIGATION OF CHINESE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PREPARATION FOR WRITING IN ENGLISH IN HIGH SCHOOLS, CRAM SCHOOLS, AND ONLINE

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Is approved by the final examining committee:

Tony Silva

Chair

April Ginther

Margie Berns

Junju Wang

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WRITING THEIR WAY TO THE UNIVERSITY: AN INVESTIGATION OF  
CHINESE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PREPARATION FOR WRITING IN  
ENGLISH IN HIGH SCHOOLS, CRAM SCHOOLS, AND ONLINE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Purdue University

by

Cong Zhang

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Requirements for the Degree

of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Purdue University

West Lafayette, Indiana

For Mao and Baby Tony

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AT: Activity Theory
- CALL: Computer Assisted Language Learning
- CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning
- CNKI: China National Knowledge Infrastructure
- EFL: English as a Foreign Language
- ESL: English as a Second Language
- GWSI: General Writing Skills Instruction
- L1: First Language
- L2: Second Language
- NMET: National Matriculation English Test
- PST: Private Supplementary Tutoring
- PST-E: Private Supplementary Tutoring in English
- TESOL: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

## ABSTRACT

Zhang, Cong. Ph.D. Purdue University, May 2016. *Writing their Way to the University: An Investigation of Chinese High School Students' Preparation for Writing in English in High Schools, Cram Schools, and Online*. Major Professor: Tony Silva.

In this dissertation, drawing from activity theory, I investigate how Chinese students prepared themselves for undergraduate studies in U.S. universities in terms of English writing from three perspectives: English writing instruction in high schools, private supplementary tutoring (PST) in English writing in cram schools, and experience with writing online and using online resources. On the basis of data from a questionnaire, interviews, classroom observations, and examinations of written materials and a forum, I provide a picture of the writing instruction experience and writing background that Chinese students bring to writing classrooms in U.S. universities. It was found that other than writing instruction in high schools that was assumed to be the main source of support for students, PST in English writing students received in cram schools was dominant in the process of preparing themselves for English writing. Online resources were also important for students although students used them mainly for test preparation rather than for improving their English writing ability. What Chinese students have achieved and are not prepared to do in English writing are also discussed in terms of aspects of writing, perceptions of a good piece of writing, amount of writing, genres of



writing, feedback, and writing pedagogy. I hope this dissertation will shed light on second language writing teaching in the U.S. as well as in China and second language writing research.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

The past decade has witnessed a sizable increase in the population of international students on American university campuses. The number of international students, especially Chinese students, in U.S. universities has been increasing exponentially. Since 2009, China has been the country that has sent the most students to the U.S. for higher education and in the academic year of 2014/2015, there were 304,040 students from China studying in the United States, who constitute 31.2% of all international students in the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2015).

### 1.2 Statement of Problem

The sizable increase of Chinese students brings both assets and challenges to the universities. According to Hanassab and Tidwell (2002), “International students have an impact on the institution of higher learning across the United States, an impact that is increasing in magnitude (p. 315).” It has been widely acknowledged that international students are a vulnerable population (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010) that faces many challenges when they enter a geographically-and-culturally new academic setting and have more needs and difficulties in succeeding in the new academic settings because of factors such as their language problems, cultural beliefs, and learning styles (Andrade, 2006; Briguglio & Smith, 2012; Edwards & An, 2006; Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002;

Li, Baker, & Marshall, 2002). Many researchers have reported the problems the international students have encountered on campuses. The research not only covers the U.S. (Crowe & Peterson, 1995; Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002; Sherry et al., 2010) but also other English speaking countries such as Australia (Bayley, Fearnside, Arnol, Misiano, & Rottura, 2002; Bretag, Horrocks, & Smith, 2002; Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000; Sawir, 2005; Zhang & Mi; 2010), Britain (Edwards & An, 2006), and New Zealand (Li et al., 2002). Among the many needs and difficulties they may have, writing poses many challenges (Bayley et al., 2002; Bretag et al., 2002; Robertson et al., 2000) that may last for a long time (Zhang & Mi, 2010). Moreover, research also indicates that undergraduate international students have more academic and career needs and concerns than graduate international students do (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002).

While international students face many challenges in universities, at the same time, this exponential increase of international students poses challenges to the universities (Bretag et al., 2002). Seeing the increase of international students and the change in the population of composition classes, some scholars have proposed providing more support and more appropriate instruction for ESL students and designing writing programs to adapt to international students' needs (Heatley, Allibone, Ooms, Burke, & Akroyd, 2011; Silva, 1997; Preto-Bay & Hansen, 2006). Despite this effort, the literature still shows that many writing instructors in universities are not well prepared for the increase of international students in their classrooms (Carrol, Blaker, Camalo, & Messer, 1996; Ferris, Brown, Liu, & Stine, 2011; Kubota & Abels, 2006; Matsuda, Saenkhum, & Accardi, 2013). According to the research, a large number of writing instructors do not receive professional training in teaching ESL students; many writing instructors do not

realize the presence of ESL students in their classrooms; some notice the existence of ESL students yet do not pay attention to their special needs in teaching; and some want to pay attention to the international students yet do not know what their needs are. This under preparation for teaching ESL students in composition classes poses more challenges for international students.

One way to help instructors better address the writing needs of international students in composition classes is to understand students' past writing experiences and how they learned to write in high school before coming to the U.S. because they play an important role in students' current writing (Carson, 1992; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996; Sawir, 2005).

Many factors may affect students' writing in a second language, e.g., L1 writing proficiency, L2 writing proficiency, metaknowledge, attitudes, educational factors, and cultural influences. However, currently it is not clear how certain variables affect students' writing; students' prior writing experience and the instruction they received in writing may be potential factors that can influence students' current writing. Several scholars have addressed this potential influence.

Mohan and Lo (1985) acknowledged the role of students' composition practice in their writing development and advocated the "importance of studying the ESL students' prior experience with English composition" (p. 523). They studied the prior composition experience of Chinese students and concluded that the source for the "differences in the ability of Chinese and Western students to organize essays in English...lies in the emphasis of the English language instruction programs to which students are exposed" (p. 528). Chen (1992) indicated that teachers' instruction plays a crucial role in students'

writing development. Sahakian (1997) reported that the environments of school and direct instruction may be factors that influence L2 writing success by exploring how writing in English develops for Hmong boys. Malicka (1996) also suggested the possible influence of instructional context on ESL students' writing development. Kubota (1998) reported that the composing experience of ESL students has an impact on their English writing. Nelson and Kim (2001), from an activity theory perspective, investigated how students learn to write in English and their classroom practice, and results indicated that the concepts and tools of the past and present activities students have engaged and are engaging in influence students' participation in class and their appropriation of rhetorical concepts and tools in writing. Sawir (2005) found that international students generally have difficulties in academic learning and that students' prior learning experience of English may have attributed to the difficulties they are experiencing and influenced how well they can deal with the academic challenges. Iwashita and Sekiguchi (2009) reported the influence of previous language instruction on the development of writing skills in Japanese as a second language. Hirose and Sasaki (1994) researched the factors that may influence Japanese university students' expository writing in English and reported that L2 writing experience plays an important role in determining students' L2 writing quality. Sasaki and Hirose (1996), in a more comprehensive study, revealed that second language proficiency, first language writing ability, metaknowledge, and past writing experiences all contribute to the variance of their expository writing in English.

Other scholars found that past writing experience and instruction students received may influence different aspects of writing. Adipattaranun (1992) examined the variables in the writing process of ESL students, and results indicated that how ESL

students are taught influences how they write and revise. Porte (1996) also reported the influence of prior learning experience on students' revision strategies. Zhang (2006) found that prior writing experience can influence students' interpretation of writing tasks.

These studies show that prior experience in learning to write and writing experience may be important variables that can influence students' writing. Therefore, to better address international students' writing needs in both mainstream classes and ESL classes, it is important and meaningful to investigate their prior writing experience, what they learned about writing, and how they learned to write, as Carson (1992, p. 154), when talking about the meaning of researching students' prior writing experience, pointed out,

Knowing about the educational background of their students can provide ESL writing teachers with insights into the ways in which ESL writers may approach the often-formidable task of learning to write in English. ESL students come to second language writing classrooms with expectations of how writing is taught and learned.... Their previous experience in learning to read and write may not yield effective strategies in ESL writing classrooms where the task of learning to write differs not only in the complexity of its demands, but also its social context and, ultimately, in its social functions.

Thus, it is important to investigate international students' writing instruction and experience, i.e., how they prepare themselves for undergraduate studies in the U.S. in terms of English writing. The large proportion of Chinese students among all international students on U.S. campuses (as stated earlier) makes them a valuable research population, and it is necessary to meet their writing needs in order to shed light on the teaching of English to Chinese students in American universities.

### 1.3 Impetus for Study

Before explaining the theoretical framework and outlining the research questions proposed in the present study, it is important to explain my reasons for taking on this topic. I myself came to the U.S. for Ph.D. study about five years ago. When I entered the Ph.D. program at Purdue, at the same time, my assistantship in the form of teaching first-year composition courses began. With insufficient background in composition theory and pedagogy, I struggled the first year since many of the concepts were new to me, e.g., rhetorical situations, visual rhetoric, archive research, annotated bibliographies, and so on. Some concepts, although I had heard of them, were not what I had expected from my prior knowledge, e.g., plagiarism and what constitutes plagiarism. Struggling as I was, I began to become familiar with and understand those concepts soon by taking mentoring classes and reading books. However, while I am not struggling any more, I have witnessed how international students in first-year composition classrooms have been struggling; yet their struggles do not disappear as soon as mine did. To them, first-year composition was even tougher because if I had struggled despite the substantial background and knowledge in academic writing I had (I had learned and taught academic writing in English for seven years before getting to the Ph.D. program and started teaching first-year composition and had become acquainted with most of the concepts and conventions of academic writing), the international students, who had just graduated from high school, had minimal experience in academic writing and limited knowledge of most of the concepts and conventions.

Many writing instructors, especially those who teach mainstream classes and rarely have experiences with ESL students, are not well prepared for the large number of

international students in their classrooms and do not know how to address their writing concerns and meet their needs. Very frequently, writing instructors assume international students are the same or similar to American students except for their language ability. Yet in fact, international students do not only struggle with language, but with many other aspects of writing, e.g., genres, length of writing, writing processes, appropriate ways of using source texts, and so on. What many writing instructors take for granted that students definitely know is new to international students, e.g., a great many international students (Chinese students in particular) do not know what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid unintentional plagiarizing (Zhang, 2014); many international students have never heard of APA and MLA styles and do not know how to document sources appropriately before coming to first-year composition classrooms; and most of them do not know what a literature review is, let alone being able to write one well.

Having seen too many international students struggling with writing in first-year composition classrooms, I kept asking myself, “How can we better meet international students’ needs and help them in writing classes?” Based on extensive reading, I found that one way to help them is to know about their prior writing experience and the instruction they received before coming to the writing classrooms because students’ prior writing experience may influence students’ current writing and their understanding of instruction in writing, expectations of how writing should be taught, and strategies for how to write. Since investigating all international students’ prior writing experience and instruction is too ambitious, I decided to only look at Chinese students because they are the largest international population on U.S. university campuses and helping them means helping the lion’s share of the international students; moreover, as a Chinese myself, and



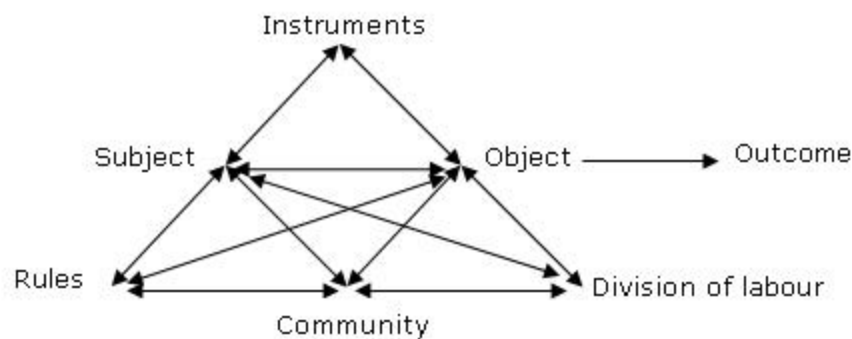
based on my previous experience teaching Chinese students English writing and my own experience of learning to write in English, I believe I can investigate with an insider's perspective and provide more credible results.

To find the most frequently used methods to improve English writing by Chinese students and pilot some of my research instruments, I conducted a pilot study before proposing this topic for my dissertation prospectus. In my pilot study, I surveyed 91 Chinese students enrolled in first-year composition for international students and interviewed six of them to obtain in-depth answers. My results suggested that most Chinese students come from public schools and that the writing instruction they received in high school was limited and far from enough for undergraduate studies in the U.S.; therefore, many turned to other methods out of school to help prepare themselves in English writing, and the most frequently used ways were private supplementary tutoring in cram schools and self-sponsored activities related to writing in online communities or using online resources. These two methods as well as their high school instruction in English writing have thus become the focus of the present study.

#### 1.4 Theoretical Framework

This present study draws from activity theory. Activity theory, rooted in psychology and pioneered by the Soviet scholar Vygotsky (1978, 1986, cited from Hull & Schultz, 2001), focuses on learning and human development and regards human activities as systematic and socially embedded, and therefore, is a framework for understanding human behaviors in sociocultural context (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). While Vygotsky pioneered activity theory, his colleague, Leont'ev, first developed activity

theory by coining the term and differentiated between individual action and collective activity (Cole & Engeström, 1993). Leont'ev's theory centers on motives for understanding human behavior, "while recognizing the social nature of activity, focuses more on the motives of individuals and the connectedness of motives and behaviors" (Zhu & Mitchell, 2012, p. 364). Later, Engeström (1987) expanded the notion of collective activity proposed by Leont'ev by including rules, community, and division of labor, and thus Engeström's approach to activity theory comprises subject, object, community, instruments, rules, and division of labor (see Figure 1), and emphasizes outcome (Kaptelinin, 2005).



*Figure 1.* The structure of a human activity system (Engeström, 1987, p. 78. Reprinted with permission).

In this model, according to Bryant, Forte, & Bruckman (2005, p. 3)

Object [is] the objective of the activity system as a whole; Subject [is] a person or group engaged in the activities; Community [is] social context [and] all people involved; Division of Labor [is] the balance of activities among different people and artifacts; Instruments/Tools [are] the artifacts (or concepts) used by subjects

to accomplish tasks; Rules [are] the code and guidelines for activities and behaviors in the system.

In other words, in an activity system, the subject works toward some object to attain some outcome in the end by using instruments/tools to mediate the activity in order to achieve the outcome, in which process rules guide the system's actions and interactions. This activity system is the unit of analysis in activity theory, and it is object-oriented, collective, and culturally mediated.

Although activity theory is traditionally Russian psychological theory (Kaptelinin, 1996), it has been adopted in other fields, including L2 research (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995). Recently, L2 writing scholars have also made efforts to incorporate activity theory into second language writing research (Nelson & Kim, 2001; Russell, 1995). Among them, Russell (1995) analyzed, using an activity theory framework, the longstanding problems of GWSI (General Writing Skills Instruction) and re-examined how to transfigure first-year composition courses so that the writing courses are valuable in U.S. higher education. Nelson and Kim (2001) also applied activity theory to first-year composition classrooms. Different from Russell (1995), who addressed the problems of writing courses, Nelson and Kim (2001) used activity theory as a useful framework to understand how students learn L2 writing and the evolution of their classroom practices. Specifically, they analyzed, guided by activity theory, how international students in first-year composition classrooms appropriated concepts and tools of rhetoric and self-evaluation and how they expanded and generalized their learning. More recently, L2 writing scholars have shifted from using activity theory in general writing courses to applying the framework to more specific L2 writing practice, e.g., peer review in L2

writing (Yu & Lee, 2015; Zhu & Mitchell, 2012). Zhu and Mitchell (2012) investigated students' peer response stances and focused on students' motives/objects for participating in peer response while Yu and Lee (2015) explored the factors that influence and shape students' motives in group peer response.

The many elements in the activity system and the various foci of activity theory (hereafter abbreviated as AT) indicate that AT is very much open and developing, hence, scholars can use AT in different ways and do research from different perspectives. In the present study, I draw on AT from three main perspectives. First, people's activity is socially sophisticated; the activities people participate in and the historical social contexts of activities and actions influence and shape the way people think and learn. As Nelson and Kim (2001) put it, "To understand how students learn to write in a second language, one must investigate the sociocultural influences of the institutions in which they participate" (p. 38) since "students are influenced by the previous institutions and activity system in which they participated" (p. 44). Therefore, I investigate Chinese students' prior writing experience and the writing instruction they received before coming to the U.S. for undergraduate study, considering that to better understand Chinese students' current practice, strategies, difficulties and needs in writing classrooms, it is vital to look at their writing history and the social context in which their writing practice takes place, i.e., their prior writing experience and the writing instruction they received before entering first-year composition classrooms.

I also draw on AT in terms of the study of instruments (mediating artifacts). In the large activity system of Chinese students (subject) working on English writing (object) to meet the requirements of U.S. universities (outcomes under which there may be two sub-

outcomes: improve English writing and meeting the cut score requirements of required writing tests such as TOEFL/IELTS/SAT writing etc.), the various forms of instruments/mediating artifacts are worthwhile researching since some of them are hidden from college writing instructors in the U.S., yet the way students make use of those instruments play a vital role in shaping them as writers in first-year composition and many other writing classrooms. A better understanding of the instruments and how students make use of those instruments will yield a better understanding of the student writers as they are now and help writing instructors better meet their needs.

Lastly, I draw on AT from the perspective of contradictions and transformations. That is, according to Engeström (1987), contradictions within the elements of the systems can become the driving forces of learning and expanding. In my pilot study, many contradictions/conflicts became the driving forces: the conflict between the vocabulary demands of the National Matriculation English Test (NMET) and TOEFL, between the essay length of NMET writing and TOEFL writing, between the limited feedback students received from their high school teachers and the amount of feedback they needed, and so on. These conflicts drove students to turn to other instruments/tools (e.g., cram school teaching and online sources) in order to achieve their outcome. This also explains and justifies the “why” I investigate students’ out-of-class writing experience in addition to their in-class writing.

### 1.5 Research Questions

To at least address some of the problems stated above and based on my pilot study, this dissertation investigates how Chinese students prepare themselves in terms of

English writing before coming to the U.S. for undergraduate study by exploring how they learn to write by employing high school instruction, cram school tutoring, and online resources. The time range for their writing experience and the instruction they receive in writing that I investigate is from students' getting admitted to high school until the time before they come to U.S. universities for undergraduate study. Although some students may go to school earlier or later than others, the majority of the students' ages range from 16 to 18. Their average age is approximately 17. In the process of research, I focus on the following questions:

1. How do Chinese students prepare themselves for undergraduate studies in the U.S. in terms of English writing?
  - a) What writing experience and instruction do the students receive in high school?
  - b) How do the students engage in private supplementary tutoring? What is the instruction like? How do the students perceive the usefulness of that instruction?
  - c) How do the students use online resources? What are their practices of writing in online communities and using online materials for English writing?
2. What have the students achieved in English writing competence from their prior learning experience in China?
3. In what ways are the students not prepared for writing courses in the U.S.?

## 1.6 Overview of Chapters

Following this introduction, I provide a literature review for the present study of previous work on high school English writing instruction, private supplementary tutoring, and making use of online materials for writing. In Chapter 3, I outline the research methodology employed in the study that includes the settings, recruitment procedures and participants, data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 reports on the writing instruction students have received in high schools and their perceptions of that instruction based on the analysis of data from surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of students' writing. It addresses the class activities students engaged in related to writing, types of writing students did, feedback students received from teachers, and students' perceptions of the writing, instruction, and feedback. Chapter 5 reports how students improved their English writing by engaging in private supplementary tutoring by analyzing data from surveys, interviews, and classroom observations of eight English writing class sessions in a cram school. Chapter 6 reports how students used online resources to improve their English writing and prepared themselves for undergraduate study in the U.S. from data from surveys, interviews, and analysis of a forum that many Chinese students reported using. The final Chapter of the dissertation includes a discussion of the research questions, implications for L2 writing research and teaching, limitations of the study, and directions for future study.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review studies from the three perspectives mentioned earlier: high school instruction in English writing, private supplementary tutoring, and online learning. It is important to notice that online learning here does not refer to taking online writing courses; instead, it refers to writing online or using online resources to improve their writing. (This study does not investigate online writing courses because, in my pilot study, few students reported that they had taken online writing courses.) To be more specific, the activities include writing in online communities, looking for writing materials and writing samples on forums, discussing how to improve writing with peers, and other possible activities.

### 2.1 The Teaching of Writing in Secondary Schools

Previous literature has covered writing instruction in secondary schools in a few countries and regions—the U.S. (Applebee, 1984; Applebee, 1993; Applebee & Langer, 2006; Applebee & Langer, 2011; Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010; Llosa, Beck, & Zhao, 2011; Noskin, 2000; Patterson & Duer, 2006; Scherff & Piazza, 2005), Sweden (Wahlström, 2007), Germany (Foster, 2002; Reichelt, 1996; Reichelt, 1997), France (Donahue, 2002), Poland (Reichelt, 2005), the Netherlands (Schoonen, Gelderen, Stoel, Hulstijn, & Glopper, 2011), Spain (Whittaker, Llinares, & McCabe, 2011), Jordan (AlJarrah & Al-Ahmad, 2013), Malaysia (Tan & Miller, 2007), Japan (Kobayashi &



Rinnert, 2002), and Mainland China (Bao, 2012; Lang, 2011; Li, 2002; Liao, 2012; Yan, 2012).

### 2.1.1 High School Instruction on English Writing in Other Parts of The World

*United States.* With nine studies on writing instruction in secondary schools, the U.S. is the most researched country regarding the topic. Among all researchers, Applebee is one of the most prominent scholars on this topic. He conducted much research on writing instruction in American secondary schools and had several important publications.

Applebee (1984) conducted a national study of writing in secondary schools using data collected during the 1979-1980 school year about writing instruction both in English classes and content area classes. In 1993, Applebee provided a comprehensive picture of the content and approaches in the teaching of literature in high schools based on data from four types of studies: case studies of schools, studies of required book-length works, national surveys of teaching literature, and analyses of literature anthologies. Recently, Applebee and his co-researcher, Langer, reported on the situation of writing in American secondary schools. Applebee and Langer (2006) looked at the state of writing instruction in American middle and high schools by analyzing data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). It was found that the writing proficiency of students had kept steady; emphasis on writing and the teaching of writing increased over time. Despite this increase, students were not writing much. In terms of the approach to teaching writing, process-oriented writing instruction had been the dominant approach reported by teachers—although how the approach was implemented in classrooms was unclear. When it came to the factors that influenced the teaching of writing, the spread of state

standards and high stakes tests were important forces that impacted the teaching of writing. Finally, with the advancement of technology, students were able to use technology in writing, and also new genres that integrated the use of technology emerged. In 2011, Applebee and Langer conducted a nationwide study on writing instruction by visiting 260 classrooms, interviewing 220 teachers and administrators and 138 students, and surveying 520 teachers. It was found that little time was devoted to writing, and the amount of writing was limited as well, although the time on and amount of writing both increased compared with 30 years ago. It was also found that teachers tended to respond to students' writing without grading; students were also asked to share their writing with their peers. In terms of high stakes exams, little writing was required in English (30.3% of the grade for high stakes tests in high school and 17.8% in middle school). Results also revealed that high stakes tests influenced curriculum and instruction. With regard to the approach to teaching writing, the top three areas were: "clearly [specifying] the parts that must be included in a particular kind of writing assignment," "spend[ing] class time generating and organizing ideas or information before writing," and "teach[ing] specific strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and organizing written work."

Other scholars also contributed much to the study of writing in U.S. secondary schools. Noskin (2000), based on his experience in teaching writing in high schools, expressed his understanding of process writing and offered advice for teaching writing in high schools.

Fanetti et al. (2010) examined how high school teachers taught writing in the U.S. and if that instruction helped students prepare for the first year composition courses in universities. A gap was observed between high school writing instruction and university

composition course expectations due to the constraints of standardized tests. Standardized tests constrained high school teachers from teaching real writing and shifted their focus to model writing instruction. This caused student's writing to be too rigid and rule-governed, which did not meet the expectations of first year composition instructors in the university.

Scherff and Piazza (2005) surveyed 2000 public-school students to examine their perceptions of writing instruction in high schools. The authors researched what kinds of writing students did, if teachers provided model essays in teaching writing, and how often students did process writing. Results showed that the most frequently written genre was response to literature; expository and persuasive writing and summaries occurred once or twice a month; narrative and comparison/contrast essays occurred once or twice a quarter; research-based papers were only written once or twice a year; drama, poetry, personal writing, responses to art or music, and business letters were reported to have never or hardly ever been done. Large numbers of students were exposed to "teacher modeling of writing" (p. 290). Findings also suggested that little process writing occurred in classrooms; many students never or hardly ever obtained feedback for revision.

Patterson and Duer (2006) surveyed secondary- and post-secondary- level teachers nationwide on their practice and expectations of teaching reading and writing. For the writing part, results revealed that although these two groups of students agreed upon the importance of some skills such as "selecting a topic, formulating a thesis," "editing and proofreading," and "revising focusing on content rather than mechanics," there was a gap between the emphasis on grammar of these two groups of teachers. Post-secondary level teachers expected the secondary level teachers to place more emphasis on

grammar and usage. Results also indicated that standardized assessment influenced secondary level teachers' focus in teaching.

Llosa et al. (2011) identified the most prevalent types of writing at the secondary level and described the challenges that English Language Learners (ELLs) and non-English Language Learners (non-ELLs) had with those types of writing. It was found that in New York City schools, the most prevalently assigned and valued genre was exposition/argument. The most emphasized component of writing was the use of source text, followed by language conventions and structure. As for the challenges, both ELLs and non-ELLs considered translating, "the process of articulating ideas in the conventions of written English" (p. 256), the biggest challenge.

*Europe.* Research in Europe covers six countries. Wahlström (2007) reported on the teaching of writing in Swedish secondary schools; Donahue (2002) examined writing preparation in France; Foster (2002) and Reichelt (1996, 1997) looked at the situation of writing instruction in secondary Gymnasium in Germany; Reichelt (2005) researched secondary writing instruction in Poland; Schoonen, Gelderen, Stoel, Hulstijn and Glopper (2011) looked the situation in the Netherlands; and Whittaker, Llinares and McCabe (2011) did research on secondary writing instruction in Spain.

*Sweden.* Wahlström (2007) investigated how English writing was taught and what kinds of writing were taught as well as how written products were graded in Swedish upper secondary schools by interviewing four teachers in two different schools. Results showed that almost all four instructors taught writing as a separate lesson rather than incorporating it into the larger scope of English class with instruction in other English skills. All four teachers went through the "common rules" (p. 14) of writing and provided

materials for students before the assignment was given to them. In terms of what kinds of writing were taught, students were asked to write journals, letters, descriptions of pictures, short essays, articles, and book reports. Despite the various types of writing, they were all formal writing because the writing class was designed to prepare students for the writing examination in the national test. Teachers placed much emphasis on writing because writing was one part of the national test in Sweden. Although all four teachers acknowledged the importance of writing and spent much time on writing, they could neither apply the process approach in their teaching nor guide students to revise their writing due to the large class size. Therefore, the most commonly used methods were the paragraph-pattern approach and the grammar-syntax-organization approach.

*France.* Donahue (2002) examined writing preparation in secondary schools for higher education in France's centralized system. Under that system, the writing-based examination required early specialization; however, that collided with the ideology of egalitarian access. Despite this collision, results showed that secondary instruction prepared students well by teaching students to write a few genres well, and therefore, made a smooth transition to the similar university writing.

*Germany.* Foster (2002) and Reichelt (1996, 1997) investigated writing instruction in Germany. Foster (2002), interviewing students and faculty from institutions in Germany, found that the authority students needed to develop as writers in the process of transiting from secondary schools (Gymnasium) to higher education because the teaching environment in the Gymnasium was more nurturing while, in higher education, seminars were the main contexts for pedagogy.

Reichelt (1996, 1997) investigated the context of writing instruction at a secondary school in Germany. Both writing instruction in L1 German and L2 English were studied. It was found that the focus of German instruction was passing on the literary and intellectual heritage while the focus of English instruction was to acquire the language. Much more time was devoted to writing instruction in German than in English. It was assumed that students would draw on their experience of writing in German when writing in English. The higher the grade the students were in, the more emphasis they put on writing in English because they were about to write English in the Abitur test. In terms of writing pedagogy, the most frequent activity was timed and graded writing to prepare for the test instead of process writing.

*Poland.* Reichelt (2005) reported on English writing instruction at different levels in Poland. As far as writing instruction at the secondary level was concerned, it was not emphasized in the past because, first, there had not been a tradition of L1 writing instruction that the instructors could draw on in the teaching of English as L2 writing, second, instructors lacked training in teaching writing, and third, instructors had heavy workloads, so they minimized writing to decrease the time for grading. However, the reform of the Matura (school-leaving exam) required students to take a writing test in one foreign language, and this reform had washback on the teaching of English writing. The instructors mainly taught writing to prepare students for the Matura and emphasized the genres that were tested by the Matura such as post cards, letters, and short essays. However, heavy workloads prevented instructors from giving much individual feedback to students' writing. It seems that the writing instruction in Poland had been shaped to a

large extent by “pressure to prepare students for the writing sections of various English English-language exams” (p. 225).

*The Netherlands.* Schoonen et al. (2011) investigated the development of L1 and EFL writing proficiency of secondary school students in the Netherlands through a three-year longitudinal study. Results showed that students experienced more improvement in their English writing proficiency than their L1 writing proficiency. But this study focused more on the relationship between linguistic fluency, L1 writing proficiency, EFL writing proficiency, and other factors like language-general metacognition rather than exploring how secondary students developed their writing proficiency.

*Spain.* Whittaker et al. (2011) examined the written discourse development of English produced in a content-and-language-integrated-learning (CLIL) environment in secondary school in Spain. It was found that students made improvement in textual coherence, and nominal group complexity was increased. Although this study investigated students’ improvement in written discourse, similar to the study of Schoonen et al. (2011), it did not explore how students developed their writing, but what development students experienced.

*Middle East.* In Middle East, only writing instruction in Jordan is represented in the available literature.

*Jordan.* Al-Jarrah and Al-Ahmad (2013), doing a field investigation, looked at writing instruction in Jordan in primary and secondary state schools, a private school, and a state university. In terms of writing instruction in primary and secondary state schools, results showed that writing instruction did not receive enough emphasis, nor did the schools have specific classes for writing per se. Writing instruction was integrated with

other skills. In addition, a low level of motivation, a lack of resources and teacher training, large class sizes, importance of exams, and limited time for teaching writing were all shaping the status quo of the writing instruction in Jordan.

*Asia.* In East Asia, researchers explored the situation of writing preparation in secondary schools in Malaysia, Japan, and Mainland China, among which, Mainland China represented the most researched country.

*Malaysia.* Tan and Miller (2007) reported how students wrote and responded to teachers' instruction in Malaysian high schools under an examination-driven and "non-negotiable" writing curriculum (p. 124). It was found that the examination-driven context did not motivate students to develop their writing skills beyond passing the exams. Students wrote essays only to meet the evaluation criteria; students were not motivated to try their best in writing; rather, they did minimal work to get by because they were confident that "their proficiency was good enough for the local examination standard in the country" (p. 131). Students also copied from sources frequently without proper referencing. Even when instructors found students plagiarizing, they did not punish the students or talk very seriously about the matter with the students because they believed that, in standard examinations, students would not have access to external sources. This study again confirmed that the educational context can shape the teaching of writing.

*Japan.* Kobayashi and Rinnert (2002) investigated Japanese students' L1 writing experience and the instruction they received in high schools in Japan. It was found that little writing was done in regular classes; however, high schools provided intensive writing instruction outside of regular class to prepare the students for examinations. Although this is about L1 writing experience and instruction, it has important



implications for L2 writing research since students' L1 literacy can be an important factor influencing their L2 writing.

### 2.1.2 High School Instruction on English Writing in Mainland China

*Mainland China.* When it comes to the research in Mainland China, five researchers looked at Chinese writing instruction in Chinese secondary schools. Among them, Li (2002) researched the teaching of Chinese writing in high schools. The other four (Bao, 2012; Lang, 2001; Liao, 2012; Yan, 2012) looked at English writing instruction in Chinese high schools. It seems that in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of studies on this topic in that three studies were published in 2012.

Li (2002) investigated the writing of high school students in Chinese classrooms. She first traced writing back to the educational system in Confucius' time and described the ancient Imperial Civil Service Exam in China. She then presented the teaching of Chinese writing in high schools and conveyed the influence of the Imperial Civil Service Exam on current high school students' writing by examining the requirements of the writing part in the National Matriculation Test and analyzing two model essays (that earned high scores) in one of the past National Matriculation Tests. Finally, she reported the results of a survey of Chinese university students that was designed to explore if the teaching of Chinese writing in high schools in China met the demand of writing in universities by asking for students' perceptions of their high school and university writing experiences. It was found that a majority of students agreed that high school instruction had prepared them well for university work. Despite the acknowledgement of the help of

high school writing, most students felt the writing in high schools and universities were different from each other in terms of the length of writing, the rules they had to follow, the freedom they had in writing, and the orientation (logic or feelings, theory or opinion, content or structure) of their writing.

Bao (2012), by surveying 120 teachers in seven different high schools in China, investigated how teachers taught writing. Results revealed that most teachers used a product-approach to teaching writing; when they gave feedback to students' writing, most teachers focused on grammar and spelling; teachers seldom asked students to conduct peer-review to give feedback to each other. The author attributed this excessive emphasis on grammar in teaching and grading writing to the examination culture.

Lang (2001) investigated the situation of English writing teaching in China by surveying 26 high schools in six cities in China. Results showed that about 40% of the students claimed that they liked English writing. When asked if they had English writing class, only 8% of the students said they had independent English writing classes. 36.3% students reported that they had difficulties in writing in English; the biggest difficulty for them was vocabulary. When students were asked for suggestions for English writing teaching in Chinese high schools, the suggestions mainly fall into three categories: more emphasis on writing process, more writing guided by model essays, and more explicit instruction in writing strategies and giving more feedback. The overall result is that teachers did not place enough emphasis on writing, which was the expectation of students.

Liao (2012) looked at the problems in English writing teaching in Chinese high schools and found that a big problem was teachers' excessive emphasis on grammar and mechanics when giving feedback to students' writing while ignoring the overall content.

She also provided advice for improving English writing teaching in Chinese high schools. For example, teachers need to motivate students to write, to help students accumulate more useful sentence structures for writing, and to encourage students to do more free writing.

Yan (2012) reported English secondary teachers' perceptions and implementation of the new English curriculum reform in China. Through triangulated data collection including classroom observation, field-notes and reflections, and semi-structured interviews, Yan investigated how English teachers in secondary schools perceived and implemented the new curriculum as well as the obstacles they encountered in the process of implementation. An implementation gap was observed between the requirements in the curriculum and the practice of teachers in classroom teaching. Major difficulties came from students' resistance, lack of support from administrators, and the effect of test-driven reality. In classroom practice, it was found that students were seldom asked to do writing. In terms of the use of textbooks, teachers paid excessive attention to the reading part and grammar while neglecting speaking and writing. Even in the monthly school-based exams, writing and listening parts were omitted because they were considered unimportant. It is suggested that despite the curriculum reform's aim to direct teachers and students' attention to the use of language, teachers placed too much emphasis on grammar. In teaching practice, it was extremely difficult for teachers to implement this due to the test-driven reality.

## 2.2 Private Supplementary Tutoring/Shadow Education

### 2.2.1 Definition and Basic Information

In addition to the instruction received in the mainstream school system, students also receive tutoring from outside school tutors or organizations. The private supplementary tutoring is also widely known as “shadow education” (Bray, 1999; Bray, 2009; Bray, 2013; Bray & Kwo, 2003; Bray & Kwok, 2013; Bray & Lykins, 2012; Bregvadze, 2012; Brehm, Silova, & Tuot, 2012; Stevenson & Baker, 1992). Stevenson and Baker (1992) first proposed the notion of “shadow education” when they investigated the outside school learning of Japanese students to prepare for the college entrance examination. They define shadow education as “a set of educational activities outside formal schooling that are designed to improve a student’s chances of successfully moving through the allocation process” (p. 1640). After that, many scholars have investigated shadow education, among whom Mark Bray is the most renowned (Bray, 1999; Bray, 2007; Bray, 2009; Bray, 2011; Bray, 2013; Bray & Kwo, 2013; Bray & Lykins, 2012; Bray, Zhan, Lykins, Wang, & Kwo, 2014). He explained the reasons why private supplementary tutoring is described as shadow education: 1); Private supplementary tutoring only exists because mainstream education exists; 2); As the size, shape, and curriculum of the mainstream system change, so do those of private supplementary tutoring; 3); In almost all societies much more public attention is focused on the mainstream than on its shadow; and 4); The features of the shadow system are much “less distinct than those of the mainstream system” (Bray, 1999, p. 17).

Despite the popularity of the term “shadow education”, in this paper, I will use private supplementary tutoring (PST) to refer to the instruction that Chinese students

receive to improve their English writing outside of their high school learning. This is reasonable because although most private tutoring that Chinese students receive is meant to shadow the education system, many Chinese students go to cram schools for private tutoring to prepare for the TOEFL writing test. This kind of tutoring is not the “shadow” system of mainstream schooling because mainstream schools do not have writing instruction that helps students prepare for the TOEFL writing test. Consequently, the curriculum in the cram schools for TOEFL writing will not change as a result of change in mainstream school curricula. Therefore, private supplementary tutoring is a more appropriate term to refer to all tutoring that Chinese students receive before coming to the U.S. for undergraduate study. In this paper, private tutoring refers to “tutoring in academic subjects which is provided by the tutors for financial gain and which is additional to the provision by mainstream schooling” (Bray & Kwok, 2013, p. 612). Private supplementary tutoring can take many different forms: one-to-one tutoring in the homes of the tutors or tutees, one-to-one tutoring in a tutoring organization, small groups in a tutoring organization, and large classes in a tutoring organization (Bray, 2013). Students participate in private supplementary tutoring for different purposes, being either remedial or for enhancement (Baker, Akiba, LeTendre, & Wiseman, 2001).

In fact, private supplementary tutoring has become a widespread phenomenon all over the world: in Korea it is known as Hagwon, in Japan as Juku, in Turkey as Dersane, and in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong as Buxiban. Baker et al. (2001) presented data from national samples in 41 countries on the prevalence of private supplementary tutoring activities in mathematics education. Of the entire sampled student population in 41 countries, on average 39.6% reported participating in private tutoring

activities regularly to improve their mathematics achievement. About 20% of the students participated in private tutoring activities for two hours or more per week, although most undertook less than one hour. In Asian countries, it is even more widespread. According to Bray's (1999) summary of results of private tutoring received by Asian students, 81% of secondary students in Taiwan, 70% of middle school students in Japan, and 82% of primary students in South Korea were receiving private tutoring. Dawson (2010) also found that the market for private tutoring in Japan, South Korea, and Cambodia has been expanding quickly.

Private supplementary tutoring may be popular because of the need to prepare for high-stakes exams (Dawson, 2010; N. U., Russell, 2002; Sawada & Kobayashi, 1986; Tansel & Bircan, 2006), to help students keep up with the content taught in mainstream schools (Husremovic & Trbic, 2006) and other structural issues such as overloaded curricula (Bray, 2007; Silova, 2009), limited access (Baker et al., 2001), low educational expenditures (Baker et al., 2001; Bray, 2010), and low teacher wages (Benveniste, Marshall, & Araujo, 2008; Silova & Bray, 2006).

Seeing this popularity and dramatic expansion of private supplementary tutoring, different governments have adopted different policies. Some countries have seen private supplementary tutoring as a necessary supplement to mainstream schooling. For example, in Japan, private tutoring has become an integral part of the educational system (Stevenson & Baker, 1992). Some countries have tried to control its spread. For example, in Korea, the private tutoring fever has been so high that the president tried to crack down on it (Chandler, 2011); in Cambodia, the government tried to enact various policies to react to this expansion but failed to be effective (Dawson, 2010). Some countries

encourage the development of the private supplementary tutoring industry. For example, the Australian government provides vouchers to families who send their students to private supplementary tutoring schools. As for China, non-high school teachers are encouraged to provide private supplementary tutoring for students while for high school teachers, different provinces have their own policies; but most of the cities forbid high school teachers from providing after-school tutoring for their own students by charging additional fees (Xu, 2009).

### 2.2.2 Literature on Private Supplementary Tutoring

Private supplementary tutoring (many scholars use “shadow education” to refer to this kind of tutoring) has been widely researched in a large number of countries and regions, but most of the research has been done in Asian countries.

*Australia.* Watson (2008) looked at the growth of private tutoring in Australia and found that the expenditure on private tutoring has been increasing: the expenditure on private tutoring constituted about 4% of total expenditure on children’s education in 1998-1999, and this number increased to 5% in 2003-2004.

*Canada.* Bray and Kwok (2003) reported that about 10% of 13-year-olds and 13% of 16-year-olds participated in private tutoring for one hour or more a week. Aurini and Davies (2004) reported that the major cities in Canada had witnessed a growth of 200% to 500% in the number of formal tutoring service businesses in the past 30 years.

According to Aurini and Davies, tutoring in Canada had transformed from traditional shadow education to a system that “closely follow[ed] the curricula of the main public school system” (p. 425), mainly served to prepare students for tests and finishing

homework, and was usually provided by individual tutors to franchised learning centers which might have their own curricula, provided more support, and aimed at skill-building.

*Kenya.* Nzomo, Kariuki and Guantai (2001) reported that 68.6% of the 3,233 surveyed pupils were receiving tutoring. Ngugi (2012) explored private supplementary tutoring in the Gatundu South District of Kenya and also found that private supplementary tutoring was common in schools; private supplementary tutoring was found to be effective in improving students' academic performance; however, it caused students to become fatigued due to learning both in school and outside school.

*Europe.* The studies on private supplementary tutoring in Europe reported on the situation in Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Germany, and the UK.

*Georgia.* Bregvadze (2012) explored the private supplementary tutoring in Georgia and found that private tutoring started in primary school with 15% of the students taking it, and this percentage increased as the level rises: 37% for basic level and 43% for secondary level. In the final year of schooling, about 57% of students were receiving private tutoring. Regarding the factors that influenced whether students engaged in private tutoring, parental education and household economics status had a significant positive impact on the likelihood of taking private supplementary tutoring. Private tutoring was reported to having a significant positive impact on the likelihood of entering the university.

*Germany.* Mischo and Haag (2002) investigated the impact of private supplementary tutoring on students' academic performance in Germany by putting students into experimental and control groups. Results suggested that students who



received private tutoring had significantly higher scores, although other factors might have caused this rise in scores as well.

*Ireland.* Smyth (2008) studied the influence of private tutoring on students' performance. Results suggested that high levels of involvement did not have a significant positive effect on students' academic performance.

*Romania.* According to a UNESCO (2000) report of the results of a 1994 study in Romania, 32% of Grade 12 students in rural areas and 58% in urban areas were receiving private tutoring.

*The U.K.* J. Russell (2002) talked about private tutoring in the UK and said, "In London and other big cities, private tutoring is booming. It has become one of the most important, yet also unacknowledged, factors in a child's performance" (p. 10).

*Middle East.* The situation in Egypt and Turkey are represented in Middle East.

*Egypt.* Fergany (1994) surveyed 4,729 households, and results showed that more than 64% of urban primary and 52% of rural children ones had received supplementary tutoring.

*Turkey.* Ünal, Özkan, Milton, Price and Curva (2010) researched the effect of private tutoring (dersane) in Turkey on the mathematical performance of 15-year-old students. It was found that private tutoring had a positive effect on students' mathematical achievement—one hour of tutoring was worth about 12 to 15 points on the math test.

*Asia.* Because private supplementary tutoring is a widely acknowledged phenomenon in Asia, related research covers ten countries and regions—Bangladesh, Cambodia, Mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

*Bangladesh.* Nath (2008) explored the situation of private supplementary tutoring and its impact on academic achievement in primary schools in Bangladesh. It was found that the percentage of students receiving private supplementary tutoring was increasing by 2% every year. Boys attended private tutoring more than girls did, and urban students attended private tutoring more than rural students did. Well-off families and parents who had higher education levels were more likely to send their students to private tutoring schools than their counterparts. Private tutoring was reported to be effective in improving students' academic performance.

*Cambodia.* Brehm, Silova & Tuot (2012) researched private tutoring in Cambodia and addressed the quality and equality implications of private tutoring in Cambodia. It was found that private tutoring is more of a continuation of mainstream schooling than a type of “shadow education”—private tutoring is considered important to fulfill the national curricular requirement by forming a hybrid education with mainstream schooling. 68.4% of the researched students were receiving private tutoring. Results also suggested that students who received private tutoring had better academic performance than those who did not. Students did not attend private tutoring mainly because of low family income.

*Mainland China.* Bray (2013) reported that private tutoring was received by 73.8% of primary, 65.6% of lower secondary and 53.5% of upper secondary students in China.

Peng and Zhou (2008) researched private tutoring in Wuhan and found that on average, about 66% of primary and secondary students were receiving private tutoring. The private tutoring took two forms: going to cram schools and studying with home tutors. Students in upper grades used the private tutoring resources more than those in

lower grades did. The main reason they were receiving private tutoring was to increase their academic achievement.

X. Zhang (2013) examined private tutoring in a high school in Beijing and found that about 87% of students were participating in private tutoring; many of them started private tutoring as primary students and continued doing so. The main reason for taking private tutoring was to improve their academic performance. As for the effect of private tutoring, most students thought it “maybe helpful but not sure”, while only about 20% of students believed private tutoring was helpful in improving their academic performance.

Y. Zhang (2013) investigated private tutoring among high school students in Jinan and found that among 10th graders, 13.3% were receiving private tutoring in English, 19.7% for 11th graders and 18.2% for 12th graders. Regarding the professions of English tutors, in urban areas, the majority were teachers from other schools (about 53%), followed by their school teachers (about 18%) and professional tutors (about 12%). The tutors' average degree is a bachelor's degree. In terms of the effect of private tutoring on students' performance in the National Matriculation English Test (NMET), the results were complicated. It was found that private tutoring did not have a significant and positive effect on students' academic performance on the NMET on average, although it was effective for some students who had lower academic achievement. However, for rural students, private tutoring was found to have a negative effect on students' performance on the NMET, although the reasons were not clear.

*Hong Kong.* Bray and Kwok (2003) surveyed secondary students in Hong Kong regarding receiving private supplementary tutoring. It was found that 35.1% of the surveyed Secondary 1-3 students, 46.6% of Secondary 4-5 students, and 70.3% of

Secondary 6-7 students were receiving private tutoring. In terms of the subjects in which students received tutoring, mathematics was the most popular, with 89.7% of students who were receiving private tutoring taking it, followed by English, being taken by 78.2% of the students who were receiving private tutoring. Most students chose to attend large scale tutoring classes instead of individual or small-group tutoring. It was also found that the ratio of students receiving private tutoring was related to the financial situation of the family and parents educational level: more students in high income level households were receiving private tutoring, and the higher parents' education level was, the larger the proportion of students receiving private tutoring.

Bray et al. (2014) conducted another study in Hong Kong recently and found that over 60% of secondary students were receiving private tutoring. English was the most popular subject, with over 65% of the students reporting receiving private tutoring in English.

*Japan.* Stevenson and Baker (1992) explored the prevalence of shadow education in Japan and found that Japanese students were “voracious consumers of shadow-education activities” (p. 1645)—88% of the students who planned to go to college received shadow education in high school. As for the determinants for the prevalence of shadow education, it was found that the most important factor was the curriculum-track system while the socioeconomic status of the family played a role as well. It was also found that shadow education in Japan was used as a widespread practice to facilitate the transition from high school to university, and its purpose was more for enrichment than remediation.

*South Korea.* Kim (2000) found that 72.9% of primary students, 56% of middle-school students, and 32% of high school students were receiving private tutoring.

*Taiwan.* Statistics suggested that in 1998, there were 5,536 registered tutoring centers, and they had 1,891,096 students. Kuan (2011) looked at the effect of going to cram schools on mathematics performance in Taiwan and found that receiving tutoring in cram schools only had a small effect on students' mathematics performance.

*Vietnam.* Dang (2007) explored the private tutoring classes in Vietnam and reported that private tutoring was widespread in Vietnam, 31% of primary students, 56% of middle school students and 77% of high school students were receiving private tutoring. It was found that private tutoring had a significant positive impact on students' academic performance.

### 2.2.3 Literature on Private Supplementary Tutoring in English (PST-E)

Despite the widespread recognition that private supplementary tutoring is a prevalent phenomenon in many countries in the world, especially in Asian countries, and that a plethora of research has been conducted in a wide range of countries and regions, the research mainly focuses on its scale and determinants while little research directly examines private supplementary tutoring in English (PST-E) (Hamid, Sussex, & Khan, 2009). In fact, I could find only three studies on PST-E.

The first study was conducted by Khuwaileh and Al-Shoumali (2001). They investigated the reasons for the prosperity of English private tutoring among university students in Jordan by surveying and interviewing students and parents. It was found that the main reasons for the popularity of English private tutoring perceived by the parents

were the lack of Arabic textbooks in the science fields, the importance of English, and the economic condition of the family. However, according to the students, in addition to the three reasons held by the parents, their school teachers' competence and getting a higher grade were other main reasons why they received private tutoring. Finally, the author concludes that private tutoring in English would continue to increase given the importance of English in Jordan.

Seeing the limited research on PST-E, Hamid et al. (2009), by drawing on quantitative and qualitative data, examined private supplementary tutoring in English for secondary students in Bangladesh. It was found that students who took private tutoring were 2.8 times more likely to obtain a higher grade on an English test. Interview data indicates that students considered private tutoring imperative mainly because of the inadequacy of the teaching of English at schools; students stopped taking private tutoring mainly because of financial problems. In terms of the effectiveness of private tutoring in English, the student participants considered it very helpful, but the PST-E did not fulfill students' expectations on their test performance. However, students still considered it effective and better than the English teaching in their mainstream schools.

Recently, Liu (2012) investigated the status quo of English private tutoring organizations for children in Erdos, Inner Mongolia, China. Three problems were reported: the lack of clear teaching goals, the low quality of the teachers, and the lack of systematic teaching materials. In terms of the teacher qualifications, the majority (about 67%) of the surveyed teachers graduated from community colleges; only about a quarter had teacher certifications; and most never received any training in teach English provided by their organizations. However, some private tutoring organizations had better teacher

training systems, e.g., New Oriental School. According to G. Zhang (2011), new English teachers in New Oriental School received systematic training—four months' training in the branch school and 10-day intensive training at the headquarters. The training included how to organize a course, look for teaching materials, and activate the classroom atmosphere.

It can be seen that this voluntary outside school learning experience is important yet rarely researched in the field of second language writing, applied linguistics, or TESOL. Studies on PST and PST-E in China were mainly conducted by Chinese people and many were written in Chinese, and therefore, are invisible to a huge number of scholars. This lack of research in this area calls for more studies to look at PST-E and PST-E writing.

### 2.3 Online Learning

The third important facet that constitutes Chinese students' experience of learning how to write in English is their online presence. In other words, how they use online materials, forums, and communities to improve their English writing.

With the advent and development of computers and the Internet, second language writing and research has been influenced greatly by CALL (computer assisted language learning). Therefore, online writing has become an important element in the teaching of and research on second language writing. However, the majority of online writing research has focused on incorporating technology into writing teaching (Baecher, Schieble, Rosalia, & Rorimer, 2013; Foroutan, Noordin, & Hamzah, 2013; Geluso, 2013; Hafner, 2013; Li, 2013; Li & Zhu, 2013; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010; Rezaee & Oladi,

2008; Vurdien, 2013), online peer review (Chang, 2012; Chen, 2012; Dekhinet, Topping, Duran, & Blanch, 2008; DiGiovanni & Nagaswami, 2001; Guardado, & Shi, 2007; Jin & Zhu, 2010; Lee, Wong, Cheung, & Lee, 2009; Lin & Yang, 2011; Yuhong, 2005), and online writing instruction and the development of online writing courses (Al-Jarf, 2004; Chuo, 2007; Ellis, 2008; Kuo, 2008; Muagsamai; 2003). Little research has looked at students' writing experiences outside school online and how they learned to write by using online resources. Among studies on students' writing experience online, some looked at what the students' writing looked like through analyzing the written texts. For example, Bloch (2004) studied how Chinese students wrote in an online Usenet group and found that they used traditional Chinese rhetoric in their English writing. You (2005) explored the way Chinese people wrote in a bulletin board forum online and advocated for the meaning potential of China English online. However, these studies did not look at how writing online helped L2 writers develop their writing skills, which is one of the foci of my dissertation study. Some studies, did however, looked at how writing online helped students develop their writing skills; the online writing activities were part of their school courses instead of taking place in an out-of-school context. For example, Spiliotopoulos (2003a; 2003b) and Spiliotopoulos and Carey (2005) looked at the effectiveness of writing on bulletin boards in helping students improve their academic writing; however, that writing took place in schools instead of being done by students voluntarily outside school. In fact, I only found two scholars' studies that are related to my study.

The first scholar is Black (2005; 2006; 2010) who took L2 writers' online writing experience in an online forum as his dissertation topic and conducted a series of studies. Black investigated adolescent English language learners' experience writing in Fanfiction,



an online forum outside school. The author adopted an ethnographic research methodology and through his participation in and observation of the online forum, Black found that the online Fanfiction forum helped students improve their writing skills by enhancing students' audience awareness and developing students' identity as authors since the immediate response of other online members enabled students to have a clearer awareness of audience. Overall, it was found that the online Fanfiction forum provided ways for students to become better writers in an out-of-the-school context.

The other scholar, Pu (2013), investigated the literacy experience of L2 high school students in and out of school using ethnographic case studies with four students in the US. Sources of data were multimodal; they included classroom observations, online community observations, surveys, interviews, field notes, and writing samples. It was found that all four participants had their own literacy practice types; their choices of medium and language of writing were also different. In their writing, students sometimes would use their mother tongues to create their own identity. As for the role of outside school writing on the Internet, it was found that although "self-sponsored writing" offered students more opportunities and channels to write, that type of writing tended to be informal and fragmentary.

It can be seen that the studies on how students learned to write online are very limited. Even the studies that investigate students' online writing outside school above did not touch upon another important element—how students improve their writing by using online materials. Therefore, seeing the importance of the study and the limited research in three aspects—high school instruction, private supplementary tutoring, and online learning, I plan to study how Chinese students improve their writing before

coming to the U.S. and prepare themselves for undergraduate study in terms of English writing.

## CHAPTER 3: METHDOLOGY

### 3.1 Overview of Chapter

In this chapter, I start with an overview of the study and research design; continue with a description of the research settings, recruitment of participants, data sources and data collection procedures; and end with an outline of the data analysis procedure. When I describe the settings, I mention the various participants I recruited and data I obtained in those settings, too, because they were so closely interwoven that it was difficult to make a clear-cut separation among them.

### 3.2 Overview of Study and Research Design

This study investigates how Chinese students prepare themselves for undergraduate studies in the U.S. in terms of English writing by looking at what kind of writing instruction they have received in high school, how they have engaged in private supplementary tutoring, and how they made use of online resources. This study adapted a mixed methods research design and triangulated multiple sources from various settings. In other words, since various perspectives would benefit the research in terms of providing as a more complete picture of writing and writing instruction of Chinese students in high school, I tried to obtain as much diversity of subjects and sites as was feasible, to achieve “maximum variation sampling” (Patton, 2002). Data for this study came from mixed sources: a questionnaire, interviews, classroom observations, and

examinations of written materials and an online forum. A questionnaire was used because it is inexpensive, fast, anonymous, and can “control subconscious bias” that may be caused by supralinguistic factors such as facial expressions, appearance, accent, and so on (Brown, 2001, p. 75); it can also gather comparable information (Mackery & Gass, 2011) for analysis. Semi-structured interviews were adopted to elicit deeper thoughts and more detailed answers from the participants in order to gain descriptive data. Classroom observations provided me with first-hand and straightforward information on how English writing was taught in reality, and examination of written materials and a forum provided supplementary data for analysis.

### 3.3 Settings

The present study took place both in the U.S. and China. In the U.S., the study was conducted at Purdue University. In China, it took place in four high schools and a cram school in a provincial capital city in Northern China. This city, according to my pilot study, was one of the top five cities from which Chinese students enrolled in the first-year composition for international students classrooms at Purdue University came. Therefore, it is a representative city for my research. The four high school settings included a key public school, an ordinary public school, a foreign language school, and an international department at the key public school. The international department was specially set up for students who were preparing to go abroad for higher education and therefore, was fairly different from the regular classes in the key public school. Thus, to distinguish the regular classes in the public school and the international department,

hereafter I will use “key public school” and “international department”, respectively, to refer to them.

I chose these four different settings based on the results of my pilot study. According to the pilot study, of the 84 participants who reported on the type of high school they attended<sup>1</sup>, most (58.3%) graduated from public schools; some came from foreign language schools and international schools or international departments in public schools. Since international schools and international departments are fairly similar, I chose the international department of a public school as a setting for a case study. I observed classes at two public schools because in China, public schools are categorized as key schools and ordinary schools. Usually key schools have better teachers, teaching resources, and better academic achievements than ordinary schools. Because only looking at a key school or ordinary school might not be representative enough for public schools, I observed both. Moreover, since most students, in my pilot study, came from public schools, it was also reasonable to observe two public schools for this study to see the different facets of public school teaching from different perspectives. The present study also took place in a cram school because private supplementary tutoring in cram schools was reported in my pilot study as an important resource for Chinese students to prepare for undergraduate studies in the U.S., even more important than the writing instruction they received in high school.

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<sup>1</sup> My pilot study included 91 participants, but seven did not report the type of the high school they attended.

### 3.3.1 Purdue University

Purdue University, well known for its rich cultural diversity, ranks one of the top three universities with the largest international student body in the United States. As of 2015, a total of 9,230 students from abroad comprised 23.4% of the total student body; 4,426 students from China comprised 48% of the total international student body, among which 3,028 students were at the undergraduate level (Purdue University, 2015). As first-year composition is a required course, every student has to take it. Addressing these many students' writing needs in the classrooms is of great importance.

At Purdue University, I gathered data using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. I obtained 187 valid responses to the questionnaire and interviewed 11. A description of the process used in the recruitment of participants and information on participants will be provided in 3.4 in detail.

### 3.3.2 A Key Public School

The key public senior high school where I conducted my research is a national model school<sup>2</sup> and plays a leading role in the province. It features quality-oriented education and has excellent academic achievements. The mission of the school is to “provide every student with boundless space to take the initiative to develop” (KAL, personal communication, September 24, 2014). As one of the largest high schools in the

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<sup>2</sup> “National Model School” stands for the best schools (national model primary/junior middle/high school). To be elected as a national model school, schools need to go through rigorous selection procedures by Ministry of Education based on their scale, academic achievement, teacher quality, teaching philosophy, and school culture.

city, it has three campuses—a day school campus and two boarding school<sup>3</sup> campuses. Altogether there were 133 classes with over 7,000 students and over 570 teaching and administrative staff. Class enrollments ranged from 45 to 55 students. The present study took place on the largest campus—a boarding campus with 81 classes (20 classes in Grade 10, 22 classes in Grade 11, and 39 classes in Grade 12<sup>4</sup>). On this campus, class begins at 8:00 am, but there is a morning self-study session starting at 7:30 am. Each class session is 45 minutes; there are four class sessions in the morning, and in the afternoon there are three class sessions, followed by an extracurricular session. After dinner, the night self-study session starts at 6:30 pm and ends at 9:30pm.

At this school, my participants included an administrator, English teachers, and students. I interviewed the vice principal to get contextual information about this school. To see how English writing was taught at the school, I observed the class sessions of three teachers—one in each grade—and four class sessions for each teacher, collected handouts and students' texts, and interviewed the teachers.

### 3.3.3 An Ordinary Public School

The ordinary public school, also a boarding school, had 60 classes, 20 classes for each grade from grade 10 to grade 12, with each class ranging from 45 to 62 students. The school principle is: “everything is for students' lifelong development” (OAC, personal communication, September 25, 2014). The academic schedule of this school is very similar to that of the key school except for that at this school morning self-study

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<sup>3</sup> Boarding school students need to stay on campus all the time except for weekends and holidays, when they can go home.

<sup>4</sup> In China, senior high school is three years, grade 10 to grade 12.

sessions begin at 7:00 am instead of 7:30 am. Different from the key public school whose teachers do not have office hours, the teachers in the ordinary school have fixed work hours from 8:00am to 5:40pm and need to work in their offices even when they do not teach.

At this school, I interviewed the vice principal, observed the class sessions of three teachers—one in each grade and four class sessions for each teacher, and interviewed them. In addition, I obtained some lesson plans, handouts and students' texts.

### 3.3.4 A Foreign Language School

Different from the key school and ordinary school which are both public schools, the foreign language school is a private boarding high school that focuses on foreign languages. The school objective is “to comprehensively improve the quality of all the students” (FAD, personal communication, Oct 8, 2014). It is one of the 17 foreign language schools in Mainland China that sends admitted-by-recommendation (“Bao Song” in Chinese) students to priority colleges and universities<sup>5</sup>. The recommendation system requires interviews at the last stage, so the foreign language school emphasizes speaking in teaching, as reflected in their teaching philosophy—“listening and speaking in the lead; reading and reciting follow-up; writing and translation [finally]; scenes blended; practice extended” (FAD, personal communication, Oct 8, 2014). This school had 60 classes with 20 in each grade; every class had about 50 students; however, students, when taking English classes, are divided into smaller groups, so every English session has about 25

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<sup>5</sup> In China, the National Ministry of Education determined that 17 foreign language high schools are qualified to send students to universities through the admitted-by-recommendation (“Bao Song” in Chinese) process; students who go through this process do not need to take the College Entrance Examination (Gao Kao).



students. The academic schedule of the school is very similar to that of the ordinary high school. One distinct feature of the schedule of the foreign language school is the “Song of the Week”, i.e., all students need to sing the Song of the Week after the first class session in the afternoon; the songs are all English songs, and there is a list of songs for each week.

At this school, I interviewed the Dean of Students, observed the class sessions of three teachers—one in each grade and two class sessions for each teacher, and interviewed two of them.

### 3.3.5 An International Department

The international department is part of the key public school with an entirely different teaching schedule and curriculum from those of the regular classes in the key school. In addition to taking the regular classes, students in the international department need to take English classes to prepare them for overseas tests and AP classes. A flower composed of seven Cs is its logo, symbolizing “creativity, confidence, communication, curiosity, conscientiousness, courage, and cooperation”. Founded in 2011, it has Sino-American high school curricula, which contain not only the ordinary courses of Chinese high schools, but also American high school courses. In addition, they also provide AP courses (CAW, personal communication, October 20, 2014). At the international department, there were two classes for each grade, and each class had 30 students. The biggest difference between the international department and the other high schools depicted above is that the former offers writing as an independent subject. In each grade there is one writing teacher. There are two consecutive English writing sessions every week: 50 minutes for each session with a 10 minute break in between.

At this school, I observed eight writing sessions of one teacher in grade 11, interviewed him and obtained written materials including some handouts, PPTs and students' texts. I also interviewed the director of the department to get more contextual information about the international department.

### 3.3.6 Cram School

The cram school at which the present study took place is one of the major branch schools of a large language training and test preparation corporation in China. As the largest cram school corporation in China, it has branch schools in 52 cities, and the one where I conducted my research is located in the provincial city and is one of its major branch schools. The corporation is well known for offering courses to prepare students for language and entrance exams used by educational institutions in Mainland China, the U.S., and some other English speaking countries such as the U.K., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The test preparation courses “focus on quality instruction and test-taking techniques designed to help students achieve high scores on the most widely used admissions and assessment tests” (“Test Preparation”, n. d.). For the year ending May 31, 2015, it had about 315,000 students enrolled in overseas test preparation courses (CAH, personal communication, October 11, 2014). The overseas exams they prepare students for include: the Scholastic Aptitude/Assessment Test (SAT), American College Test (ACT), Graduate Record Examination (GRE), Law School Admission Test (LSAT), Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Business English Certificate (BEC), Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC).

At this school, I observed eight TOEFL writing sessions and interviewed the instructor. In addition, I interviewed the Director of the Overseas Test Preparation Department for more contextual information about the school.

### 3.4 Recruitment Procedure and Participants

I recruited participants from the six settings presented above. At Purdue University, my participants were Chinese students; in Mainland China, my participants were teachers and administrators as well as students in the classes that I observed. Since the recruitment of participants in Mainland China was fairly similar, I will group them together when explaining the process of recruitment.

#### 3.4.1 Purdue University

##### 3.4.1.1 Recruitment procedure

At Purdue University, I recruited participants from the first-year composition course for international students (ENGL 106i); the majority of the students in the course were from China. My criteria for recruiting participants for the questionnaire were: 1; They were undergraduate students from Mainland China. (I did not include students from Hong Kong, Macau, or Taiwan because English writing instruction in these regions is probably fairly different from that in Mainland China<sup>6</sup>.) 2; They held F-1 visas. 3; They attended high schools in Mainland China, not necessarily all three years but at least some

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<sup>6</sup> I am not saying English writing instruction in Mainland China is unified and the same across the whole country, but it is at least more homogeneous compared with Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, considering the government issues national curriculum guides to all cities despite the regional difference.

time, so that they have high school experience in Mainland China<sup>7</sup>. 4; They had been enrolled in ENGL 106i (the first-year composition for international students) for at least four weeks to make sure they had already gained some experience with English writing instruction in U.S. universities and could share their feelings on the usefulness of their prior writing instruction and experience in terms of preparing them for the writing courses at Purdue.

I asked for permission of colleagues who were teaching ENGL 106i for me to go to their classrooms to recruit participants. For those students who were willing to participate in my study, they were asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire through Qualtrics online. Altogether I recruited 256 students for the questionnaire, among whom 56 did not finish the whole questionnaire, and thus were excluded from the study. Of the rest of the 200 students who finished the questionnaire, 13 went to U.S. high schools and never attended any high schools in Mainland China. Therefore, in the end, I obtained 187 valid responses to the questionnaire, and this made up the questionnaire data at this setting for the present study.

At the end of the questionnaire, they were asked if they were willing to be interviewed later. Based on the percentage of students from different types of high schools which will be presented in the next section, I chose 11 interviewees from those who said yes: six from public schools (three from key schools and three from ordinary schools), three from international schools or international departments in other schools, and two from foreign language schools. I had planned also to interview students from

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<sup>7</sup> Some students finished all their high school in the U.S., and those students were not investigated in the present study, since their writing instruction should be very similar to that of American students.

private schools other than foreign language or international schools, but the questionnaire results suggested that few Chinese students (only 3.4%) were from that type of school, so this group has not been included in the present study. All in all, from the setting of Purdue University, I obtained 187 responses to the questionnaire and conducted 11 interviews.

#### 3.4.1.2 Participants' profiles

Of the 187 participants, 117 (62.6%) were males and 70 (37.4%) were females. Their ages ranged from 18 to 22, with an average of 18.7. As for the year they were in, 160 (85.6%) students were freshmen, 12 (6.5%) were sophomores, 13 (7%) were juniors, and two (1.1%) were seniors. Except for 42 students who had not decided their majors, others majored in a wide variety of fields including Engineering, Management, Computer Science, Economics, Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, Communication, Physics, Education, Accounting, Actuarial Science, Sociology, Marketing, Film Production, Apparel Design and Technology, and so on<sup>8</sup>. Of the 145 participants who had majors, 98 were in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) and 47 were in Arts.

In terms of the types of high schools they went to, except for ten who went to more than one type of school, all the others finished their high school in one school. One hundred and seven went to public schools; 25 went to international schools; 23 went to international departments in public/foreign language schools; 15 went to foreign language schools; and seven went to private schools other than foreign language school or international schools. Of the ten who went to more than one high school, they all started

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<sup>8</sup> These majors were listed in the order most to least participants.

in public high schools and then switched to international departments in their original public schools (five), international schools (two), private school for AP class (two), and high school in the U.S. (one) at their second (grade 11) or third year (grade 12). Since the questionnaire asked them to answer the questions based on their experience in their first school, they were categorized in public schools for data analysis, which meant in total 117 participants were under the “Public” category. In addition, considering the similarity of international schools and international departments in other schools, I grouped participants from those two types of schools together under the “International” category.

As for the 11 interviewees, as mentioned earlier, six were from public schools (three from key schools and three from ordinary schools), three from international schools or international departments in other schools, and two from foreign language schools. Detailed information about the interviewees is shown in Table 1. All names used in this study are pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and facilitate coding.

Table 1. Student interviewees' profiles

Interviewees	School	Age	Gender	Year
KA	KP	18	F	1
KB	KP	18	F	1
KC	KP	19	M	1
OA	OP	19	M	1
OB	OP	18	F	1
OC	OP	18	F	1
IA	IS	18	M	1
IB	ID	18	M	1
IC	ID	20	F	2
FA	FLS	19	F	1
FB	FLS	19	M	1

Note. KP stands for key public schools; OP stands for ordinary public schools; IS stands for international schools; ID stands for international departments; FLS stands for foreign language schools.

Of the 11 interviewees, as shown in Table 1 above, six were female students and five were males. All were freshmen except for IC from an international department. Their ages ranged from 18 to 20, with an average of 18.5 years old.

### 3.4.2 Recruitment of Participants in Mainland China

#### 3.4.2.1 The City

In Mainland China, I mainly wanted to obtain data from classroom observations and interviews with English teachers and school administrators; therefore, I needed to

recruit participants from as many different types of schools as possible. Before I recruited participants, I had to decide in which city I was going to conduct my research. My criteria for choosing the city were: 1; It was a city many Purdue students reported to have come from. 2; It had various types of high schools. 3; I had some connections with people in the city that could help me recruit as many participants as possible. Based on these criteria, I chose a provincial capital city in Northern China. It met all the criteria above: it was reported as one of the top five cities from where the participants in my pilot study reported to have come; it has almost all types of schools that I wanted to investigate—public schools, international departments, foreign language schools and cram schools that offer overseas test preparation courses; and I had some connection with some friends who helped with my recruitment of participants.

#### 3.4.2.2 Recruitment Procedures

After I chose the city for my data collection, I sent emails to the principals of 10 high schools asking for their permission to recruit participants in their schools. To increase the chance of getting permission, I offered to do something that the schools, teachers, or students might like, e.g., giving a talk on English learning and teaching or about life in the U.S., or anything that they might think helpful. In the end, I got permission from five schools—two key public schools, two ordinary schools, and one foreign language school. I chose one key public school, one ordinary school, and one foreign language school to conduct my research. Since the key public school has an international department, it meant I had four settings from which to recruit participants. I went to the schools, and talked with English teachers about my research and how they



could participate in my study. Some teachers were not comfortable with my observing their classes maybe because they thought I am a Ph.D. student in an English department in an American university with good reputation and my research interest is second language writing. Thus, they considered me as a kind of “authority” on English teaching and were hesitant to allow me to observe their classes. As one of them said, “I don’t think you want to come to my class. Your English is too good; you won’t get any useful information from my class.” Despite this, luckily except for the international department, I recruited at least one teacher from each grade of the three other schools. In the end, I chose to observe one teacher’s class sessions in each grade in the three schools. At the international department, since there were only three writing teachers (one in each grade), one teacher agreeing to participate my study was lucky of me considering that in the other three schools there were over 80 English teachers altogether. In addition to the teachers, I also was able to interview one administrator from each of the four research settings.

My recruitment of the cram school participants was easier compared to that of high school teachers thanks to my connection with a former colleague at the cram school. The colleague (CAH) was the director of the Overseas Test Preparation Department at the cram school. He not only allowed me to conduct research in his department, but also agreed to be my participant as well. I went to their weekly meeting to recruit participants for my study. In the end, I observed one writing teacher’s class sessions, interviewed her, and interviewed CAH.

In the following sections, I will outline the participants’ profiles. The participants included high school students, high school teachers and administrators, cram school

students, a teacher, and an administrator. Since the students participated in the study by allowing me to observe their class sessions, I will not provide detailed profiles of them in the study.

#### 3.4.2.3 Teacher Participants' Profiles

I have 11 teacher participants: three from the key public school, three from the ordinary public school, three from the foreign language school, one from the international department, and one from the cram school. They participated in my study by allowing me to observe their sessions, taking part in my interviews, and providing written materials. The majority of them were females (eight) and only three were males. Although the participants were not balanced in terms of gender, it is understandable since in China there are many more female teachers than male teachers, especially in K-12 schools. Their ages ranged from 26 to 47, with an average of 35.5. They had taught from two years to 25 years. The class lasted from 40 minutes to one hour and the class size ranged from 15 students to 62, with the high schools having fairly large classes.

In terms of the highest degrees they had earned and their majors, most of the teachers had a master's degree, and only four had a bachelor's degree. Except for teacher ITH in the international department and CTC at the cram school, all the other teachers majored in some fields that are closely related to English teaching: Education or English. Even though ITH and CTC majored in Economics and Marketing, which seemed not to be related to English teaching, they had fairly good English proficiency since ITH obtained his degree from a university in Hong Kong and CTC in Australia. It is fairly common in international schools or cram schools to hire teachers from abroad even if the

teachers do not hold a degree related to education or English teaching, since the schools want the teachers to prepare students for overseas tests and thus value the overseas experience of the teachers. The detailed information can be seen in Table 2 Below.

Table 2. Teacher participants' profiles

Teacher	Age	F/M	School	Grade	Class Size	Class Length	YoT	Highest Degree Earned	Major
KTA	42	F	KP	10	48	45min	22	Master	Education
KTB	35	F	KP	11	50	45min	12	Bachelor	English
KTC	47	F	KP	12	55	45min	25	Master	Education
OTA	40	M	OP	10	52	45min	19	Bachelor	Education
OTB	37	F	OP	11	59	45min	15	Master	Education
OTC	31	F	OP	12	60	45min	10	Bachelor	Education
FTA	35	F	FLS	10	24	40min	13	Bachelor	English
FTB	29	M	FLS	11	25	40min	5	Master	Education
FTC	41	F	FLS	12	25	40min	19	Master	Education
ITH	28	M	ID	11	30	50min	2	Master	Marketing
CTC	26	F	CS	NA	15	1h	2	Master	Economics

Note. F/M stands for female/male; YoT stands for year of teaching; KP stands for the key public school; OP stands for the ordinary public school; FLS stands for the foreign language school; ID stands for the international department; CS stands for the cram school.

### 3.4.2.4 Administrator Participants' Profiles

I have five administrator participants: one from each of the five research settings in China. They were KAL, Vice Principal of the key public high school; OAC, Vice Principal of the ordinary public high school; FAD, Dean of Students of the foreign language school; IDW, Director of the international department; and CSH, Director of the Overseas Test Preparation Department at the cram school. Interestingly but not surprisingly, they were all males. The administrators at the three high schools were all in their 50s and had worked at the school for over 25 years. Although IDW worked in the international department for only 3 years, he had worked at the key public school for 18 years and transferred to the international department when it was founded in 2011. CSH, at the cram school, had also worked a fairly long time considering that the school in the Provincial capital city was in existence for 9 years by the time I conducted my research. Detailed information on the administrators can be found in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Administrator participants' profiles

Administrators	Age	Gender	School	Year at the School
KAL	54	M	KP	30
OAC	50	M	OP	25
FAD	51	M	FLS	26
IDW	40	M	ID	3
CSH	35	M	CS	8

### 3.5 Data Collection

Data for the present study was collected through a questionnaire, interviews, classroom observations, analysis of written materials, and a forum.

#### 3.5.1 The Questionnaire

An anonymous online questionnaire was distributed to 256 Chinese students at Purdue University (187 valid responses were received) to elicit how they prepared themselves for undergraduate studies in the U.S. in terms of English writing from the following aspects: in high school writing instruction, private supplementary tutoring in cram schools, and online materials. Before the questionnaire was distributed, a pilot study was conducted with 91 Chinese students at the same university to test the applicability of the instrument and elicit the main approaches students used to improve their English writing for overseas study. Based on the results of the pilot study and the suggestions of the pilot study participants, modifications were made. The final questionnaire contained five parts with both closed-item and open-ended questions. Part I asked the students for their personal information, including their age, gender, year at Purdue, major, and the type of high school they attended. Part II asked about the English class and the English writing instruction they received in high school such as the time spent on writing teaching per week, writing assigned, feedback received, and methods used by their teachers to teach writing. Part III asked about their experience in private supplementary tutoring in English writing in terms of the type of classes they took, time they spent on private supplementary tutoring in English writing, methods used by cram school teachers to teach writing, feedback they received, and perceptions of the usefulness of private

supplementary tutoring. Part IV asked about their experience with online writing and using online websites in terms of if, what, and why they wrote online, and how they made use of online materials to improve their English writing or prepare for writing tests. Part V asked in what aspects their prior writing instruction and experience had or had not prepared them for university writing courses. The results of the pilot study indicated that the questionnaire should be conducted in simplified Chinese since it would be easier to understand and save time for students in answering the questions. For most of the participants, the questionnaire was finished in 15 to 20 minutes.

### 3.5.2 Interviews

Interviews were conducted with Chinese students at Purdue University and teachers and administrators in China. I interviewed a total of 26 students, teachers, and administrators. Since I shared the same L1, Mandarin Chinese, with all participants, I was able to offer them the option of having conversations in either Chinese or English. All of them opted for Chinese, although some of them code switched to English occasionally. Interviews lasted from 20 minutes to one hour, with the average interview time being 38 minutes.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The interview transcripts were shown to the interviewees to ensure the authenticity and reliability of the interview data.

During the interviews, I kept an open mind and asked fairly open-ended questions, i.e., I tried to put aside any assumptions about the teaching of English writing that I might have made from my own experience of learning to write in English and the results of my

pilot study. Putting the assumptions aside increased the reliability of the research in that pre-held assumptions might have caused the researcher to ask questions to get “expected answers” instead of real answers and thus would hinder obtaining information needed to paint a good picture of what was going on in the context.

Moreover, as long as I had guiding questions for the interviews, I did not restrict myself to asking the exact questions on my list, nor did I follow the order of the guiding questions. Sometimes, interviewees, while answering one question, commented on something that was related to another question that I wanted to ask later, and I would take it from there instead of following the order of the questions rigidly. For example, when I asked the question “How do you teach writing” (Question 5 on my interview questions list for high school teachers, see Appendix C), some interviewees talked about the activities they assigned, and that was related to Question 9. In that case, I would jump over Question 6, 7, and 8 and follow the flow of the interviewee. Later, I came back to Questions 6, 7, and 8. In this way, the interviewees were able to talk freely and naturally. I also thought it more important for them to talk at their own pace instead of forcing them to answer all questions in full detail. Thus, different interviewees focused on various questions in their responses since they talked in more detail about issues they thought were important. Despite this, I was able to obtain enough responses that covered all the interview questions on my list.

In addition, I tried not to interrupt interviewees when they were talking, and let them finish what they would like to say before asking another question. Sometimes, although interviewees talked about something that was not on my interview question list, I did not stop them or interrupt them because, although it did not address questions on my

list, it was interesting information and helped provide answers to some questions. E.g., some teachers, when answering the question “what kind of feedback do you give for students’ writing”, talked about the heavy workload they had and the large class size, which although not addressing questions on my list, helped explain the way they gave feedback.

Something that was interesting during my interviews was that I was not only asking questions but also answering questions sometimes. For example, a teacher in the ordinary high school asked me about the courses I taught, how I taught, and English writing instruction in U.S. universities. Although this was not related to the present study, I answered his questions patiently. This actually helped me gain more information from the interviewee because when sharing with him information about English writing instruction in the U.S., the interviewee was commenting and comparing with the way he taught English writing. Although I did not ask questions, I gained enough information to answer my interview questions. And it was more informative, because when I was answering his questions, I built good rapport with him, and his attitude in talking about how he taught English writing changed from an interviewee helping me do research to a friend having a good conversation with me. This also happened with the writing instructor in the international department. He asked for feedback on his teaching after I observed his class and asked me to share materials that I used when teaching English writing. After I gave him my feedback and wrote down his email address and promised to send him materials later, he talked more earnestly. In addition, while originally he did not feel comfortable making any teaching materials available to me, after what I did, he shared with me some of the handouts and PPTs he gave to students and writing he graded



for students. The interview lasted for one hour and I obtained valuable information. I think his role changed from an interviewee helping me do research to someone that asked for my help and thus wanted to pay back by providing more materials.

### 3.5.3 Classroom Observations

When I was observing the class sessions, I took notes concerning anything related to writing, and if I had obtained the teacher's permission before class, I recorded. In addition, I collected the relevant handouts given to students and exercise sheets used in class.

Since except for in the international department and the cram school where English writing was an independent course, in other schools it is integrated with other skills and the course is English in general, teachers were not able to predict when they would do something related to writing. Therefore, the class sessions I observed were not all related to writing, and some of them were seldom related to writing. Despite this, I was able to see how writing was integrated to the overall course and how it was taught.

### 3.5.4 Written Materials

In addition to distributing a questionnaire and conducting interviews, I examined written materials. These materials included students' writing, teachers' lesson plans, textbooks, the curriculum guides for English teaching in high school, and relevant published journal articles.

Some teachers made their teaching materials and students' writing available to me. For example, one teacher, at the end of one class I was observing, asked her students if they still had their "writing book" (a notebook where they did writing since they were

freshmen). She collected the writing books of the students who still kept them and did not mind showing them to me. I took pictures of the writing and gave them back to the students the next day.

As for the other written materials, I obtained them through different ways. The textbooks were available at the bookstores. They were not exclusively for English writing; rather, they were for English in general with sections on writing interwoven. I downloaded the curriculum guides on high school English teaching from online. I examined the curriculum guides with a special focus on the parts related to writing, e.g., the goals for English writing, the types of writing prescribed for students to do and so on. I also read relevant published journal articles on English writing and English writing teaching in high school retrieved from CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) database.

### 3.5.5 A Forum

To know more about students' writing experience using online resources, I also examined a forum that was reported to have been used by many of the student participants. The forum has extensive information on overseas test preparation for TOEFL, IELTS, SAT, and GRE (for more information on the forum, see p. 152).

## 3.6 Data Analysis

Since I distributed the questionnaire through Qualtrics online survey software, after I deleted the invalid responses, Qualtrics generated an initial report of the results automatically with basic statistical results provided; however, I wanted to look at more detailed results sometimes and, moreover, I also wanted to look at the responses of

students from different types of schools, which Qualtrics did not do for me. Hence, I downloaded data to a Microsoft Excel sheet for analysis. Students' responses to the closed-item questions and their demographic information were analyzed through mathematical calculation and categorization. Students' responses to the open-ended questions were copied and pasted from the spreadsheet into a Microsoft Word document and coded.

As for the interviews, they were all audio-recorded and transcribed. When I was analyzing the interview data, I used the Chinese transcripts to make sure no important information got lost due to translation. The transcripts were translated only when they were used to present results to ensure the accuracy of the data analysis. The interview recordings were also transcribed and categorized based on a coding scheme I developed that will be talked about later. I also used the coding scheme to analyze the class observation notes and students' writing. The textbooks, curriculum guides, and other materials served as background material and were not coded.

I developed the coding scheme based on students' responses to the questionnaire questions, the research questions of this study, the interview questions, my own knowledge regarding English writing teaching in China, and my own teaching experience. The coding scheme went through several rounds of changes and modification in the process of coding, and after the final version of the coding scheme was established, I went through the data again to make sure they were coded correctly. For example, at first I had grading and feedback as two independent categories, yet when I was coding interview transcripts with some teachers, I realized that feedback should be a sub-category of grading. I also tried to use abbreviations made of letters and numbers (e.g.,

Ia1) for coding at the beginning, but I realized that was more troublesome for me than using the full words since remembering all the abbreviations took much time and I was confused easily when using the abbreviations. Finally, I developed the coding scheme presented below.

1. High schools (Key, Ordinary, Foreign Language, and International):
  - a. Teaching: Objective, time, methods, class activity, aspects, emphasis
  - b. Assignment: in/after class, frequency, length, type, topic, draft
  - c. Grading: criteria, feedback (type, frequency, emphasis)
  - d. Perception: usefulness (test, writing ability, writing course)
2. Cram schools:
  - a. Basic: receive, type, time, reason
  - b. Teaching: Objective, time, method, class activity, aspects, emphasis
  - c. Assignment: in/after class, frequency, draft
  - d. Feedback: type, frequency, emphasis
  - e. Perception: usefulness (test, writing ability, writing course)
3. Online Experience:
  - a. Writing: venue, reason, frequency, type, perception
  - b. Using online materials (UOM): material, way, perception

When I was coding, I used H for high school and use K for key school, O for Ordinary school, F for foreign language school, and I for International school or international department; I used CS for cram school, and OL for online. For example, when I was coding something related to the type of feedback given by ordinary high

school teachers, I used the code OH\_feedback\_type; when I was coding where students wrote online, I used the code OL\_writing\_venue.

When I was analyzing the forum, I focused on the resources they offered and users' posts under the TOEFL section since that section was the one used most frequently by Chinese students to prepare for undergraduate studies in U.S. universities.

### 3.7 Summary of the Chapter

The present study used a mixed methods research design, collected data in various settings, and adopted triangulated instruments. Altogether I surveyed 187 students, observed 46 English/English writing class sessions, interviewed 26 students, teachers, and administrators; and examined written materials. To be more specific, I interviewed 11 Purdue students, three key high school teachers, three ordinary high school teachers, two foreign language school teachers, one international department teacher, one cram school teacher, and one administrator from each of the five settings in Mainland China. I observed 12 English class sessions at the key school, 12 at the ordinary school, six at the foreign language school, eight at the international department, and eight sessions at the cram school. The written materials I examined included textbooks, curriculum guides, student' writing, lesson plans, teaching materials, and published journal articles on teaching English writing. The analysis of the various data yielded interesting and meaningful results, which I will report in the next few chapters.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS OF HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH WRITING INSTRUCTION

In this chapter, I will report on the results of my analysis of high school English writing instruction from four perspectives: students' perceptions of English writing, teaching, assignment, grading, and perceptions of the usefulness of the instruction in terms of helping them prepare for English writing for undergraduate studies in U.S. universities. I will first present students' perceptions of English writing in terms of its difficulty and importance; then I will report on teaching in high schools from the following perspectives: nature of English writing, origins of teachers, teaching objectives, time devoted to teaching writing, teaching methods, and the aspects of writing taught. My analysis of assignments will be about the amount of writing assignments done, topics, and types of assignment. The grading of writing in high schools will be examined in terms of criteria for grading and feedback. I will end this chapter with students' perceptions of the usefulness of English writing instruction they received in high schools for their writing courses in their undergraduate studies in the U.S. and with a discussion of this chapter. When reporting on the results, I sometimes present the results from different types of high schools separately when it is necessary.

### 4.1 Students' Perceptions of English Writing

Before looking at the instruction in English writing students received in high school, it is important to understand students' perceptions of English writing in terms of

its importance in school and difficulty. When the participants were asked to rank the importance of the four skills of English in their school from most important (1) to least important (4), the results were: reading 1.68, listening 2.47, writing 2.49, and speaking 3.37. It can be seen that in most participants' schools, reading was regarded as the most important skill and speaking, the least important; listening and writing scored about the same. The different amount of emphasis on various skills may be attributed to their weighting in the NMET (National Matriculation English Test<sup>9</sup>). The national version of the NMET consists of four major sections: Listening (30 points), Reading (40 points), Cloze test (45 points)—cloze test in multiple choice format (30 points) and cloze without giving options (15 points), and Writing, which has two parts—part I is identifying sentence errors (10 points), and part II is guided writing (25 points)<sup>10</sup>. The first part of the Writing section is error correction; teachers usually focus on grammar and mechanics drilling in teaching rather than writing to prepare for this part (Cheng & Qi, 2006). Therefore, real writing only takes place in the guided writing section. Figure 2 is an example of part I, and Figure 3 part II of the writing section in the NMET.

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<sup>9</sup> The National Matriculation Test is the university entrances test of English for the whole country.

<sup>10</sup> The national version of the NMET is not used across the whole country; some provinces and cities develop their own versions. However, each year, the National Educational Examinations Authority (NEEA) sets a test syllabus for the NMET and prescribes the test format, time, weighting, and testing content. Therefore, despite the freedom in developing their own papers, the cities and provinces are guided by the test syllabus issued by the NEEA and follow the same test format (Cheng & Qi, 2006).

**第四部分 写作 (共两节, 满分 35 分)****第一节 短文改错 (共 10 小题; 每小题 1 分, 满分 10 分)**

假定英语课上老师要求同桌之间交换修改作文, 请你修改你同桌写的以下作文。文中共有 10 处语言错误, 每句中最多有两处。每处错误仅涉及一个单词的增加、删除或修改。

增加: 在缺词处加一个漏字符号(∧), 并在其下面写出该加的词。

删除: 把多余的词用斜线(\)划掉。

修改: 在错词下划一横线, 并在该词下面写出修改后的词。

注意: 1. 每处错误及其修改均仅限一词;

2. 只允许修改 10 处, 多者(从第 11 处起)不计分。

When I was a child, I hoped to live in the city. I think I would be happy there. Now I am living in a city, but I miss my home in countryside. There the air is clean or the mountains are green. Unfortunately, on the development of industrialization, the environment has been polluted. Lots of studies have been shown that global warming has already become a very seriously problem. The airs we breathe in is getting dirtier and dirtier. Much rare animals are dying out. We must found ways to protect your environment. If we fail to do so, we'll live to regret it.

*Figure 2. Part I of the writing section in the NMET*

**第二节 书面表达 (满分 25 分)**

假定你是李华, 你校英文报“外国文化”栏目拟刊登介绍美国节日风俗和中学生生活的短文。请给美国朋友彼得写信约稿, 要点如下:

1. 栏目介绍;
2. 稿件内容;
3. 稿件长度: 约 400 词;
4. 交稿日期: 6 月 28 日前。

**注意:**

1. 词数 100 左右;
2. 可以适当增加细节, 以使行文连贯;
3. 开头语已为你写好。

Dear Peter,

I'd like to ask you to write an article for our school's English newspaper.

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*Figure 3. Part II of the writing section in the NMET*

[Translation: Part II Essay Writing (25 points)]

Suppose you are LI Hua, to obtain an essay for the “Foreign Culture” column in your school English newspaper introducing American holidays and secondary school



students' daily life, you need to write to your American friend Peter to call for a manuscript. The main points are as follows:

1. Introduction to the Column; 2. Content of the manuscript;
3. Length of the manuscript; 3. Deadline for the manuscript: June 28

Note:

1. The essay should be about 100 words.
2. You can add some details to make the essay cohesive.
3. The beginning of the essay is provided below.]

That being said, writing weighs only 16.6% of the total score (150 points) of the NMET. This low weight may have caused schools and teachers not to place much importance on it. A teacher confirms this in an interview: "Writing is only a small part in the NMET. It's not like reading, which is the most important section. So we consider reading the most important and devote the lion's share of teaching time to reading, vocabulary, and grammar" (OTB, personal communication, September 29, 2014). Speaking was considered the least important, mainly because the NMET does not have a National Matriculation English Test—Oral Subtest (NMETOS).

Although writing ranked the last but one important skill in most participants' schools, students considered writing the most difficult among four English skills, followed by speaking and listening, and reading was perceived as the easiest.

## 4.2 English Writing Teaching in High Schools

### 4.2.1 Writing Courses in Chinese High Schools

Understanding the teaching of English writing in various schools requires knowing about English writing courses in high schools in China.

When asked if writing was an independent subject in their high school, only 45 (24.1%) participants responded “yes”; the other 142 (75.9%) said “no”. When public schools were examined separately, the ratio was even lower: of the 117 public school participants, only 11 (9.4%) claimed English writing was an independent subject in their schools, while the other 106 (90.6%) reported that, in their high schools, writing was incorporated into the larger scope of English class with instruction on other skills, which is in line with Lang’s (2001) report that only 8% of the surveyed students in her study had an independent writing class. Similarly, three (20%) out of 15 foreign language school participants reported having English writing as a subject, and 12 (80%) did not.

Although most public schools do not have independent English writing courses as part of their required course sequences, some schools may offer English writing as an elective course. In addition to required English classes, schools are required to offer elective courses related to English depending on what kind of courses the teachers in the schools can teach. The schools can choose to offer whatever electives they choose to students, such as Learning English from Movies, English Literature Appreciation, English Debate, and so on. However, few electives are about English writing since “writing will add a lot of workload to the teacher... Teachers need to grade students’ papers and give feedback. No one wants to teach writing” (FTA, personal communication, October 8, 2014).

In contrast, among international school (international department included) participants, 28 (58.3%) out of 48 had independent English writing courses while 20 (41.7%) did not. This indicates that in public schools and foreign language schools, writing usually is an integrated part of English with speaking, reading, and listening. That means, English teachers have the freedom to decide how much time to devote to teaching writing.

#### 4.2.2 Origin of Teachers

As for the origin of English teachers or writing teachers, the majority of student participants from public schools reported having Chinese teachers, although some participants had foreign teachers. For those who had foreign teachers, there was usually one class session with the foreign language teachers teaching English speaking; writing was mainly taught by Chinese teachers. Foreign language schools feature foreign languages and place more emphasis on language teaching; thus, they have more foreign language teachers from English speaking countries. However, similar to the situation of the public schools, those foreign teachers mainly teach speaking rather than writing. The only type of school, which has foreign teachers teaching writing, is international schools. Having Chinese teachers and foreign teachers have their respective merits and demerits: foreign teachers, as compared to Chinese teachers, may be able to help students develop more communicative competence and learn writing according to western conventions, but some of the teachers may not have a certificate or lack experience in teaching English to speakers of other languages. Moreover, foreign teachers usually go to China to gain experience abroad and sign a contract with the international school for two to three years,

which may affect the consistency of English writing teaching. IAW (Personal communication, October 20, 2014) commented on this when he said,

Many of the foreign teachers in our department are young people from English speaking countries. They don't stay here for long, from as short as one year to as long as three years...The foreign teachers change frequently. This is common in other international departments, too...It's not good for students, to some extent, since various teachers have their own teaching philosophy and approaches; students need to adapt to the change frequently and thus their improvement in writing may be interrupted.

Compared to the frequent change of foreign teachers, Chinese teachers are more stable—they usually stay in a school until retirement and teach the same cohort of the students from Grade 10 to Grade 12. The long association with the students enables them to know their students better and provide consistent teaching, although they may not bring to students excitement and new experience in learning to write as the foreign teachers do.

#### 4.2.3 Teaching Objectives

In addition to the nature of writing and the origin of teachers in various schools, it is important to know teachers' objectives in teaching English or English writing for a better understanding of their instruction in writing. When asked what was/were their objective(s) of English writing teaching, most of the public high school teachers reported that helping students gain a good grade on the NMET writing section was their main objective in teaching, as reflected in the interviews, "My objective of English writing teaching, actually not only of writing, but of English teaching in general, is to make sure

my students obtain as a high grade on the NMET as possible” (KTB, Personal communication, September 22, 2014). This objective held by the teachers was different from what was prescribed in the English Language Curriculum for Senior Secondary Schools<sup>11</sup> (hereafter abbreviated as “Curriculum”) –to cultivate students’ autonomous and collaborative learning ability, help students form effective English learning strategies, and help them develop communicative competence and the comprehensive ability to use English language skills. When asked about the discrepancy between the different objectives, KTB commented that,

I admit that the objectives set out by the Curriculum are very good, but the thing is it’s difficult to achieve in teaching, since we, I mean, teachers and students, are under huge pressure of the NMET; we don’t have extra time for communicative competency development. The most important thing is to ensure good performance on the NMET.

This comment reflects the washback of the NMET on high school English teaching. In fact, teachers spare no effort to make sure students can get a good grade on the NMET not only for students but also for themselves, since the NMET scores of students are used to evaluate teaching. The scores can affect teachers’ promotion and sense of achievement, and the teachers may be judged by students, administrators, colleagues, and even parents based on the scores (Qi, 2003, cited from Cheng & Qi, 2006). Therefore, it is

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<sup>11</sup> The *English Language Curriculum for Senior Secondary Schools*, approved by Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China and published by People’s Education Press (PEP), sets out the English language teaching objectives and assessment measures (Wang & Lam, 2009).

understandable why teachers take “ensuring a good grade” as their main and maybe the only objective for English teaching.

Although the foreign language school is a private school, the teachers held objectives similar to those of public school teachers, which may be attributed to the washback of the NMET, too. It is worth noting that despite the practice of sending students to priority universities and colleges through the admitted-by-recommendation system, every foreign language school usually has recommended places for 200 students, which means other students<sup>12</sup> still need to take the NMT for college entrance. Undoubtedly, the NMET has a huge washback on English teaching in foreign language schools as well, with writing teaching being part of it.

The teacher in the international department believes his objective in teaching English writing<sup>13</sup> is to “prepare students for a good grade on the writing section of overseas tests such as TOEFL and SAT” which is also test driven and similar to that of high school teachers, and “build a foundation for the students in terms of their writing skills so that they won’t be overwhelmed by the university writing courses in the U.S., U.K., or Canada” (ITH, personal communication, October 21, 2014), which is different from the objectives of high school teachers. He had this objective because all students in the international department aimed to go abroad for higher education, and therefore, will not take the NMET, which does not have a washback effect on the teaching in the international department, as it does in high schools. However, what is worth noting is that

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<sup>12</sup> Usually a foreign language school has about 1,000 students. This means, about 80% of the students need to take the NMET for college admission.

<sup>13</sup> The teacher in the international department comments only on his objective in teaching writing instead of English in general because the international department has writing as a separate subject rather than having writing interwoven with other skills.

teaching to the test is a common practice across the various types of school. The objectives held by teachers influenced the time they spent on teaching writing and how they taught it.

#### 4.2.4 Time Devoted to Writing

Students reported that every week they had between four and ten English sessions, with each session ranging from 40 minutes to one hour. The average was six sessions with each session being 45 minutes, which means every week the students had about four and half hours of English in-class instruction. In terms of the time spent teaching English writing explicitly, the majority of the participants reported that the time their high school teachers spent on writing was between 10 minutes to one hour (71.7%) while those with less than 10 minutes and over one hour were few, only 28.3%, as shown in Table 4. Looking at the responses of students from different types of schools separately yielded more interesting results. As high as 80.3% of public school students received instruction in writing from 10 minutes to one hour; about 19.7% received instruction in writing less than 10 minutes per week; some, although only a few (four students, 3.4%), never even received any explicit instruction in writing; and none of them received more than one hour of instruction in writing a week. Compared to the public school students, whose teachers spent a limited amount of time on writing instruction, students from foreign language schools and international schools reported that their teachers spent more time on writing. The results for those two groups of students were fairly similar. None of them chose “never”; the majority chose “10 to 30 minutes” (53.3% of foreign language school students and 37.5% of international students) and “30 minutes to one hour” (20% of

foreign language school students and 33.3% of international students); and some even chose more than one hour (20% of foreign language school students and 22.9% of international students). From Table 4, it can also be seen that over half (58.9%) of the participants reported having received less than 30 minutes of writing instruction per week. This amount of time, compared to the average time of four and half hours of English sessions, was fairly limited. When looking at students from public schools separately, the percentage was even higher; 64% of them received no more than 30 minutes of writing instruction every week. These results indicate that the time students spent on writing was fairly limited in high school.

Table 4. Time on explicit writing instruction per week

	Total		Public		Foreign language		International	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
Never	5	2.7%	4	3.4%	0	0	0	0
<10min	25	13.4%	19	16.2%	1	6.7%	3	6.3%
10-30min	80	42.8%	52	44.4%	8	53.3%	18	37.5%
30min-1h	54	28.9%	42	35.9%	3	20%	16	33.3%
1-2h	18	9.6%	0	0	1	6.7%	7	14.6%
>2h	5	2.7%	0	0	2	13.3%	4	8.3%
Total	187	100.1%	117	99.9%	15	100%	48	100%

Note. Given the small number of students from foreign language school, the percentage may not be as informative as those of other types of school.

The reasons that teachers did not spend much time teaching writing may be, first, writing is weighted less compared to reading and grammar, as mentioned in 4.1, and as



one student reported in the interview, “She (high school English teacher) never taught us how to write English essays explicitly. Most of the teaching was about grammar and reading because writing only contributes 25/150 [16.7%] to the NMET, but vocabulary, grammar, and reading contribute 85/150 [56.7%]” (OA, personal communication, November 3, 2014). Two other reasons, although different from the first one that is about the weighting in the NMET, are also related to the NMET. According to the teachers, students could get a fairly okay score on writing on the NMET easily. Even if the teachers spent more time on teaching writing, it would not increase their score to a large extent. Thus, “it’s not necessary to devote a lot of time to writing since the scores students increased are not worth the time spending on it”, and most teachers would rather “spend more time on reading, grammar, and vocabulary which would help them gain a good overall grade in the NMET” (KTC, personal communication, September 23, 2014). Another reason might be the nature of the writing prompt in the NMET. It is a guided writing exercise requiring about 100 words, and the prompt usually provides the required main points students need to write about; students need to elaborate based on the prompt. Therefore, teachers believe “the structure [of the writing] is easy to grasp; what is difficult is the vocabulary and sentence structures, so what is more important is to ask students to memorize good words, phrases and sentences so that they can use in the NMET writing” (OTC, personal communication, September 30, 2014).

#### 4.2.5 Teaching Methods

In terms of writing pedagogy, it was found that some frequent activities included, as shown in Table 5 in the order of most reported to least reported, teacher lecturing

(61%), analyzing model essays (50.3%), teaching different patterns of organization (49.7%), asking students to imitate good student writing (46%), asking students to memorize good words and phrases (45.5%), teaching grammar and doing grammar exercises (44.4%), providing students with useful sentence structures for writing tests (42.2%), asking students to discuss writing with other students (38.5%), to do peer review (37.4%), to practice handwriting (32.1%), and to memorize model essays (30.5%).

Some less frequent activities included asking students to read and imitate examples of famous writers, asking students to write journals or diaries, holding writing contests, asking students to do planning before writing, and teaching specific strategies for planning, drafting, and revising. Classroom observation yielded similar results. For example, in almost all the English sessions I observed, teachers, at the beginning of the session, would ask a few students (usually three to five depending on the space of the blackboard/whiteboard) to dictate words and phrases that they had learned the previous session, which is well known as PaHeiBan (dictating on blackboard) in China. Although peer review was reported to have been used fairly frequently, classroom observation revealed that, in peer review sessions, students were asked to correct each other's grammar and mechanical errors instead of providing feedback on content, logic, and other aspects regarding writing.

Table 5. Frequently used teaching methods

	Total		Public		Foreign Language		International	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
Teacher lectured	114	61.0%	62	53.0%	11	73.3%	38	79.2%
Analyzed model essays	94	50.3%	58	49.6%	7	46.7%	23	47.9%
Taught patterns of organization	93	49.7%	48	41.0%	9	60.0%	32	66.7%
Imitated student writing	86	46.0%	67	57.2%	6	40.0%	11	22.9%
Memorized words & phrases	85	45.5%	55	47.0%	9	60.0%	18	37.5%
Grammar teaching & exercise	83	44.4%	48	41.0%	7	46.7%	23	47.9%
Gave sentence structures	79	42.2%	48	41.0%	9	60.0%	17	35.4%
Discussed writing	72	38.5%	32	27.4%	9	60.0%	26	54.2%
Peer review	70	37.4%	40	34.2%	6	40.0%	22	45.8%
Practiced handwriting	60	32.1%	44	37.6%	5	33.3%	9	18.8%
Memorized model essays	57	30.5%	46	39.3%	4	26.7%	6	12.5%

Note. 1. The numbers and percentages reflect how many students chose the option. For example, 114 students chose the “teacher lectured” option, which means 114 (61.9%) of students reported that in their school, teacher lecturing was used as one of the teaching methods.

2. Given the small number of students from foreign language schools, the percentage may not be as informative as those of other types of schools.

When different types of schools were compared, it was found that the teaching methods used by public school teachers were different from those used in foreign language schools and international schools. For example, although asking students to imitate good student writing was one of the most frequently used methods by public

school teachers, it was less used by foreign language school teachers and seldom used by international school teachers. What is similar is the use of “memorizing model essays”. Sentences that I frequently heard when observing the English sessions in public schools included, “A model essay a week, the NMET writing is like a piece of cake.” “If you do not memorize model essays now, you’ll feel like an ant on the hot pan when you take the NMET!” “You’d better memorize these sentences in this model essay since they are ‘master sentences’ that you can use in almost every essay!” The teachers believed that memorizing was a process of learning, and imitating good essays was a great way to do it since “most high school students do not have the ability or a large enough repertoire of vocabulary and sentence structures to write well on their own; what they do in writing is to learn from others...if they can memorize and imitate other students’ good writing, those good expressions will become theirs and they can write well” (KTC, personal communication, September 23, 2014). When asked whether they worried about plagiarism if students imitated others’ writing, they seemed not to think of that as an issue because they believed, as KTA (personal communication, September 24, 2014) commented:

There is no such a thing ‘plagiarism’ (leitongjuan in pinyin, test answers with the same essays written by different students) in English writing (in the NMET) since it's a closed book test, in which they don't have access to external sources. Even if students imitated others’ writing when preparing for the test, they won't be able to write exactly the same...they will definitely use different expressions.

This reply is consistent with the belief of English teachers in Malaysian high schools (Tan & Miller, 2007), and indicates that public and some foreign language school English

teachers think memorizing and rote learning, although one of the learning styles of Chinese students, is also one of the routes by which Chinese learners achieve writing competence by internalizing external models (Bamford & Sergiou, 2005; Pennycook, 1996; Shei, 2005; cited from Zhang, 2014).

Differently, international school writing teachers seldom asked students to imitate or memorize other students' writing maybe because of their educational background—most writing teachers in international schools are either foreign teachers from the US, UK, and Canada or Chinese teachers who have obtained degrees in English speaking countries. Their western education has enabled them to emphasize property rights and ownership of texts (Pennycook, 1996), and thus they are more cautious and reluctant about asking students to memorize or imitate.

Another difference in the writing pedagogy between different types of school was the emphasis on “practicing handwriting”. In public and foreign language schools, teachers emphasized the importance of handwriting and even considered it part of the criteria for grading. As OTB emphasized in one session when lecturing, “Your handwriting is like your appearance. Although it says ‘don’t judge a person by his appearance’, people can’t see your fine qualities however nice a person you are. Most people will tell what kind of person you are based on their first impression of your appearance. If you don’t wash your face and are dressed dirty and shabby, they will think you are not a clean and tidy person. Similarly, ...if you have beautiful handwriting, the grader will have a good first impression of your writing and will give you a higher grade!” Teachers urged students to practice their handwriting and some schools even required

every student to write like print (see Figure 4 and Figure 5 for two examples of “print handwriting”).

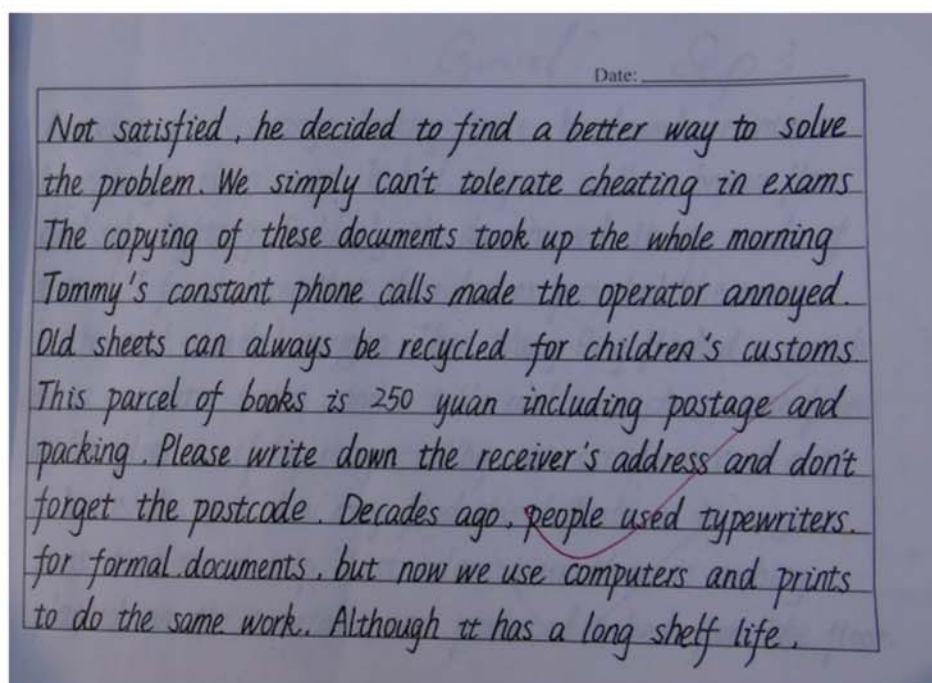


Figure 4. Print handwriting example 1

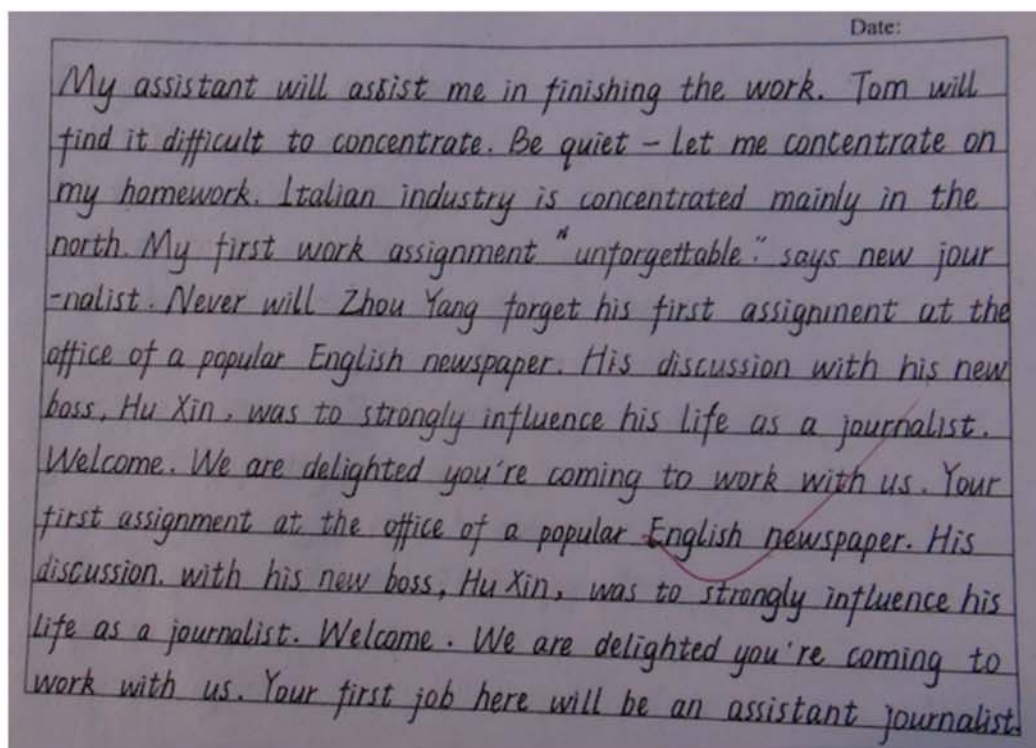


Figure 5. Print handwriting example 2

A final difference between the teaching methods used in different types of schools, although it cannot be seen by the numbers presented in Table 5, was spotted in classroom observations and interviews, was the different ways and content of lecturing. Public school teachers lectured more generally regarding English writing, while teachers' lecturing in international schools was more detailed and genre targeted. One session that I observed in the key public school was exclusively about writing; the teacher (KTA) before talking about how to write essays, told students about the rubric of the NMET guided writing, i.e., the essay should be cohesive, well organized, and demonstrate grammatical, syntactic, and lexical variety. Then the teacher talked about what students should do to meet those requirements. She first talked about how to organize an essay: "Although the NMET writing only requires about 100 words, you need to write in a few paragraphs to make it look organized...The introduction should be straightforward instead of beating around the bush since native speakers are direct. It should be very short and concise, maybe one long sentence or two shorter sentences. The second paragraph is the body and the most important paragraph; it should be about five to six sentences in which you talk about the required key points. The conclusion should be about one or two sentences, too." Following that she gave students a "16 Character Magical Rule" (as she called it) to follow—four short phrases with each having four characters: "Shu Xie Gui Fan, Yao Dian Qi Quan, Shan Guang Er San, Di Ji Bu Xian" (have neat handwriting and spelling, have all required key points, have good sentences and words, no stupid mistakes). It can be seen that this is fairly general lecturing on English writing. KTA did not explain what students should do in each part of an essay and the purpose each part serves. After class I asked her how often she lectured on writing explicitly like this. She

said, “The NMET writing structure is very easy to grasp by students, so I usually teach once in Grade 10. After this it will be mainly about asking students to memorize good words, phrases, and sentence structures which we do in every class” (KTA, personal communication, September 24, 2014).

Different from the public high school teacher who only touched on the general structure of English writing, teachers in international schools provided more detailed and sophisticated instruction, as described by a student interviewee (IB, personal communication, November 11, 2014),

My teacher spent a quarter of the class time teaching writing...I'd like to use the argumentative essay as an example to explain...First, he taught us what the purpose of that essay was and what could be a good topic...Then, he asked us to brainstorm...After that, he asked us to do some research on the Internet...Then, he would teach us how to organize the essay...To be more specific, the introduction should contain the background information and the thesis. While the body should include two to three supporting arguments with a topic sentence and specific evidence in each paragraph. The conclusion should contain the summary of your arguments and restate your thesis...Finally, he would teach us the way of documentation including the in-text citation and reference page.

The above comparisons indicate that students in different types of schools may have received fairly different types of instruction. The different ways of teaching may have impacted their expectations of the way writing is taught and their understanding of different types of writing instruction.



#### 4.2.6 Aspects of Writing Taught

In terms of what aspects of writing the teachers taught, a vast majority of students (81.3%) reported that teachers taught grammar. Following grammar, the aspects taught by teachers included sentence structures (80.7%), organization (74.3%), introductions (73.8%), conclusions (71.1%), vocabulary (70.1%), thesis statements (65.8%), logic (48.7%), and punctuation (20.3%). What was rarely reported was use of source text (6.4%), documentation (6.4%), format (2.7%), and rhetoric (2.1%).

It seems that most students received instruction in a fairly good number of aspects of writing, but the classroom observations suggested the number did not tell the true story. For example, as described earlier regarding teacher KTA's lecturing, she talked about introductions and conclusions, yet did not really teach students how to write a good introduction and conclusion. Similarly, at another teacher's (OTB's) session, she emphasized the importance of using transitional devices to make the essay cohesive, yet she did not teach students how to add transitions, nor did she guide students in using transitional devices. Instead, she gave students a list of transitional adverbs and phrases for a category, e.g., for contrast and comparison, she wrote on the blackboard "but, yet, however, on one hand, on the other hand, and nevertheless", and told students "when you are writing, you can pick anyone you want and put it in your essay" without explaining the differences between the words or phrases. This lack of differentiation between the various words and phrases may cause students to lack the ability to choose the appropriate transitional words and phrases based on the relationship between different sentences and paragraphs in their writing. This indicates that although public school teachers indeed "taught" some aspects of writing, they did not teach in a comprehensive

way, and thus students may “kind of know what it is, but don’t know how to do it in writing, especially long writing” (KB, personal communication, November 5, 2014).

In contrast, as indicated by aforementioned interviewee IB’s description of his teacher’s teaching, teachers in his high school offered detailed and comprehensive instruction including almost every aspect of writing such as planning, organization, content, logic, and even documentation. Considering that IB went to an international school, that the writing teachers there were foreign teachers, and that the objective of English teaching in that school was not to prepare students for the NMET, this result is not surprising.

### 4.3 Writing Assignments

I will look at the writing that students did vis-à-vis the amount of writing done, the topics, and the types of assignments. The amount of writing done will be looked at in terms of numbers, length, and drafts of writing assignments.

#### 4.3.1 Amount of Writing

The number of essays written by students ranged from one essay every semester in some public schools to 60 essays per semester in some international schools. The average number of the essays written by all participants in high school was 12 essays per semester. The length required for the essays in high school differed, too. The length ranged from 80 words per essay as the shortest in some public schools to 1,250 words as the longest in some international schools. The mean was 298 words. The average of the total number of words written each semester was 3,454 words. The majority of the writing was done after class. When looking at the schools separately, students in public

schools wrote about 11 essays of about 198 words each a semester, and usually they did not write multiple drafts. They wrote a total of about 2,120 words each semester. In contrast, students in foreign language schools and international schools wrote more—averaging 15 essays with each being about 537 words for international schools, and 13 essays with each being about 325 words for foreign language schools<sup>14</sup>. As for the total number of words written each semester, the average number for students in international schools was 6,602, and for those foreign language schools was 3,873.

It is interesting to note that most students from public schools reported that they were required to write between 80 and 120 words for each essay, as interviewee OC explained, “80 to 120 words is the range of word requirement of guided writing in the NMET in our province. If we wrote less than 80 words or more than 120 words, we would have points deducted” (personal communication, November 3, 2014).

In terms of whether they wrote another draft based on teachers’ feedback, it was found that, as shown in Table 6, most students (66.3%) never or sometimes wrote another draft; only 11.2% always wrote another draft.

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<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that the numbers of essays and words per essay should not be multiplied to get the total number of words students wrote each semester because those who reported writing more words for each essay wrote fewer essays. For example, students who reported writing about 1,200 words for each essay wrote about three essays per semester.

Table 6. Frequency of writing multiple drafts in different types of schools

	All		Public		Foreign Language		International	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
Always	21	11.2%	5	4.3%	3	20%	12	25%
Usually	42	22.5%	25	21.4%	6	40%	10	20.8%
Sometimes	89	47.6%	62	53.0%	2	13.3%	22	45.8%
Never	35	18.7%	25	21.4%	4	26.7%	4	8.3%
Total	187	100%	117	100.1%	15	100%	48	99.9%

Note. Given the small number of students from foreign language school, the percentage may not be as informative as those of other types of schools.

When participants from various schools were examined separately, it was found that the results for public school students and international school students had huge differences. Around 21.4% of public school students never wrote another draft while the number of international school students was only 8.3%. Similarly, only 4.3% public school students always wrote another draft, but about a quarter of international students did so. Given the small number of student participants from foreign language schools, the percentage for that column may not be as informative as those in the other columns. However, we can still see that most foreign language school students would write another draft for revision. The interview helped answer why most public school students did not write multiple drafts—students did not get good feedback to help them rewrite as indicated by KA’s comment, and students thought it meaningless to rewrite, as OB’s response suggested.

The feedback our teacher gave us was very general. The most comments I got were “Good job!” or “Keep working!” Those comments did not help me very much. Sometimes my teacher also corrected my grammar and spelling. With such kind of feedback, I didn’t know how to revise in my second draft....I would correct the grammar errors and misspellings based on the comments, but not write another draft since I didn’t know how to change the content. (KA, personal communication, November 5, 2014)

Our teachers didn’t require us to write a second draft, but they encouraged us to do so. However, even if we wrote, we wouldn’t hand in to the teachers nor would the teachers give us feedback. So we never wrote a second draft since it had no point in doing that. (OB, personal communication, November 3, 2014)

From these results, it can be seen that students in public schools did a fairly limited amount of writing; although students in foreign language schools and international schools wrote more, the amount of writing was still limited compared to the amount of writing that is required in American universities.

#### 4.3.2 Topics and Types of Assignments

The topics and types of assignments that students wrote were also examined. Topics of the assignments students did included life, culture, education, economics, politics, and jobs. As for the types of assignments, participants reported a wide range of genres, including narrative writing (75.4%), argumentative writing (52.9%), letters (46.5%), emails (41.2%), expository writing (27.3%), research papers (18.7%), book reports (15.5%), movie reviews (12.3%), and some additional genres that were reported

by only a few students, such as play writing, science reports, notice, news report, poetry, and summaries. Despite the reported various genres, most students did narrative writing, and nearly half of the students never wrote argumentative essays. Some commonly written genres in U.S. composition classes such as literature reviews, critiques, comparison and contrast essays, and annotated bibliographies were not taught in high schools. Students may feel at a loss when required to write genres that they are unfamiliar with.

Since I also examined the Curriculum and textbooks, I found a gap between the requirements of the Curriculum, the content related to writing in the textbooks, the above results, and teachers' practice. The Curriculum requires students to grasp a variety of genres of writing, including but not restricted to: notes, letters, descriptive writing, greeting cards, notice, and applications. In addition, the textbooks used in public high schools covered a wide range of genres: letters, emails, posters, newspaper articles, advertisements, reports, narrative writing (e.g., write a story about oneself), descriptive writing (e.g., describe a person), imaginative writing (e.g., write about the robot that the students want to own), creative writing (e.g., a poem, a humorous story, and the ending of a love story), expository writing (e.g., solve a problem that people might have on the moon), and instruction writing (e.g., instructions on first aid). However, teachers did not teach many of the genres. When asked about the discrepancy between the Curriculum, the textbooks, and teachers' practice, teachers expressed their frustration, as KTC (personal communication, September 23, 2014) commented,

We very much want to teach according to the Curriculum, but we have no choice.

For example, the Curriculum requires teachers to develop students'

communicative competence in English and recommended some class activities to promote that development, e.g., pair/group work, give students' more opportunities to talk in class and make the class students centered, but in reality, it is impossible. How many students do I have in a class? 55! If I let one student talk for one minute, the class is over and we didn't get time to do anything else...

What can that one minute do for the students? Nothing. So it's not that we don't want to teach according to the Curriculum; We CAN'T... As for Writing, it's the same. The Curriculum prescribed that we should teach many genres, but we don't have time to teach that many...more importantly, those genres won't be tested in the NMET. We have to spend time on what will be tested in the NMET. Anyway, helping students get a good grade is our main goal.

This echoes the study conducted by Qi (2007) when she was investigating the intended washback of the NMET, and found that the communicative features designated by the National High School English Teaching Syllabus were rarely observed in school practice despite the effort of test developers to "encourage development of students' language-use ability instead of mere linguistic knowledge<sup>15</sup> since it was believed to be more direct and communicative than the other tasks or items in the same test, most of which adopt the multiple-choice format" (Qi, 2007, p. 53).

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<sup>15</sup> For an explanation of language-use ability and linguistic knowledge, see Qi (2007, p. 53).

## 4.4 Grading

### 4.4.1 Criteria for Grading

When asked what teachers emphasized when grading students' papers, except for five students who said they did not know what their teachers' criteria were, most other students opted for "correctness in grammar or spelling" (74.7%), followed by "clarity of main idea" (70.9%) and "organization" (69.8%), and then "neatness and handwriting", "content" (both 53.2%), and "using good examples and details to illustrate main ideas" (51.6%). Other criteria reported by some students included "beauty of language" (30.2%), "length of paper" (28.6%), "quoting experts and other sources" (18.1%), and "expressing true feelings honestly" (12.6%). Few people chose "originality and imagination" (6.6%), critical thinking (1.6%), and logic (0.5%). When looking at various schools separately, the three most emphasized criteria in grading used by teachers in public school were "correctness in grammar and spelling" (76.3%), "organization" (67.5%), and "neatness and handwriting" (65.8%); those used in international schools were "clarity of main idea" (91.5%), "organization" (78.7%), and "using good examples and details to illustrate main ideas" (78.7%); and those used in foreign language school were "clarity of main idea" (15/15), "correctness in grammar and spelling" (12/15), and "organization" (9/15)<sup>16</sup>.

These questionnaire results are in line with results of data from classroom observations and interviews. Public high school teachers emphasized grammar, spelling, organization, and handwriting all the time in teaching. They believed these were most

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<sup>16</sup> Different from those of public schools and international schools, the results for foreign language schools were reported in numbers instead of percentage because the sample size of the participants from foreign language schools was small, and thus using percentage may not be as informative as actual numbers.



important for the NMET writing, but there might be some mismatch between their perception and test developers' intention. Qi (2007) found that students and teachers placed much emphasis on "neatness of paper", "good handwriting", and "keeping word limit" for a good piece of writing in the NMET, but none of the test developers considered those aspects important (p. 59). In international schools and foreign language schools, teachers considered it was important to maintain "clarity in main idea", good "organization", and "using good examples and details" in writing, although they urged students to check grammar and spelling mistakes, too. Classroom observations echoed this. Teacher FTB at the foreign language school, in one session, asked students to check each other's organization of writing, and made sure the writer "had good organization and divided paragraphs appropriately". Teacher ITH at the international school, using a whole session, talked about how to use good examples and details to support their main idea, guided students in analyzing a sample essay that did not do well in using examples, and asked students to rewrite their paper to make it a good piece of writing.

#### 4.4.2 Feedback

When asked if teachers gave feedback to them on their writing, it was found that most teachers did give feedback; the frequency of giving feedback ranged from always (28.9%) to most of the time (34.2%), to sometimes (34.2%). Very few teachers (2.7%) never gave feedback. A separate look at the results from different types of schools found that over 80% of teachers in foreign language schools and international schools either always or most of the time gave students' feedback on their writing, and more than half

of public school teachers always or most of the time did so. The detailed information can be found in Table 7.

Table 7. Frequency of feedback to students' writing

	All		Public		Foreign Language		International	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
Always	54	28.9%	23	19.7%	5	33.3%	24	50%
Most times	64	34.2%	40	34.2%	7	46.7%	16	33.3%
Sometimes	64	34.2%	51	43.6%	2	13.3%	8	16.7%
Never	5	2.7%	3	2.6%	1	6.7%	0	0
Total	187	100%	117	100.1%	15	100%	48	99.9%

Although the numerical results in Table 7 seem encouraging, when looking at the types of feedback, it was not as encouraging. When asked what types of feedback teachers usually offered, the percentage of general comments like “good job” and grades without comment took up to 38% of all feedback, with the percentage being higher for public school students (44%). The rest of the feedback focused mostly on grammar, spelling, organization, sentence structures, and word choice, with very few comments about content and logic. This is consistent with the result reported Liao (2012) and Yan (2012) that teachers' feedback was mainly about grammar. Interviews revealed teachers' practices in giving feedback and the reason behind the curtain. As teacher OTA (personal communication, September 26, 2014) replied when asked whether he gave feedback and what feedback he gave for students' writing,

I do look at every student's paper... Usually I underlined good sentences in the paper with waving lines and those having grammatical mistakes with straight lines. I also circled misspelled words... I don't often give more detailed feedback since I don't have enough time... I teach two classes; one has 52 students and the other 55. Altogether I have over 100 students. If I graded every student's writing giving detailed feedback, it will take forever... But I do tell them I'm available at their night self-study sessions. If they want to get more feedback on their writing, they can come to me... Only a small number of students come to me... I think maybe it's because the students are not motivated enough or they do not want to devote that much time to English writing.

A student interviewee echoed this comment:

Our teachers seldom gave us feedback [on our writing]. Most of the time, they only gave us a grade without comments. The ideal situation would be that the teachers would point out the mistakes on tense or singular-plural forms. Because there were too many students in one class, the teachers didn't have time to give feedback to each student. (OA, personal communication, November 3, 2014)

These comments suggest that in schools with large class sizes, it is difficult for teachers to give detailed feedback and help students improve their writing. This may be the reason why most schools did not ask students to do multiple drafts—without teachers' feedback, it would be difficult and not useful to write more than one draft (see Figure 6, 7, and 8 for feedback examples).

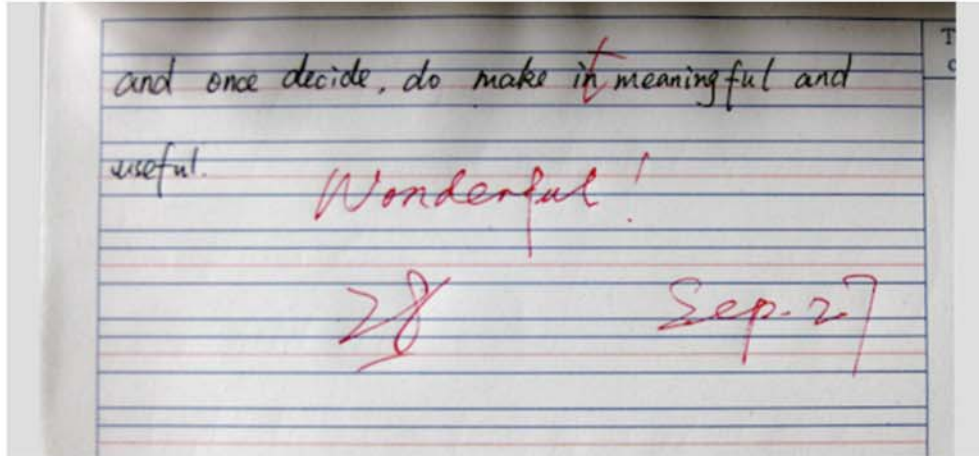


Figure 6. Feedback example 1

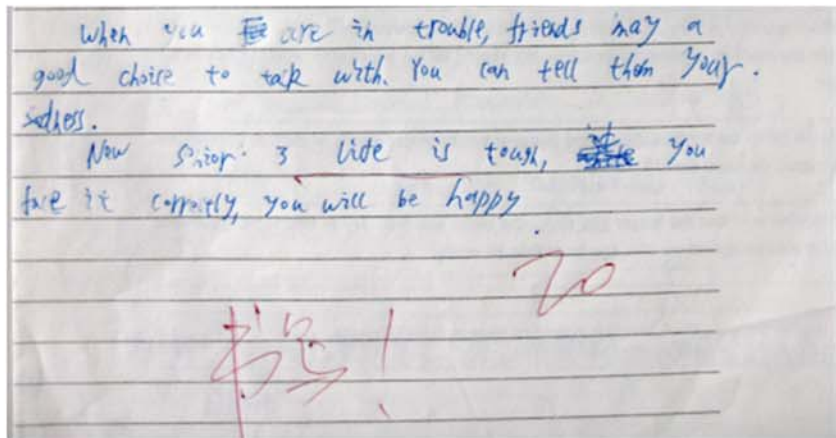


Figure 7. Feedback example 2 [Translation: Handwriting!]

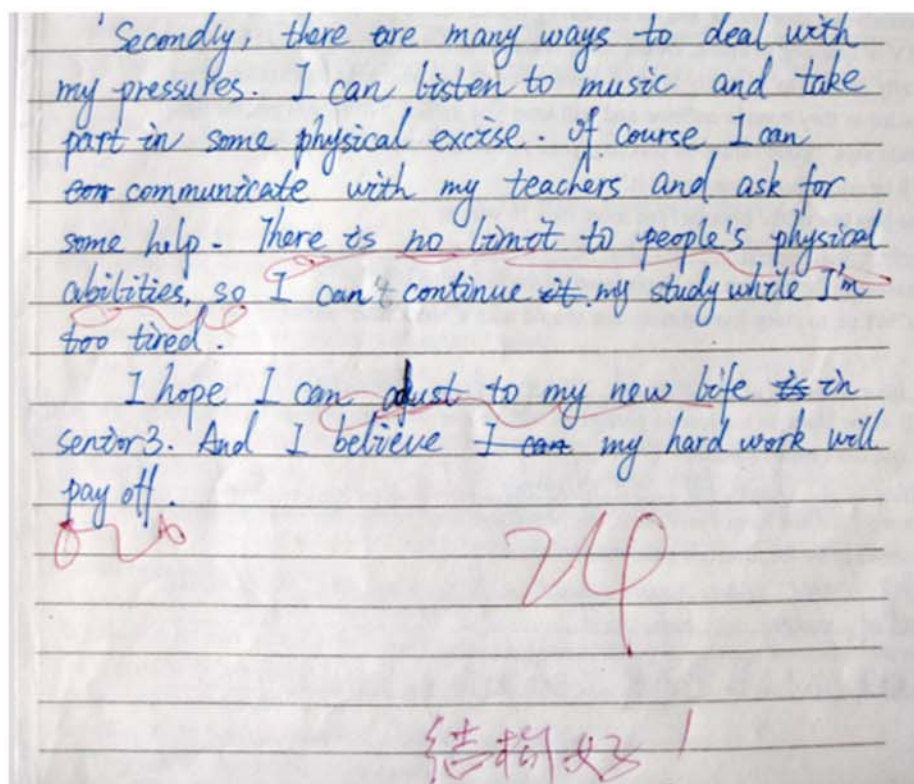


Figure 8. Feedback example 3 [Translation: Good organization!]

Students from the international school received more comprehensive feedback, as IA (personal communication, November 12, 2014) said,

Usually, I got most of the comments on content. For instance, the examples were not used properly or the reasons were not explained specifically enough.

Something like that. But my teachers also pointed out my grammar, structure, or logic mistakes sometimes.

This suggests that the situation in different schools may be very different—students from public schools may receive little feedback from their teachers due to large class size, while students from international schools and foreign language school schools may have been advantaged by the small class size (30 for the international school and 25 for the

foreign language school in my research setting) and the emphasis placed on writing in their curriculum.

#### 4.5 Students' Perceptions of High School Writing Instruction

From the previous results, it seems that many participants did not receive sufficient instruction on English writing; therefore, it is important to ask for their perceptions of the usefulness of the instruction in English writing in high school in terms of preparing them for writing courses in American universities. It was found that except for the instruction on grammar, which was perceived by over half of the students as useful, other aspects were considered by most students useless, as shown in Table 8. It was commonly believed that the high school writing instruction did not prepare them well in terms of logic, vocabulary, length, and genres.

Table 8. Perceptions of high school English writing instruction

	Useful		Useless	
	no.	%	no.	%
Grammar	106	56.7%	81	43.3%
Sentence structures	75	40.1%	112	59.9%
Organization	65	34.8%	122	65.2%
Logic	56	29.9%	131	70.1%
Vocabulary	49	26.2%	138	73.8%
Length	38	20.3%	149	79.7%
Genres	31	16.6%	156	83.4%

The interviews can provide deeper thoughts of students in terms of what, how, and why vis-à-vis the issue of high school instruction in English writing and students' current studies.

Actually, English writing in university compared to high school writing is totally different. First, the genres can be a challenge. In high school, I didn't even know what a literature review was. In addition, the word limit is another problem. Also, I cannot use accurate words to express my ideas. I wish I had got more writing practice in different genres in high school. (KC, personal communication, November 6, 2014)

This suggests that the different writing genres and word limits were two big challenges for students when they came to the university. Another student, FB (personal communication, September 6, 2014), however, provided a different reason for the under-preparation:

I do not mean any offense or disrespect to my high school English teacher, but I'd like to say that she didn't prepare me well for the English writing that I am doing now. In fact, the teaching of English writing in Chinese education system was the main reason for my under preparation. I did not get much help from the translation-like writing assignment in my high school since I'm writing essays that require my own thoughts now. The logic, which is quite important right now, was not taught or emphasized.

From the comment above, it can be seen that the student blamed the Chinese education system for not preparing him well for the current studies, and he probably was not the only one, given the fact that many participants complained about the instruction in

English writing in Chinese high schools. Despite the widespread dissatisfaction, some students thought it prepared them well. For example, IB (personal communication, November 11, 2014) said,

My previous English instruction did prepare me for the current studies, especially like the grammar I had learned before. It offered me different options of sentence structures and fixed collocations leading to syntactic variety. Teachers also guided us to write in different genres and provided very detailed and comprehensive instruction on how to write in each genre.

Given that IB went to an international school and considering the detailed instruction on argumentative essay that he described earlier, it is not unexpected that the instruction in his high school should have prepared him well for his current studies. This again indicates that it is likely that students going to international schools are better prepared for their studies in U.S. universities compared with those who went to public schools.

Despite the negative attitude toward the usefulness of writing instruction, students' perception of the usefulness of the feedback given by students was fairly positive. The majority of them considered most feedback, except for the general feedback like "good job" and grades without comment, were useful. The most useful ones included feedback on grammar, organization, sentence structures, and word choice. About half of the students thought of feedback on spelling as useless. Most students thought comments on content and logic were useful and wished to have received more.



#### 4.6 Summary of the Chapter

The results regarding English writing instruction in high school from the aspects of teaching, assignments, grading, and students' perceptions indicate that teaching to raise scores is a common practice for high school teachers, and most students receive fairly limited writing instruction in high schools, although those in international schools receive more comprehensive instruction compared to those in public schools. In fact, high schools teachers', especially those in public schools, perceptions of the importance of writing, approach to teaching, time spent on writing, and genres they teach are all influenced by the NMET. As Cheng and Qi (2006) pointed out, "The washback effect of testing on teaching and learning—referred to in China as 'the influence of a traffic wand'<sup>17</sup>—is commonly accepted by the society" (p. 64).

Since contradictions in an activity system may become the driving force for subjects to expand and learn in other ways so that they can achieve their outcome, the contradictions between students' perceptions of writing as the most difficult skill and less importance placed by schools and teachers on writing, the mismatch of the genres taught in schools and those required in overseas writing tests, the length of writing assignments in schools and in overseas tests, and the limited feedback received from high school teachers and the amount students need may have become driving forces that urged students to turn to other resources (private supplementary tutoring at cram schools and online resources) to prepare for English writing in order to achieve their goal of preparing themselves for undergraduate study in U.S. universities.

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<sup>17</sup> A traffic wand is used by policeman to lead the cars to different direction in China. Here it is a metaphor indicating that the NMET leads the direction of English teaching in China.

In the following two chapters, I will present the results regarding private supplementary tutoring and online experience. The discussion of private supplementary tutoring will cover how many and why students engage in it, teaching quality and teacher training in cram schools, and teaching. The online experience will be discussed based on students' writing experience online and how they used online materials. At the end of each chapter, I will report students' perceptions of how these media helped them prepare for undergraduate studies in the U.S. in terms of English writing.

## CHAPTER 5: RESULTS OF PRIVATE SUPPLEMENTARY TUTORING IN ENGLISH WRITING IN CRAM SCHOOLS

In this chapter, I will report on the results of private supplementary tutoring (PST) in English writing Chinese students received in cram schools from the following perspectives: the percentage of students receiving PST, the types of PST, time devoted to PST, reasons for receiving PST, English writing teaching and PST, and students' perceptions of PST in English writing. The teaching of English writing and PST will be discussed in terms of teaching quality, teacher training, teaching objectives, and teaching methods. Students' perceptions of PST in English writing will be examined in terms of the usefulness of PST for test preparation, improving their writing ability, and preparing them for university writing courses.

### 5.1 Percentage of Students Engaging in PST and the PST Types

When asked if students received PST in English writing for the writing sections of overseas tests such as TOEFL and the SAT, 20 (10.7%) students said “no”; the other 167 (89.3%) students said that they received various types of PST, as shown in Table 9. Of the 167 students who reported having received PST, 11 students reported that they had home tutors. However, a closer examination of their answers revealed that, in addition to learning with home tutors, they also received PST in cram schools. Therefore, 167 (89.3%) students had engaged in different types of PST in cram schools.

Table 9. Types of PST students received

Types of PST	no.	%
Small group PST in cram schools	102	54.5%
One-to-one tutoring in cram schools	78	41.7%
Large classes in cram schools	60	32.1%
Home tutoring	11	5.9%
Did not receive PST	20	10.7%

Note. The total number is more than 187 and the total percent is more than 100%, because students received more than one type of PST.

As for the types of PST students received in cram schools, it can be seen that the most popular type was small group tutoring, in which a small group of students took a class with one tutor in cram schools. One-to-one tutoring at the cram school had a high percentage among various types of PST, despite its high cost. According to CAH (personal communication, October 17, 2014), one-to-one tutoring, also called “VIP tutoring”, costs from \$80 to \$100 per hour depending on the teacher the student chose and the number of class sessions purchased. Small group tutoring usually has from six to 25 students, and is less expensive—about \$30 per hour for each person for small group tutoring with six students, and \$12 per hour for groups with 25 students. When asked the differences of the different types of PST and how students made the choice, he said,

They have their advantages and disadvantages respectively. In VIP tutoring, one teacher only tutors one student at a time, so the teacher knows the student better, and can design the teaching tailoring to the student. Of course it will be the most expensive type... If money is not an issue for the students, it will definitely be the

most effective version...The larger the class is, the less attention and time each student will get from the teachers, although the cost will be less ....So many students would take part in small group tutoring or a large class tutoring as well as VIP tutoring.

It seems that the various types of PST offered in cram schools can meet the different needs of students.

## 5.2 Time Devoted to PST

The proportion of students having attended cram schools is already large; the time they spent on learning writing in cram schools is also considerable. The minimum time on PST in writing in cram schools every week was one hour; the maximum was 20 hours per week. The average time students spent in cram schools for English writing per week was 4.5 hours—substantially longer than the time their high school teachers spent on writing (roughly from 30 minutes to one hour). Not only did students devote themselves intensively to PST in English writing in cram schools by spending a large amount of time there every week, they also devoted themselves extensively by receiving PST in cram schools over a long period of time. The shortest time was four weeks, and the longest was 40 weeks. When looking at the total amount of time spent on PST in English writing in cram schools, the shortest time was two hours per week for 12 weeks with a total of 24 hours, and the longest was six hours per week for 32 weeks with a total of 192 hours. The average time was 52 hours. When the cost of PST in cram schools is taken into consideration, students, in order to prepare for undergraduate studies in U.S. universities, spent a substantial amount of money, as well as time, on PST. This indicates that cram

schools, not their high schools, have become the main source for learning English writing for most students who want to study abroad. Other researchers have also reported the popularity of cram schools in East Asia (Kwok, 2004; Liu, 2012). A student reported in the interview that she did not even go to school in her senior year; instead, she spent 32 weeks learning English in a cram school, and devoted six hours to English writing per week (KA, personal communication, November 5, 2014). CAH also commented on the popularity of PST in cram schools when he pointed out that “students rely on cram schools more than their high school for overseas tests...this has caused an exponential increase in the formal tutoring service business in China, especially those targeting at students who are planning to go abroad for higher education” (personal communication, October 17, 2014).

### 5.3 Reasons for Engaging in PST

Seeing the enormous appeal of PST in cram schools, I could not help but wonder, why students engaged in PST in English writing in cram schools? The analysis of students’ responses to the questionnaire revealed that the most reported reason was that the examination-taken strategies taught by writing teachers in cram schools could help students obtain a higher score on TOEFL/IELTS/SAT/ACT writing quickly. This reason was acknowledged by 71.5% of students who reported having received PST in cram schools. It is worth noting that, despite the comprehensive instruction, detailed feedback, and much attention given to students in most international schools, most students still chose to engage in PST in cram schools. The reason for this was the test strategies taught in cram schools. As IB said, “the test strategies helped me prepare for TOEFL and SAT

writing by teaching me how to do timed writing well by following the rules and the requirements of the tests, which were not taught in my high school” (Personal communication, November 12, 2014).

Other popular reasons included: the writing teachers in cram schools provided comprehensive instruction in English writing (52.1%); the writing teachers in cram schools gave more detailed feedback (44.9%); the writing teachers in cram schools could provide tailor-made instruction, which could help improve English writing quickly (37.1%); and high school teachers did not teach the type of writing that is tested in TOEFL/IELTS/SAT/ACT writing. Reasons that were not as popular included: parents wanted the students to; high school teachers did not teach English writing; friends went, so the students wanted to go with them; students could not understand what teachers taught in high school; and a lack of motivation to study on one’s own.

This indicates that teacher quality and qualification is not the reason for students to turn to cram schools for PST. Instead, the reason lies in the fact that cram schools can provide students with what they need yet cannot obtain in high schools. In other words, cram schools can help solve the contradictions between the high school writing instruction and students’ needs: lack of preparation for TOEFL/TOEFL/IELTS/SAT/ACT writing in high schools versus students’ need to take those tests; general instruction in English writing in high schools versus the need for comprehensive teaching; limited feedback provided by high school teachers versus the amount of feedback students needed; and teaching to fairly large classes in high schools versus the need for tailor-made instruction.

## 5.4 English Writing Teaching of PST in Cram Schools

### 5.4.1 Teaching Quality and Teacher Training

Before talking about the instruction provided in cram schools, it is important to know about the teachers in cram schools. The quality and qualifications of teachers can impact the teaching and the effectiveness of the PST.

There are some concerns about the quality of the teachers and teacher training in cram schools. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Liu (2012) reported the problems of English cram schools in Erdos, Inner Mongolia, China—the lack of clear teaching goals, the low quality of the teachers, and the lack of systematic teaching materials. To be more specific, about 67% of teachers graduated from community college, and only about 25% had teacher certifications; and most never received teacher training provided by their organizations. While this may be an issue for some cram schools, there are other cram schools that have better teacher training systems. For example, Zhang (2011) reported that new English teachers in the New Oriental School received systematic training—four months' training in the branch school and 10-day intensive training at the headquarters.

CAH addressed the issue of the quality of teachers and teacher training at the cram school where he was working. As the largest cram school in China, they have better resources than other cram schools; therefore, they can receive applications from competitive candidates. That is the first reason for teacher quality. They also have rigorous recruitment procedures: applicants need to, first, send their resumes; the finalists will go through a few rounds of interviews, in which they need to give a teaching talk. After being recruited, there is a probationary period for about one month during which the new teachers need to demonstrate their ability to teach a class well.



In addition to ensuring the teacher quality at the recruitment step, after recruitment, the school also provides teacher training for one to four months, depending on the tightness of the schedule of the school. Every January, new teachers are sent to the headquarters for 10 days of intensive training. In the training, new teachers join a group of teachers who teach the same subject, discuss how to organize the class, activate the class atmosphere, and make effective and engaging PPT slides with the guidance of a mentor. They also attend a few talks on teaching pedagogy and teacher ethics given by the most experienced teachers and administrators of the school.

A final method that is used to ensure the quality of teaching is the correlation between students' evaluation for a teacher and her income to stimulate teachers to ensure their teaching quality. The higher a teacher is evaluated by students, the more money she will make.

These methods, working together, help maintain a satisfactory level of quality of teaching at the school. Despite these efforts, it is undeniable that some factors still negatively affect the teaching quality of the school. One is the low level of education of the teachers and lack of required teacher certification. Although the school values the potential and ability to teach more than degrees or certificates, it is better if the teachers have gone through systematic training in teaching. The other factor is the high teacher turnover rate. For one thing, over half of the teachers at the school work part time, since they are students in universities. Therefore, they usually teach for only two or three years before they leave when graduating. For another, some experienced teachers, after building a good reputation and being well received by students, would leave the school, too, to start their own private tutoring service business.

In terms of the writing teachers at the Overseas Test Preparation Department at the cram school, according to CAH, there were three teachers teaching TOEFL writing, two teachers for SAT writing, two for IELTS writing, one for GRE writing, and one for GMAT writing. They were all Chinese teachers. Their ages ranged from 23 to 35, averaging 28. They had taught in the school from one year to four years, 2.3 years on average. One of them had a master's degree, three had a bachelors' degree, and the other four were students—two seniors and two graduate students. None of them had a certificate for teaching writing, but most of them (six out of eight) had overseas experience. Since the results of my pilot study indicated that the PST students received in cram schools was mostly in TOEFL writing, I investigated the teaching of TOEFL writing in the present study.

#### 5.4.2 Teaching Objectives

The main teaching objective in the cram school was to raise scores for students, and at the same time, if possible, to try to help students improve their English ability. As CAH pointed out,

Our job is to help students raise as many points on the tests as possible, maybe as quickly as possible, too. That's why we are called "CRAM" school, right?.... The more points we help students raise, the more credibility we have among students...more students will come to study...Reputation is very important to us.... Although we are an education industry, we are more of a service industry. The goal for service industry is to meet our customers' needs, and their need is to get good grades on the tests. But we also hope to help students improve their

language skills instead of only cramming them for tests....When they are contradicted? I don't think they are, but in case it happens, raising score will win.

(Personal communication, October 17, 2014)

The teacher, CTC, at the cram school agreed that her teaching objective is to help students raise scores, but she also pinpointed the interwoven relationship between raising scores and improving writing ability:

Raising students' scores, for sure, is my teaching objective...because that's my students' needs...all students want to raise scores.... Improving their writing? I think in the process of raising their scores, their writing ability is improved, too.... In fact, test strategies can help raise students' scores, but test strategies alone won't help....To help them get a good grade, you need to teach them test strategies, but also improve their writing ability.

(Personal communication, October 5, 2014)

This indicates that, teachers in cram school try their best to meet students' needs, since they consider learners not their students, but their customers. To meet their needs, they try to help them raise scores and improve their writing ability. These objectives influence how they teach and what they teach.

#### 5.4.3 Teaching Methods

In terms of writing pedagogy, it was found that some frequent activities included, as shown in Table 10 in the order of most to least reported, teaching test strategies (64.7%), giving writing templates to follow (61.7%), asking students to write in class (58.1%), teaching different patterns of organization (57.5%), analyzing model essays

(56.9%), asking students to memorize words and phrases (53.9%), and giving detailed feedback (50.9%). Some less frequently used activities included: asking students to imitate good student writing, teaching grammar and doing grammar exercises, asking students to discuss writing with other students, doing peer review, practicing typing, asking students to read and imitate examples of famous writers, and asking students to write journals or diaries.

Table 10. Frequently used teaching methods in cram schools

Methods	no.	%
Taught test strategies	108	64.7%
Teacher lectured	107	64.1%
Gave writing templates to follow	103	61.7%
Asked students to write in class	97	58.1%
Taught patterns of organization	96	57.5%
Analyzed model essays	95	56.9%
Memorized words & phrases	90	53.9%
Gave detailed feedback	85	50.9%

Note. The numbers and percentages reflect how many students chose the option. For example, 108 students chose the “taught test strategies” option, which means 108 (64.7%) of students reported that in cram schools, teaching test strategies was used as one of the teaching methods.

It seems that teaching test strategies is the main objective of cram schools. In fact, it is one of the best selling points of cram schools. As mentioned in 5.2, over 71.5% received PST in English writing in cram schools because examination-taking strategies

taught in cram schools could help them obtain a higher grade on TOEFL/IELTS/SAT/ACT writing quickly. Classroom observations revealed some of the strategies: writing an essay about 350 words within a short time with a good organization, finding main points quickly for writing by analyzing the reading in the integrated writing task before listening, writing a workable introduction quickly, and making simple sentences longer and more complex to demonstrate lexical and syntactic variety, and so on. Taking the introduction as an example, they usually provided different ways of writing introductions for various topics. Two common ways were connecting the topic in the prompt with current hot topics such as globalization and environment protection, and comparing and contrasting the status quo with the past. Another example is expanding sentences. In one session, the teacher guided students in expanding short and simple sentences to long and complex sentences. She gave students the original sentence, Climbing mountains is good, and asked students to expand it to an as long sentence as possible. After students finished, she gave students a model sentence:

*It is a widely acknowledged fact that climbing mountains is an extremely economical and convenient yet magically effective way of relieving the great pressure from a variety of aspects of life such as work and education.*

Then she gave students another sentence, TV is good, and asked students to extend by using the above model. Again, after students finished, she showed them a model sentence:

*It is a widely acknowledged fact that TV, with a great deal of information, is an extremely cheap and convenient yet magically effective way of learning about a variety of aspects of a foreign and unfamiliar country such as economy, politics, and history.*

She told students how to expand a sentence by adding adjectives and adverbs, phrases, and examples. She emphasized the importance of long complex sentences to a good grade on TOEFL writing. However, it is probably not the case that more long complex sentences mean higher grades on TOEFL, especially such kind of monster-like sentences (A. Ginther, personal communication, April 19, 2016). Similar to the mismatch between high school teachers' perception of what is important to a good piece of writing and test developers' intention of the writing section of the NMET reported by Qi (2007), discrepancy exists between cram school teachers' and test raters' perceptions of what is a good piece of TOEFL writing.

As for other frequent activities shown in Table 10, they were all observed in the class sessions. For example, students preferred the model instruction because they believed that the writing templates could help them raise scores quickly, especially those low level students. Figure 9 shows a writing template for Integrated Writing in TOEFL.

The lecture apparently refutes the points illustrated in the reading material. According to the professor, \_\_\_\_\_. On the contrary, the reading contends an opposite stand that \_\_\_\_\_.

The first point the professor uses to cast doubt on the reading is that \_\_\_\_\_, which differs from the statement in the reading that \_\_\_\_\_.

Another evidence the speaker adopts to contradict the passage is \_\_\_\_\_. However, the reading states that \_\_\_\_\_.

Finally, the speaker raises the issue that \_\_\_\_\_. This point disagrees that \_\_\_\_\_, as demonstrated in the reading.

In conclusion, the point made in the lecture contrasts with what is presented in the reading. As the professor claims that \_\_\_\_\_, whereas the reading material holds that \_\_\_\_\_.

*Figure 9.* A writing template for Integrated Writing in TOEFL

With this writing template, students do not need to think about how to organize their language. Instead, they only need to find the main points (thesis statement and reasons) in the reading, and write down the corresponding points in the listening passage. Combined with the strategy for finding main points in a reading passage quickly, students, even if they cannot understand the whole listening passage, can get a grade of about 20 out of 30. This is extremely useful for low-level students.

For Independent Writing in TOEFL, the cram school also has writing templates for students to follow; Figure 10 below is a sample template. With this template, students can “finish the introduction and conclusion quickly, and thus save more time to think about the reasons and main points” (CTC, personal communication, October 5, 2014).

(Restate the prompt)\_\_\_\_\_ When faced with the decision of A of B, quite a few would deem that \_\_\_\_\_, but others, in contrast, believe A/B as the premier choice and that is also my point. Among countless factors that influence -A/-B, there are three conspicuous aspects as follows.

The main reason for my propensity for \_\_\_\_\_ is that \_\_\_\_\_

The second reason can be seen by every person that \_\_\_\_\_.

In addition, these reason are also usable when we consider that \_\_\_\_\_.

There are some disadvantages in \_\_\_\_\_ (the other point)\_\_\_\_\_.

In a word, \_\_\_\_\_ (restate thesis statement and reasons)\_\_\_\_\_. Taking into account of all these factors, we may reach the conclusion that \_\_\_\_\_.

*Figure 10.* A template for Independent Writing in TOEFL

Although cram schools give writing templates to students, it is not the only way of teaching. The templates are usually for “students who has low English writing proficiency, but need to obtain a satisfactory grade within a short time” (CTC, personal communication, October 5, 2014). The cram school also lectured on how to draft, revise,

and edit, analyzed model essays for students, asked students to write in class, and gave detailed feedback.

### 5.5 Students' Perceptions of PST Tutoring in English Writing

The results above showed that the way of teaching English writing in cram schools is different from that in high schools. Then how do students perceive these different types of teaching? I will talk about this from the following three perspectives: the perceptions of the teaching in cram schools versus high schools for test preparation, improving their English writing ability, and preparing them for university writing courses.

#### 5.5.1 Students' Perceptions of the Usefulness of PST for Test Preparation

When asked whether the instruction in high schools or cram schools was more helpful in preparing them for the writing in overseas tests such as TOEFL and the SAT, the majority of students (86.2%) who had taken writing classes in cram schools acknowledged the usefulness of the writing instruction there, as shown in Table 11 below. 8.4% considered both were equally helpful; 3.0% considered neither was helpful; only 2.4% considered the high school instruction more helpful.

Table 11. Cram schools vs high schools for test preparation

	Cram school	High School	Same	Neither	Total
no.	144	4	14	5	167
%	86.2%	2.4%	8.4%	3.0%	100%



In the interviews, participants revealed why they thought the writing instruction in cram schools helped them more.

Of course the cram school teachers [have taught me more in my English writing]. My English teacher at the cram school spent more time with me, and we were just like friends, so I would accept more ideas and feedback from him. (FB, personal communication, November 6, 2014)

Another interviewee said,

The cram school was more helpful. They could provide one-to-one tutoring. So the teacher could focus on my problems and provide instruction that suited me, like tailor made instruction specially designed for me. In that situation, my writing improved quickly. (OC, personal communication, November 3, 2014)

Student KC offered another reason:

The cram school teachers taught us how to build our own writing models. Writing models were specific phrases or sentences that we could use to build logic and structure in writing. It would save a lot of time in TOEFL writing. (Personal communication, November 6, 2014)

Students not only revealed why they thought the writing instruction in cram schools was more helpful, but also commented on why the instruction in high school was not helpful in terms of preparing them for overseas writing tests.

Personally speaking, I don't think my high school English classes prepared me well. First, the essays were much easier than the essays in TOEFL and SAT; high school writing was like "baby writing". Second, the way of writing in high school was quite different from that of TOEFL and SAT writing. Third, TOEFL and

SAT writing are always based on huge explanations and examples, and these elements were rarely needed in high school. (KB, personal communication, November 5, 2014)

KB's comments were in agreement with several other interviewees. For example, OB said,

NOT AT ALL. The type of writing in our high school was not comparable with TOEFL writing. We were only asked to write about 100 words for the essays in our high school, but in TOEFL writing, we had to write around 500 words. We never practiced writing that long essays, so the foundation was not laid at all.

(Personal communication, November 3, 2014)

Different from these two comments, some interviewees, although admitting that the instruction in their high school did not prepare them well for TOEFL writing, acknowledged the usefulness of high school English teaching to some extent. For example, according to FA,

[The instruction] didn't prepare me well for TOEFL writing because TOEFL writing is much much much harder than the writing we did in high school, but I have to say, high school English teaching laid a good foundation on my grammar part for TOEFL. That's useful. (Personal communication, November 8, 2014)

What is surprising is that even IB, who went to an international school and received comprehensive instruction on English writing, did not deny that the instruction on English writing in his high school did not prepare him well either:

In fact, the English writing in my high school was totally different from TOEFL or SAT writing. It helps in some aspects such as vocabulary or grammar, but I

won't say it prepared me well for those tests. First, the time of TOEFL and SAT writing is so limited. I couldn't really follow the process of writing a common English essay in the school, especially in that kind of atmosphere where I could hardly think calmly. Second, since they are tests, the writing has to follow a particular rule to meet the requirements of the examiners. (Personal communication, November 11, 2014)

These comments indicate that the instruction in English writing in Chinese high schools may have failed to prepare students for TOEFL or SAT writing mainly for three reasons: 1); the types of writing were different; 2); the word requirement was not comparable; and 3); the atmosphere of writing tests and writing in school were different. However, it needs to be noted that despite their under preparation, students acknowledged the role of English teaching in their high schools in laying a good foundation for their grammar, which is an important element in writing. This also is in line with the result reported in Chapter 4 that students acknowledged the usefulness of the high school instruction in grammar for their current studies. The comments also indicate that the main reasons why students favored cram schools were: 1); the teacher-student relationship was more relaxing, and therefore, facilitated students' acceptance of the advice more easily; 2); the instruction in cram schools was more tailored to meet different students' needs; and 3); cram schools can help students increase their grades within a short time by using some shortcut methods. However, can these shortcut methods also help students improve their writing ability and prepare them for university writing courses? I will discuss this in the following sections.

### 5.5.2 Students' Perceptions of the Usefulness of PST for Improving Writing Ability

When it comes to which type of instruction helped students more in improving their writing; however, results were more interesting. Although the majority of students (61.1%) still favored cram schools due to their helpfulness in improving their writing, the percentage, compared to that for TOEFL preparation (86.2%), showed a dramatic decrease. 19.2% considered both were equally helpful; 9.0% considered neither was helpful; and 10.8% thought that high school instruction was more helpful (see Table 12).

Table 12. Cram schools vs high schools for improving writing ability

	Cram school	High School	Same	Neither	Total
no.	102	18	32	15	167
%	61.1%	10.8%	19.2%	9.0%	100.1%

This indicates that although the majority of students acknowledged the usefulness of cram school instruction in helping them prepare TOEFL and SAT writing, many doubted its usefulness in terms of helping them improve their writing ability. As IB commented,

The writing instruction in my high school was more helpful to improve my writing, because that instruction still benefits me when I came to university. While the classes that I took in the cram school were only for the tests. I don't think I will use those skills in the future. (Personal communication, November 11, 2014)

Another student affirmed this point,

The writing instruction in cram schools, although could help me raise scores within a short time, had a ceiling effect.... They could only help me gain, maybe around 24 out of 30, but could not make my score raise any more. There is a limitation of the effect of the cram school instruction, since it didn't radically improve my writing ability. (OB, personal communication, November 3, 2014)

These comments indicate that, for some students, cram school instruction is more useful in helping them meet the cut score requirements on the tests rather than help improve their writing ability. However, it is undeniable that most students perceived the PST in cram schools to be fairly useful in terms of improving their writing ability, as KA said,

Some people may think cram schools only help raise scores within a short time, but I don't think so.... it helped me a lot in improving my writing ability. Before I went to a cram school for PST in English writing, I couldn't write more than 100 words. My vocabulary was no more than 3,000 words. But since I went there, my teacher had made a detailed plan for me... He asked me to memorize words, practice using them in writing, and try to express my ideas and thoughts in English... He also taught me how to brainstorm ideas for writing when I got a prompt, how to organize my main points, and how to maintain good logic.... He asked me to write; then he gave me feedback, and then guided me in revision. That process really helped. I spent six hours a week for 32 weeks learning writing at the cram school.... It takes time to feel the difference. (Personal communication, November 5, 2014)

### 5.5.3 Students' Perceptions of the Usefulness of PST for University Writing Courses

Since most students acknowledged the usefulness of PST in terms of preparing them for writing tests and improving their writing ability, it is worth looking at what they thought of PST in English writing for their university writing courses. It was found that, different from the high school instruction where grammar was considered useful by about half of the students, the instruction in cram schools helped students in organization, logic, sentence structures, vocabulary, and grammar, but was not as helpful in essay length and genres (see Table 13).

Table 13. Perceptions of cram schools English writing instruction for university writing courses

	Useful		Useless	
	no.	%	no.	%
Organization	89	53.3%	78	46.7%
Logic	87	52.1%	80	47.9%
Sentence Structures	85	50.9%	82	49.1%
Vocabulary	82	49.1%	85	50.9%
Grammar	80	47.9%	87	52.1%
Length	63	37.7%	104	62.3%
Genres	39	23.4%	128	76.6%

Although over half of the students acknowledged the usefulness of cram school writing instruction in terms of preparing them for university writing courses, this, compared to the percentage of students who advocated for the usefulness of PST in test preparation, is noticeably smaller. Moreover, some students complained about it since the teaching was “too rule-governed and modeled that they did not know how to write other genres except for TOEFL essays” (FA, personal communication, November 8, 2014). She told me about her experience in writing a writer’s autobiography in her first year composition class. She was so influenced by the writing instruction at the cram school that she could not think of other ways for writing an introduction. The writer’s autobiography required describing herself as a writer in her native language and second/foreign language(s). Since her foreign language is English; she naturally related

the topic to the way she learned at the cram school, and write the introduction in the first draft like this:

*Under the connected and globalized world environment, the importance of learning English cannot be overstated. It is the primary language of global communication, trade, business and diplomacy. Therefore, leaning English in school will undoubtedly give an advantage to students looking to make their way in United States as well as in the world. As every youth Chinese children, I have started to study English when I was four or five years old. Among the four basic skills of English study, listening, speaking, reading and writing, writing is the one of the most difficult aspects for me.*

Her instructor told her that the introduction did not really address the topic, since she was focusing too much on English and ignoring her native language. Also, she was “beating around the bush too much”. She was frustrated, and it took her a long time to step out of the influence of the cram school writing instruction. This indicates that the model-writing instruction in cram schools may cause students writing to be too rigid. In fact, the instruction in writing for TOEFL essays is so rule-governed that “TOEFL writing” has even become a genre, and some writing teachers in first year composition classrooms may have even noticed some trace of this genre in Chinese students’ writing, especially in argumentative writing.

## 5.6 Summary of the Chapter

The report on PST in English writing in cram schools indicates that, due to the lack of preparation for the writing tests in exams like TOEFL and the SAT, students have



to seek sources outside school for help to prepare for the tests. One source is PST in cram schools. Results indicate that a huge proportion of the participants (89.3%) go to cram school for English writing instruction. The writing instruction in cram schools differs from that used in high schools, in that it teaches students test strategies for writing tests, provides students with models to use in writing, and targets students' needs as much as possible. These methods help students raise scores on writing tests for undergraduate studies in U.S. universities, and therefore, are deemed useful by most students. Thus, the effectiveness of PST for students in preparing themselves for undergraduate studies in U.S. universities are acknowledged by most students, which is consistent with the positive impact of PST in improving students' academic performance reported in other contexts, e.g., Bangladesh (Nath, 2008), Cambodia (Brehm et al., 2012), Georgia (Bregvadze, 2012), Germany (Mischo & Haag, 2002), Kenya (Ngugi, 2012), and Turkey (Ünal et al., 2010). However, although such instruction is perceived helpful by most students in helping them in writing tests, it is not as helpful in improving students' writing and preparing them for university writing courses.

## CHAPTER 6: RESULTS OF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE WITH ONLINE WRITING AND ONLINE RESOURCES

In this chapter, I will report on the results of students' experience with online writing and online resources. Students' experience with online writing will be examined in terms of whether students wrote in English out of class online, the venues for writing, the frequency and types of writing, reasons for writing, and students' perceptions of the usefulness of their online writing experience. Students' experience with using online resources will be discussed in terms of how students made use of online resources, the types of online resources they used, and their perceptions of the usefulness of those online resources.

### 6.1 Students' Experience with Online Writing

#### 6.1.1 Venues for Writing

When asked about whether students wrote in English out of class, 67.4% of the participants reported "yes"; 32.6% said "no". Of the students who wrote in English out of class, 63.5% claimed they wrote online. The other participants wrote on paper, or on their computers but did not upload their writing online.

In terms of the specific venues for online writing, it was found that they mainly wrote on social media, which included both Chinese social media such as WeChat, Weibo, Blog, Q Zone, and Renren, and also foreign social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. In addition to these social media, they also wrote on forums. Of

all the venues for students to write online, the most frequently used were: WeChat, Weibo, Facebook, and forums, on which they wrote in English as frequently as weekly, with some writing less often, i.e., monthly. As for the other aforementioned venues, students wrote in English monthly or even yearly on them.

### 6.1.2 Types of Writing

As for the types of writing students did out of class, the majority (66.7%) were writing practice for overseas tests, e.g., TOEFL and SAT writing. Other types of writing included, from most reported to least reported, emails (42.1%); narrative writing (41.3%); posts (36.5%); argumentative writing other than TOEFL writing (36.5%); letters (25.4%); diaries (22.2%); blogs (17.5%); expository writing (15.9%); research papers (7.9%); book reviews (6.3%); poems (5.6%); novels (4.8%); plays (1.6%); and game guides (0.8%).

In addition to the numerical results obtained from the questionnaire, the interviews provided additional data. A student (IC) shared her experience of writing novels in English online. She had been writing novels in Chinese since she was a freshman in high school, and her novels had been well received by her friends in school and online since she posted her novels on a forum. However, she never thought of writing novels in English until her English teacher in the international school encouraged her to do so. She first translated her Chinese novels to English, and as she became more familiar with writing in English, she started writing short novels in English (personal communication, November 12, 2014).

This indicates that, although practice for writing tests still constitutes the lion's share of the writing students do out of class, students also do other types of writing in

English. Some of them are creative writing, for example, poems, novels, and plays, as shown in Figure 11, an example of a poem a student wrote.

**The Dove**  
**If peace were a pure white dove,**  
**Tangible to your soft touch,**  
**That can travel unhindered**  
**Over lands of ail and mirth,**  
**I'd tie my heart to its foot,**  
**My whispers, laughters too brusque.**  
**Then my messenger will fly,**  
**Making your wilted heart revive,**  
**For peace is a tacit gift**  
**We shan't falter to cherish.**

*Figure 11. A poem example*

### 6.1.3 Reasons for Writing

When it comes to why students wrote in English online, over half the students who reported having written in English out of class online opted for “to raise scores on writing tests” (56.3%) and “to improve English writing skills” (53.8%) as their reasons, as shown in Table 14. Additional common reasons included: “to communicate with friends who use English” (37.5%), “feeling cool” (26.3%), and “feeling more comfortable writing in English” (23.8%). Some other reasons, although not provided in the options, but reported by several students, included: “typing in English is faster”, “to explain things in a different way”, “to report game bugs”, and “my Chinese handwriting sucks”.

Table 14. Reasons for writing in English online

Reason	no.	%
To raise scores on writing tests	45	56.3%
To improve English writing skills	43	53.8%
To communicate with friends who use English	30	37.5%
Feeling cool	21	26.3%
Feeling more comfortable writing in English	19	23.8%
Other	9	11.3%

Note. The total percentage is more than 100% because students chose more than one option.

The interviews described the participants' practices of writing online. For example, KB talked about her experience writing on a forum,

When I was preparing for TOEFL writing, I joined a study group on a forum to motivate me to learn in order to raise my scores. We set a plan to write at least an essay every week. So I would write a TOEFL essay on the forum every week.

(Personal communication, November 5, 2014)

Another student wrote in English because it was cool, as OA said,

I seldom wrote essays in English online.... My English is not very good and I don't like writing, not even in Chinese. But I'd write posts in English on WeChat.... It's COOL!... In another word, to Zhuangbi<sup>18</sup>.... My friends in China would think I'm cool, I think. (Personal communication, November 3, 2014)

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<sup>18</sup> Zhuangbi means to act pretentiously; to show off.

FB explained what it is like to write in English to communicate with friends who use English,

There can be several situations. As far as I know, some people write emails to their pen pals who are English speakers. Some people use English forums, everything is in English, so they have to write English.... I have a friend who plays Cross Fire in U.S., and he needs to communicate with his teammates in English. (Personal communication, November 6, 2014)

Some students, however, had multiple reasons. For example, IC, when asked why she wrote novels in English, said,

The reasons were complicated. At the beginning, I didn't want to, but my English teacher encouraged me to. Out of curiosity, I started trying. After a while, I felt that writing in English was kind of cool, especially when I got a lot of "likes" when I uploaded it to WeChat. I had a huge sense of achievement. At the same time, I realized that, as I wrote more, my English writing improved a lot.... I can now express my thoughts in another language freely. That feeling is so good.... I like writing in English now. It's not a burden. It has become a hobby.... Last week, I just finished another short novel "Dawn". I think I will keep writing.

(Personal communication, November 12, 2014)

This long quote indicates that IC wrote in English for multiple reasons: encouragement from the teacher, feeling cool, sense of achievement, improving English writing, and expressing thoughts in another language freely.

#### 6.1.4 Students' Perceptions of the Usefulness of Online Writing

When it comes to the usefulness of online writing in terms of preparing them for undergraduate studies in U.S. universities, students reported different perceptions. Some students believed that it did not help much due to the limited amount of writing done and the relaxed attitude held when writing, as OA commented,

I don't think it is helpful.... I didn't write much. I just wrote some short posts on WeChat once in a while. That was not real writing practice or essays. Moreover, when I was posting, I didn't devote much time or effort to thinking about sentence structures and word choices. Sometimes there may even be grammar mistakes.

Such kind of writing doesn't help. (Personal communication, November 3, 2014)

Although some students did not acknowledge the usefulness of writing in English online, other students held different opinions. For example, KB commented on how writing with a group on a forum helped her,

It was difficult to write at least an essay a week.... Sometimes I wanted to give up, but seeing other people upload their writing every week was really motivating.... Or else, I don't think I could have persisted practicing writing on my own.

Although I could get very little feedback on the essays I wrote, writing on the forum helped me form a good habit of writing regularly, which improved my writing a lot! It not only helped me get a good score on TOEFL writing, but also prepared me, to some extent, for the first year composition course.... I was used to writing a lot. Or else, the large amount of writing required in the first year composition course would be very intimidating and overwhelming. (KB, personal communication, November 5, 2014)

IC also spoke highly of the usefulness of writing online for her current studies,

I'd say writing novels in English online is very beneficial.... In my first year composition course, the first assignment, writer's autobiography, required us to write a narrative. Unlike other students who felt it was very hard, I felt it was fairly easy.... When I wrote novels, I developed the skill of writing detailed and vivid descriptions. I could use that skill in a writer's autobiography since it was a narrative. My teacher really liked my writing and gave me an A. (IC, personal communication, November 12, 2014)

The aforementioned quotes indicate that students recognize the usefulness of writing in English online, mainly because, for one thing, collaborative work in a group motivates them to write and helps them form a habit of writing, and therefore, they are used to the amount of writing required in university courses; for another, the skills developed in online writing can be used in university writing. In contrast, students who wrote in English online casually and occasionally may not benefit as much as those who write seriously and regularly.

## 6.2 Students' Experience with Online Resources

### 6.2.1 Ways of Using Online Resources

When asked if they used online resources to improve their writing skills or prepare for writing tests such as TOEFL and SAT writing, it was found that 58.3% of the participants did. It can be seen that although the percentage is not as high as that of students who used PST in cram schools, online resources are still a popular way for



students to achieve their goal of preparing themselves for undergraduate studies in U.S. universities in terms of English writing.

With regard to how students used online resources, as many as 86.2% of participants who used online sources claimed that they used it to look for writing Ji Jing<sup>19</sup>. Because many of overseas tests use prompts that are the same or similar to previous prompts once in a while, students looked to writing Ji Jing to prepare for the tests with the hope of practicing similar prompts and getting a good grade. This is a sensitive issue since ETS requires test takers to sign a contract before taking part in a test and state that they will not reveal the content of the test. However, some test takers still upload the topic of the prompt, not necessarily the prompt, to some websites or forums to “benefit other test takers”. Not only writing Ji Jing are available online; Ji Jing for other sections of TOEFL and other overseas tests are available, too. As the number of test takers who use writing Ji Jing is increasing exponentially, ETS has taken action by cancelling some test takers’ scores, and those test takers need to retake the tests. Therefore, students have been more cautious in using Ji Jing. As OC said,

I looked for writing Ji Jing, but didn’t use the model essays for those prompts. Since ETS now knows such kind of practice; if I used the model essays, my writing might be similar to many other students. In that case, they might give me a very low score, or even cancel my score.... Usually I looked at a prompt in Ji

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<sup>19</sup>Ji Jing refers to previous tests. It originated from the GRE test. Ji means Internet; Jing means experience. When they are combined together, it means the experience of taking online tests. At the beginning, some test takers, after taking the test, wrote about their experience, which included some questions or writing prompts in the tests. Now Ji Jing is used exclusively to represent the previous test questions and prompts, and there are TOEFL Ji Jing, IELTS Ji Jing, SAT Ji Jing, GRE Ji Jing, and so on, also reading Ji Jing, writing Ji Jing, listening Ji Jing, and speaking Ji Jing.

Jing, and thought about how I could address the topic and my main points, and memorized some words and phrases related to the topic. That's it. I just wanted to make sure I wouldn't feel totally at a loss at a completely strange topic. (Personal communication, November 3, 2014)

FA addressed the issue of cheating and using Ji Jing,

I don't think using Ji Jing is cheating. At least I didn't want to cheat. I used Writing Ji Jing as exercise topics for me to practice writing before the tests. It's like buying TPO [TOEFL Practice Online] from ETS.... TPO is expensive, and these prompts are shared free by other test takers. Why can't I use them to practice writing?

This indicates that students use Ji Jing more for practice than for cheating. Maybe there are students who used Ji Jing to cheat, but those would be fairly rare cases.

Table 15. Ways of using online resources

Way of using online resources	no.	%
Looking for Ji Jing (previous writing prompts)	94	86.2%
Looking for useful vocabulary, phrases, and sentences	75	68.8%
Looking for writing templates	70	64.2%
Looking for test strategies	61	56.0%
Looking for model essays	60	55.0%
Practicing writing	18	16.5%
Getting feedback on writing	13	11.9%

Note. The total percentage is more than 100% because some students chose more than one way of using online resources.

Other common ways of using online resources, as shown in Table 15, included looking for useful vocabulary, phrases, and sentences (68.8%), looking for writing templates (64.2%), looking for test strategies (56.0%), and looking for model essays (55.0%). A small proportion of students reported that they used online resources to practice writing (16.5%) and get feedback on their writing (11.9%).

### 6.2.2 Types of Online Resources Students Used

With regard to the types of online resources students used, few students (five out of 109) took online courses. Most students used forums for test preparation, especially for overseas tests preparation. The forums have specific sections for various tests that provide materials for test preparation and for test takers to communicate. I took a forum

as a case study and will describe the forum to show what types of resources students could obtain online.

TM (Pseudonym) is one of the largest forums for test preparation in China, and over 80% of the participants who used online resources reported using TM. TM has sections for tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, SAT, and GRE, among which the section for TOEFL is the most comprehensive and TM's feature. Under the TOEFL section, there are subsections including Ji Jing, TOEFL Practice Online (TPO), Materials, and Training Clubs. As for resources for writing, the Ji Jing section has previous writing prompts or topics shared by other test takers; TPOs are shared for free so that test takers do not need to buy them, which saves them a substantial amount of money. The Materials section provides test takers with various materials for the TOEFL writing test, e.g., good words, phrases, and sentences that can be used in writing, course notes taken by students with renowned TOEFL writing teachers, strategies for writing, model essays, writing templates, good examples that can be used to support one's argument for different topics, errors that test takers should avoid in writing, ways of arguing, good electronic books on TOEFL writing, and so on. Figure 12 is an example of the materials addressing transitional devices; Figure 13 is an example of the materials in terms of good sentence structures that can be used in writing. Figure 14 and Figure 15 are an example of the materials used for model essay analysis.

### 一. And 并列关系 (and)

in addition // and // similarly // likewise // as well as // besides // furthermore // also // moreover // too // not only... but // even // besides this/that

E.g. The food was excellent, (and) likewise the wine. 菜好极了, 酒也是。

### 二. Sequence 顺序 (then)

出现的时候表示列举

first // initially // second etc. // to begin with // then // next // earlier/later // following this/that // afterwards

E.g. The illness can develop in two ways: firstly, in cases of high blood pressure and secondly... 这种病有两种情况: 第一, 由高血压引起; 第二....

### 三. Consequence 结果 (so)

前面是后面的结果 // 也就是这些词后面就开始给出结论了。

As a result // thus // so // therefore // consequently // it follows that // thereby // eventually // in that case // admittedly

E.g. They paid cash, thereby avoiding interest charges. 他们付的是现金, 以免付利息。

### 四. Contrast 转折 (but)

however // on the other hand // despite // in spite of // though // although // but // on the contrary // otherwise // yet // instead of // rather // whereas // nonetheless // in contrast

E.g. It doesn't seem ugly to me; on the contrary, I think it's rather beautiful. 我觉得它并不丑, 恰恰相反, 它挺美。

*Figure 12.* An example of TOEFL writing materials: Transitional devices

第一：定语从句。

这应该算是写作中最常用的一种句型之一。适当地运用定语从句可以给你的文章增色不少。

例如，下面的这两个句子用上定语从句马上就变成了一个漂亮的复杂句。

Bad books contain evil thoughts. In them, there might be much deion about violence, superstition, and sex.

→ Bad books, in which there might be much deion about violence, superstition, and sex, contain evil thoughts.

第二：状语从句。

在托福写作备考当中运用的最多的是以下五种状语从句，即原因状语从句，让步状语从句，条件状语从句，时间状语从句和目的状语从句。

1. 原因状语从句：常由because, as, since和for引导

Eg: Nonetheless, I am still in favor of space travel, for its merits far outweigh demerits.

尽管如此，我还是赞成太空探险，因为它的好处远远大于坏处。

2. 让步状语从句：常由although, though, even though/ if, as long as和notwithstanding引导

Eg: Although this view is wildly held, this is little

*Figure 13.* An example of TOEFL writing materials: Sentence structures

**【范文赏析】****【首段】** 背景介绍 + 争议焦点 + 作家立场

Such is human nature to explore the unknown and see the outside world, that is why a great many high school graduates are keen on traveling or working for a period of time before attending dream universities. Conflicting ideas clash in determining whether or not it is a wise idea to inspire high school leavers to experience the Grand Tour. As I see it, the merits of experiencing the gap year outshine its potential demerits.

**【二段】** 间隔年之利好

The most important educational benefit of taking a year off before starting university life is that traveling exposes young adults to stunning places and exotic cultures. It is one thing for teenagers to read about distant countries, but it is even better to enrich the experience of the world on one's own. What one learns by associating with strangers and absorbing diverse cultures is something he or she could never acquire in the classrooms. For example, I made many congenial friends by self-travel to Tibet after finishing my schooling. This fantastic journey not only expanded my mind but also alleviated my stress triggered by tight academic study. Feasting my eyes on the stunning landscape

*Figure 14.* An example of TOEFL writing materials: Model essay analysis I

【尾段】再次亮明观点 + 总结理由

In closing, my stand is that to inspire young adults to take a year off before going to college is a two-edged sword. Yet youngsters should be encouraged to challenge themselves. This is one of the best ways to mature their thoughts and chasten their characters.

【经典语料】

1. go to university = start university life = attend university 上大学
2. earn a living = work as part-timers 谋生
3. do some sightseeing = to be well-traveled = to travel on one's own 自己旅行
4. Such is human nature to explore the unknown 探索未知是人之本性。
5. The merits of experiencing the gap year outshine its potential demerits 经历间隔年的利大于弊。
6. to experience the gap year 体验间隔年
7. take a year off to work and travel before attending dream university 升入理想大学之前，用一年的时间去工作或旅行
8. feasting my eyes on the stunning landscape 尽情欣赏迷人景色
9. really sweetened my life and lifted my spirit 使我快乐，精神振奋

Figure 15. An example of TOEFL writing materials: Model essay analysis II

It can be seen that in Figure 12 and Figure 13, the transitional devices and sentence structures are listed in different types, followed by an explanation of each type of the transitional devices or sentence structures. Then an example sentence is provided to illustrate how the transitional devices and sentence structures can be used in a sentence, with a Chinese translation after it to facilitate understanding. Figure 14 and Figure 15 show part of a model essay for the topic of “gap year”. The purpose of each paragraph is



stated at the beginning, with the model paragraph following it. At the end of the model essay, vocabulary and expressions related to the topic are listed for test takers to memorize and use in their own writing.

In addition to these resources, the Training Club on the forum is popular among test takers. There are various training clubs, e.g., TOEFL reading club, TOEFL speaking club, TOEFL writing club, TOEFL listening club, Vocabulary memorizing club, Dictating club, and so on. Take the TOEFL writing club for example: it has various activities that can help test takers to raise their writing scores. For example, there is homework for club members ranging from daily to weekly. The homework includes memorizing a certain number of words every day, practicing using a certain sentence structure every day, writing an essay every week, and so on. For example, as mentioned earlier, KB joined a similar club and had to finish an essay every week as homework. The encouragement as well as pressure from peers motivated her to write every week. Another interesting activity is the peer-review activity. It requires everyone to first review the previous essay uploaded by a member and then upload his or her own essay for another member to review. In other words, suppose A uploads an essay, B needs to review A's essay and upload the comment on A's essay first; then B uploads her essay so that C can review B's essay. If Z is the last one to post an essay and she reviews Y's essay, A needs to review Z's essay. Figure 16 shows a part of a peer-reviewed essay.

Moreover, learning books can make people think something logically, **and make them a strong fundamental ability to understand** what has been happening around them.

Without that knowledge from books, even though they experience something within their life or jobs, they may have no idea about what those experiences mean to them.

This phenomenon

happens on some illiterate people.

To sum up, although **no every thing** we can learn from books, we learn useful and precious knowledge from them. Learning from experience is good for people avoiding make mistake and getting a trick to deal with something well, but it depends whether people have enough knowledge to use those experiences. Where does the knowledge come from? Open your books.

整篇文章的整个思路有很大的问题，词汇用得极其不准确，让人看得很莫名其妙。过多的中文式英语使得整个文章看起来就很骨感，论点支持没有说服力。文章无非靠的是一些单词量以及毫无逻辑的思维组建的

*Figure 16.* An example of a part of a peer-reviewed essay

[Translation: The logic of the essay is problematic. Word usage is not accurate, and therefore the essay is confusing. There are too many Chinglish expressions. Supporting points are not persuasive. The whole essay is made up of advanced vocabulary and illogical thoughts.]

However, it can be seen in Figure 15 that since the club members do not know each other in reality, the comments may be fairly harsh. Moreover, the comments are rather general than specific, and therefore, its usefulness to writers may be decreased. Despite these drawbacks, such types of activity are well received by club members since it is difficult to get feedback from other people if one uploads her essay online. This activity, however, requires everyone to review another essay first so that everyone can get feedback. Although the feedback may be general and harsh, it is better than nothing.

### 6.2.3 Perceptions of Online Resources

When asked if students trusted these online resources, it was found that 14.7% of the students who used online resources chose “trust”; 81.7% chose “trust most of them”; 2.8% chose “do not trust most of them”; and 0.9% chose “do not trust”. It can be seen that most of the students trust the online resources they used.

When asked whether they thought online resources were helpful, 11.0% chose “very helpful”; 71.6% chose “helpful”; 16.5% chose “not very helpful”; only 0.9% chose “not helpful at all”. As OC said in an interview,

I'd say [online resources] helped me a lot in preparing for TOEFL writing test.... I looked for Ji Jing on a forum and practiced lots of topics, so by the time I took TOEFL, I had been familiar with tons of topics. When I saw the prompt in the test, it looked familiar.... Although it was not the same as the prompts I had practiced, it was similar to some topics... Since I had accumulated vocabulary and phrases related to a topic, as long as it's about the topic, I could use the vocab and phrases and knew how to express myself even if the prompt was a bit twisted. (Personal communication, November 3, 2014)

This indicates that most students acknowledge the usefulness of online resources.

However, they regard online resources as helpful in terms of preparing them for the TOEFL writing test instead of for university writing courses.

When it comes to the usefulness of online resources for their university writing courses, it was found that over half of the students who used online resources doubted their usefulness. As shown in Table 16, over 60% of students thought online resources did not prepare them well for university writing courses in sentence structures (60.6%),

organization (63.3%), and vocabulary (67.0%); over 70% of students thought online resources were useless in preparing them for logic (77.1%) and grammar (78.9%); and more than 80% of students doubted the usefulness of online resources in genres (83.5%) and length (85.3%). This indicates that students mainly used online resources for test preparation instead of for improving their writing ability to prepare for university studies.

Table 16. Perceptions of online resources for university writing courses

	Useful		Useless	
	no.	%	no.	%
Sentence structures	43	39.4%	66	60.6%
Organization	40	36.7%	69	63.3%
Vocabulary	36	33.0%	73	67.0%
Logic	25	22.9%	84	77.1%
Grammar	23	21.1%	86	78.9%
Genres	18	16.5%	91	83.5%
Length	16	14.7%	93	85.3%

OC shared her opinion on this issue in an interview,

Although [online resources] helped me a lot in TOEFL writing, I don't think it was helpful in preparing me for university writing courses.... I used Ji Jing online to familiarize myself with the topics in TOEFL writing, but in my first year composition course, I am not asked to write on those topics.... The vocab and

sentence structures that I learned online was kind of helpful, though. (Personal communication, November 3, 2014)

FB addressed the issue from the perspective of the way he used online resources,

It wasn't helpful [to prepare me for university writing courses] not because those resources are useless, but because of my own way of using those resources. In fact, there are lots of good resources.... useful vocabulary, sentence structures, good ways of arguing, ways of keeping good logic, ways of addressing a topic, and so on. But I didn't make full use of them.... I used it to raise score on TOEFL writing, that's all. If I had used them to prepare for university writing courses, I think they'd be very helpful.

Seeing this quote and considering IB's way of using online resources—committing to using a forum to practice writing, and its effect, it indicates that online resources are useful materials, but students' ways of using it affect, to some extent, the usefulness of those resources negatively.

### 6.3 Summary of the Chapter

The report on students' experience with writing online and using online resources indicates that students' online experience, especially with using online resources has become an important way of preparing for undergraduate studies in U.S. universities, especially in terms of preparing for the TOEFL writing test, although it is not as widely used as PST in cram schools. Students' experience with online writing, however, is perceived as useful, by some students but not others, whether for TOEFL writing or improving writing skills. The discrepancy in students' perceptions of the usefulness of

writing online indicates that regular and serious writing practice has a positive effect on students' writing ability, while casual and irregular writing such as posting on social media may not be as helpful. In terms of using online resources, most students use those resources to look for Ji Jing, writing templates, good expressions, and model essays; some students use them to practice writing and get feedback. The different ways of using online resources may impact their usefulness. However, since most students use them to raise their TOEFL writing scores, online resources seem to be more useful in terms of preparing for TOEFL writing than for university writing courses.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

### 7.1 Overview of Chapter

In this chapter, I revisit activity theory and discuss the usefulness of activity theory for my research. I then examine the research questions proposed in Chapter 1 in light of the results from the questionnaire, interviews, classroom observations, written materials, and a forum that are presented in Chapter 4, 5, and 6. I also discuss the implications of the findings and recommendations for second language writing<sup>20</sup> teaching in the U.S. and China and the implications for second language writing research. At the end of the chapter, I discuss the limitations of the present study, and suggest possible directions for future studies. While I am not claiming that I can make a generalization when answering the research questions and discussing implications, due to the fact that the curriculum in public schools in China is similar from place to place, what I found may also be the situation in other contexts. Therefore, I hope to shed light on second language writing teaching in the U.S. and China as well as second language writing research by drawing a sketch of some Chinese students' prior writing instruction and experience.

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<sup>20</sup> Second language writing in this dissertation includes both second language writing and foreign language writing, without differentiating those two.

## 7.2 Activity Theory

As discussed in Chapter 1, this dissertation draws on activity theory as a theoretical framework from the following three perspectives. First, the historical social nature of human activities and actions indicates that understanding students' previous writing instruction experience helps understand how students learn to write and their current writing practice, difficulties, and needs in writing classrooms. Second, in an activity system, the subject works on the object to achieve the outcome(s) by making use of various instruments. Finally, the contradictions within the elements of the activity systems can become the driving forces of learning and expanding.

In this dissertation, activity theory proves to be a useful tool and helps facilitate my research because I was able to see the relationship between the various elements in the activity system in which Chinese high school students who prepare to go abroad for undergraduate studies are the subjects. As the subjects, Chinese high school students work on English writing as their object to achieve their outcomes of meeting the requirements on English writing of universities. In this process, high school English writing instruction, assumed to be the main instrument, in fact, did not provide enough support for the students. Therefore, the contradictions between what high school English writing instruction provides to those students and what those students need become the driving forces for them to look for other instruments to achieve their goal. Those additional instruments included private supplementary tutoring in English writing in cram schools and online resources. Altogether, all these elements make the activity system an organic system in which Chinese high school students make use of writing instruction in high schools, cram schools, and resources online to work on their English writing in order



to achieve their outcome of meeting the requirements for English writing of overseas universities.

### 7.3 Discussion of Research Questions

In this section, I provide a discussion of the research questions proposed in Chapter 1. Each research question is repeated, and after it a brief summary of the findings and discussion related to it are provided. I will group research questions 2 and 3 instead of discussing them respectively in view of the interwoven nature of the two questions. Question 3—in what ways are students not prepared for writing courses in the U.S.—is in fact the other side of Question 2—what have students achieved in English writing competence from their prior learning experience in China. Therefore, to avoid repetition in discussing them respectively, I will discuss the two questions together.

#### *1. How did Chinese students prepare themselves for undergraduate studies in the U.S. in terms of English writing?*

The results presented in Chapter 4, 5, and 6 reveal that Chinese students, to prepare themselves for undergraduate studies in the U.S. in terms of English writing, mainly used three types of resources: English writing instruction in their high schools, private supplementary tutoring (PST) in English writing in cram schools, and online resources. It was found that, of the three types of resources, although English writing instruction in their high schools was assumed as the main source of support for students, as a matter of fact, PST in English writing students received in cram schools was dominant in the process of preparing themselves for English writing. This shift of reliance from high schools to PST in cram schools was due to the contradictions between

students' perceptions of writing as the most difficult skill and less importance placed by schools and teachers on writing, the mismatch of the genres taught in schools and those required in overseas writing tests, the length of writing assignments in schools and in overseas tests, the limited feedback received from high school teachers and the amount students needed, and the general instruction in writing in schools and the comprehensive instruction and test strategies needed by students. In a student's words, "the baby writing that was taught and practiced in high schools was not comparable to overseas writing tests such as TOEFL and SAT writing" (FB, personal communication, September 6, 2014). The online resources were also important for students, although not as important as PST in cram schools. Students used online resources mainly for test preparation rather than for improving English writing skills. The three types of resources that prepared students will be discussed below respectively.

*a) What writing experience and instruction did the students receive in high school?*

The results in Chapter 4 reveal that students had different writing experiences and instruction in different types of high schools. Some foreign language schools and more than half of international schools had writing courses. However, in most public high schools, writing was not an independent course; instead, it was incorporated in the larger scope of English class with the teaching of other skills including listening, speaking, and reading. In this overall curriculum, writing was not an important part because the high-stakes tests, especially the NMET, exert a far-reaching influence on the teaching of English. In fact, not only in China, but also in other countries, the standardized tests have influenced the instructional priorities, e.g., U.S. (Fanetti et al., 2010; Patterson & Duer,

2006), Jordan (Al-Jarrah & Al-Ahmad, 2013), Malaysia (Tan & Miller, 2007), and Poland (Reichelt, 2005). Teachers tend to teach to tests rather than devote more time to developing students' writing competence. As Fanetti et al. (2010) commented, "Writing is important for reasons beyond testing, and the impetus to teach writing as a powerful form of communication and expression is there, but the curricular constraints require those ideals to be uncomfortably married to practices that deflate their significance" (p. 80). As Reichelt (2005) reported on Polish English teachers who minimized writing to decrease the time for grading, English teachers in public high schools in China adopted the same practice due to large class size. They minimized time spent on teaching writing also due to the light weighting of the guided writing in the NMET and their perception of the minimum effort needed to obtain a fair grade on the NMET. Therefore, students from public high schools did not receive much writing instruction—about 20% of them received writing instruction for less than 10 minutes every week; over 60% of them received no more than 30 minutes of writing instruction per week; none of them received more than one hour of writing instruction per week. In foreign language and international schools, most teachers devoted from 10 minutes to one hour per week to teaching writing, and over 20% of them devoted over an hour. Although students from foreign language and international schools, compared to the public school students whose teachers spent a limited amount of time on writing instruction, received more writing instruction in terms of the time devoted to teaching writing by their teachers, the writing instruction they received, compared to the amount of time required in U.S. university writing courses, was far from enough.

As for what aspects of writing were taught in high schools and how writing was taught, the majority of students reported that their teachers taught grammar, sentence structures, organization, introductions, conclusions, vocabulary, and thesis statements; however, classroom observations revealed that public school teachers touched on mentioning introductions and conclusions briefly without teaching students how to write introductions and conclusions well. Some teachers taught logic and punctuation; few teachers taught use of source text, documentation, format, and rhetoric. As for teaching pedagogy, model-writing instruction was prevalent. It included activities such as analyzing model essays for students, and asking students to imitate good student writing and to memorize model essays, although memorizing model essays was used less frequently in foreign language and international schools. Other frequent activities included teacher lecturing (public school teachers' lectures were more limited and general while those in foreign language and international schools more detailed and comprehensive) and teaching various patterns of organization, grammar, and sentence structures to students. In addition, teachers also asked students to memorize useful words and phrases, discuss writing, do peer review, and practice handwriting. Process writing was rarely implemented, and most students were not taught how to do planning, drafting, revising, and editing.

In terms of the writing assignments students did in high schools, on average, students wrote 12 essays per semester; the average number of words for an essay was 298. Students wrote about 3,454 words per semester on average, with students from public schools writing less (2,120 words per semester on average), students in foreign language schools writing more (3,873 words), and those in international schools writing the most

(6,602 words). Topics of the assignments students did covered life, culture, education, economics, politics, and jobs. The frequent types of writing students did included narrative writing, argumentative writing, letters, and emails. Less practiced genres included expository writing, research papers, book reports, and movie reviews. Genres that were only written by a very small proportion of students were play writing, science reports, notice, news reports, poems, and summaries. When teachers graded students' writing, they valued correctness in grammar and spelling the most. Other important criteria included clarity of main ideas, organization, neatness and handwriting, content, and using good examples and details to illustrate main ideas; beauty of language, length of paper, quoting experts and other sources, and expression of true feelings were less valued; originality and imagination, critical thinking, and logic were almost not valued at all. In terms of feedback students received on their writing, about 40% of students received general comments like "good job" and grades without specific feedback. The rest of the feedback was focused mostly on grammar, spelling, organization, sentence structures, and word choice, with very few comments about content and logic. Multiple drafts were not a common practice; most students never or only sometimes wrote another draft. Without enough and appropriate feedback from the teachers, it was difficult for students to revise their writing relying on their own limited writing proficiency to produce another draft of better quality.

*b) How did the students engage in private supplementary tutoring? What was the instruction like? How did the students perceive the usefulness of that instruction?*

Results in Chapter 5 reveal that about 90% of students received PST in English writing in cram schools; the various types of PST students received included one-to-one tutoring, small group tutoring, and large class tutoring. Students favored PST in cram schools mainly because the test strategies taught in cram schools could help them obtain a higher grade on the writing section of overseas tests. Other reasons included that cram school teachers provided comprehensive instruction, gave more detailed feedback, and provided tailor-made instruction to raise their scores and improve their writing ability quickly. Students devoted themselves to PST in English writing in cram schools both intensively—about 4.5 hour per week, and extensively—as long as 40 weeks. The average of the total time devoted to PST in English writing in cram schools was 52 hours.

As for the instruction in cram schools, although teaching quality was an issue for some cram schools, the cram school at which I conducted my research tried to maintain a satisfactory level of the quality of teaching through recruiting competitive candidates, following rigorous selection procedures, providing relatively systematic teacher training, and correlating teachers' income with student evaluations. However, the low level of education, the lack of teacher certificates, and the high teacher turnover rate are unavoidable factors that might negatively impact teaching quality in cram schools. As for writing pedagogy, frequent activities included teaching test strategies, giving writing templates to follow, teaching different patterns of organization, analyzing model essays, asking students to memorize words and phrases, and giving detailed feedback. Teachers also asked students to write in class sometimes. All these methods were used to raise scores for students as the primary objective, and improve their writing ability as a byproduct.

When it comes to students' perceptions of the usefulness of such instruction, it was found that most students perceived PST in cram schools as helpful in preparing them for overseas tests, especially compared to writing instruction they received in high schools. Although the usefulness of PST in English writing in terms of preparing themselves for writing tests was acknowledged by most students, this was not necessarily the case for its usefulness vis-à-vis improving students' writing ability, because students believed that this type of writing instruction was test oriented and had a "ceiling effect" in improving their writing ability. As for students' perceptions of the usefulness of PST in preparing them for university writing courses, students considered the instruction in organization, logic, sentence structures, vocabulary, and grammar useful, but not that in essay length and genres.

*c) How did the students use online resources? What were the students' practices in writing in online communities and using online materials for English writing?*

In terms of students' experience with writing and using resources online, as revealed in the results reported in Chapter 6, about two thirds of students used online resources, and about one third wrote online. Students mainly wrote on social media and forums to raise scores on writing tests, improve English writing skills, and communicate with friends. Some students wrote online in English because they felt cool and more comfortable writing in English. As for the types of writing students did, most involved writing practice for overseas tests. Additional common types of writing included emails, narrative writing, posts, and argumentative writing other than TOEFL writing. Some students believed that the writing practice benefited them in terms of preparing them for

university writing courses because of the motivation from other community members on the forum and the sense of achievement from the encouragement of friends on social media. However, for those who did not write regularly and seriously, writing online was not helpful.

In terms of using online resources, most students reported using them to look for writing Ji Jing; however, they did not use it for cheating, but more for practicing writing and familiarizing themselves with various topics. In addition, students also used online resources to look for useful vocabulary, phrases, and sentences, writing templates, test strategies, and model essays. Some students also practiced writing and obtained feedback on their writing from forums. Almost all students trusted or trusted most of the online resources, and over 80% of students perceived the online resources helpful vis-à-vis preparing them for writing tests. However, when it comes to the usefulness of online resources for university writing courses, the majority of students thought it useless no matter whether it prepared them for sentence structures, organization, and vocabulary, or logic, grammar, genres, and the length of papers. Despite this ineffectiveness in preparing students for university writing courses, online resources have merits in students' minds since some believed that there were useful resources online for university writing courses, but their way of using the online resources for test preparation negatively impacted this usefulness.

2. *What have the students achieved in English writing competence from their prior learning experience in China?*
3. *In what ways are the students not prepared for writing courses in the U.S.?*



The results reported in Chapter 4, 5, and 6, and the discussion of students' previous experience with high school writing instruction, PST in cram schools, and writing and using resources online reveal that students in various types of schools have received different types of instruction and done different writing assignments. Public schools tended to write fewer and shorter essays than students from foreign language and international schools; they also received substantially less instruction and feedback from their teachers. However, since the majority of Chinese students in U.S. universities came from public schools, as indicated by the profiles of student participants in Chapter 3, the majority of Chinese students may have not received sufficient writing instruction in high schools nor have they received adequate feedback from their teachers. "Without feedback and revision as a routine part of daily writing lessons, students missed an essential part of the writing process—revision, the stage in which studying the writer's craft (strategies and skills) takes place" (Scherff & Piazza, 2005, p. 290). This may have contributed to students' under-preparation for university writing courses because "writing is a cultural invention that requires guidance and conscious effort in order to be mastered" (Flood, 2003, p. 968, cited from Wahlström, 2007, p. 4) and strategy instruction is an important factor that can influence students' writing positively (Graham & Perin, 2007). Although students turned to PST in cram schools to prepare for overseas writing tests, instruction in cram schools was test oriented rather than aimed at improving their writing ability in English to prepare them for university writing courses. Similarly, students used online resources and wrote online mainly for test preparation. The limited instruction in high schools, the test oriented teaching in cram schools, and the use of online resources for test preparation have caused Chinese students to lack preparation for university writing

courses in many aspects. I will discuss what they have achieved and what they are not prepared to do in terms of aspects of writing, perceptions of a good piece of writing, amount of writing, genres of writing, feedback, and writing pedagogy.

*Aspects of writing:* Most Chinese students have achieved competence in grammar since it was the most emphasized aspect in high schools. However, students may still have many errors in their writing due to the fact that the way grammar was taught in high school is mainly through grammar-translation, and practice for the usage of grammar is mainly through grammar drills and multiple choice exercises. In addition, grammar is also mainly tested through multiple-choice questions. Therefore, this may cause students to be “language-knowers” rather than “language-users” (M. Berns, personal communication, April 19, 2016). Many Chinese students may have also accumulated some vocabulary and sentence structures for university writing courses to demonstrate lexical and syntactic variety; however, word accuracy may be a challenge for them considering the fact that their way of accumulating vocabulary was memorizing English words and their meaning in Chinese, which may be misleading sometimes. Most students are familiar with organization, introductions, conclusions, and thesis statements, but many of them may not know how to write them well since public high schools teachers might not guide them in practicing writing those elements. In terms of other aspects of writing, most students never received instruction in logic, punctuation, format, rhetoric, use of source texts, and documentation, and thus have not achieved competence in these aspects.

*Perceptions of a good piece of writing:* Many students have understood the importance of grammar, clarity of main idea, organization, spelling, content, and using

good examples and details to illustrate main ideas for a good piece of writing. However, it may be difficult for them to understand the importance of quoting experts and other sources, originality and imagination, critical thinking, and logic since these criteria were rarely and even never emphasized by their teachers.

*Amount of writing:* As for the amount of writing, most Chinese students are not prepared to write long essays and big writing projects since in public high schools, students wrote about 198 words for each paper. Even when students from foreign language and international schools were taken into consideration, on average students wrote about 298 words for each essay. This, compared to university writing assignments, is far from enough. Therefore, students may be overwhelmed when asked to write at least 750 words or more.

*Genres of writing:* A large proportion of students have written a variety of genres including narrative writing, argumentative writing, letters, and emails. Some have written expository writing, research papers, book reports, and movie reviews. Only a few students wrote plays, science reports, notice, news reports, poems, and summaries. Therefore, students are familiar with a range of genres. However, despite the various genres students wrote, nearly half of the students never wrote argumentative essays. Some commonly written genres in U.S. composition classes such as literature reviews, critiques, comparison and contrast essays, and annotated bibliographies were not taught in high schools. Students may feel at a loss when required to write genres that they are unfamiliar with.

*Feedback:* Although many students did not get feedback from their writing teachers in high schools, I expect that they may have developed the ability to take

teachers' feedback and incorporate the feedback into their revision, because in cram schools, teachers provided fairly detailed feedback. However, most students did not develop the skill of providing feedback to their peers' writing because they were seldom asked to do peer-review prior to coming to the university. Even if some students were asked to do peer-review sometimes, they were asked to check their peers' grammar and spelling without giving feedback on other aspects of writing.

*Writing pedagogy:* In terms of writing pedagogy, the most frequent activity is model-writing instruction, not only in high schools, but also in cram schools. Students were provided with writing templates, asked to imitate good student writing, and directed to memorize model essays. This has been caused by the constraints of standardized tests (the NMET for public and some foreign language high schools and TOEFL and SAT for cram schools). This may cause students' writing to be too rigid and unable to meet the expectations of first year composition instructors in U.S. universities, which is consistent with the results reported by Fanetti et al. (2010) on writing instruction in U.S. high schools. Moreover, this approach may enable students to fall into the pit of unintentional plagiarizing in university writing courses, because they did not think their prior practice of imitating good writing and using words and ideas from model essays were plagiarizing, and may continue to do so when they go to university writing courses. In fact, the majority of Chinese students did not have a clear understanding of what plagiarism is and what constituted plagiarism (Zhang, 2014). In addition the popularity of model-writing instruction, writing pedagogy students received earlier also featured the lack of process writing, due to the lack of time and feedback. Therefore, most students are not prepared for process writing, and may not know how to do planning, drafting, revising, and editing.

#### 7.4 Implications and Recommendations

These findings have implications for second language writing teaching in the U.S. and China, and second language writing research. Firstly, in terms of the implications for second language writing teaching in U.S., these findings can provide second language writing teachers in U.S. universities with a picture of the writing instruction experience and writing background that Chinese students bring to writing classrooms. To be more specific, by knowing what writing competence Chinese students have achieved and in what aspects they are not prepared for university writing courses, writing teachers can better anticipate their difficulties and challenges, understand their practices, and address their needs in writing classes. Specific implications and recommendations for second language writing teaching are provided below from the perspectives of explaining rubrics, discussing rhetoric, guiding students in using source texts and doing documentation, adjusting schedules, clarifying assignment sheets, teaching peer-review strategies, dealing with plagiarizing, and implementing process writing.

*Explaining rubrics:* Writing teachers should not assume that all students know what a good piece of writing is like. Chinese teachers place considerable emphasis on grammar, spelling, organization, and handwriting, and this may cause Chinese students to think those are the most important elements of a good piece of writing, but do not understand the importance of quoting experts and other sources, originality and imagination, critical thinking, and logic because these criteria were rarely and even never emphasized by their teachers. Without a clear knowledge of what makes a good piece of writing, it is difficult for students to produce one. Therefore, writing teachers may consider talking about the rubric openly with the students before assigning a writing

project so that Chinese students can know what they are expected to produce to facilitate their success.

*Discussing rhetoric:* Rhetoric in English is a difficult concept for most Chinese students since they never learned about rhetoric before coming to university writing courses. Therefore, teachers may want to spend more time talking about rhetoric, and it would be better if teachers could ask students to discuss intercultural rhetorical differences to enhance their understanding.

*Guiding students in using source texts and doing documentation:* Chinese students may also be challenged in using source texts, documenting, and formatting following MLA and APA styles. Writing instructors, instead of sending students' the link to MLA or APA style guidelines on Purdue Online Writing Lab, may want to devote more time teaching how to use source texts and doing documentation in assigning research papers and literature reviews. Never exposed to using source texts and doing documentation, it is difficult for students to learn how to do APA and MLA formatting following the instructions on the website on their own.

*Adjusting schedule:* The schedule for university writing courses usually allows a fairly short time between assigning a writing assignment and the due date for the first draft. Take first year composition courses for international students at Purdue University, for example: students receive a writing assignment one day, and are usually required to turn in the first draft the next day. Therefore, students only have 24 hours to craft a first draft. This, to students who are used to writing long essays, may not be an issue; however, for Chinese students who were used to writing no more than 300 words, this is fairly challenging. Therefore, writing instructors, in making course schedules, may consider

giving more time for Chinese students to plan and draft. Another recommendation is not to grade the rough drafts; instead, to give students more time in producing a good final draft.

*Clarifying assignment sheets:* Some genres, although common in U.S. writing courses, are completely new to Chinese students, e.g., literature reviews, critiques, comparison and contrast essays, and annotated bibliographies. Therefore, writing instructors, when asking students to do such types of writing, may need to spend more time explaining assignment sheets and planning with students to make sure they understand what those types of writing are and how they can write them well.

*Teaching peer-review strategies:* Writing teachers, before asking students to do peer-review, may need to teach students the strategies for giving feedback on their peers' work to increase the effectiveness of the peer-review activity for the whole class.

*Dealing with plagiarizing:* Due to the influence of previous writing instruction, Chinese students may not have a clear idea of what plagiarism is and do not think using model essays is plagiarizing, and thus plagiarize unintentionally. Therefore, it is essential that writing instructors spend time lecturing on what is, what constitutes, and how to avoid plagiarism. Moreover, when students were found plagiarizing, teachers may want to investigate the reasons behind the action of plagiarizing, be it laziness or ignorance, before accusing them of plagiarizing and taking serious punishment actions.

*Implementing process writing:* Since most Chinese students were not exposed to process writing, they may struggle with this approach, and may not know how to produce the best work in the process. Writing instructors can teach students the skills of planning,

drafting, revising, and editing to help them succeed in writing classrooms where process writing is adopted.

On top of these implications and recommendations for U.S. writing teachers, the findings also imply that English writing teaching in Chinese high schools should be less test-oriented. Although writing instruction in Chinese high schools does not necessarily aim to improve students' writing in order to prepare students for U.S. university writing courses since those students constitutes only a small portion of the whole student population, improving students' writing ability instead of teaching to raise scores on the NMET should be the objective of English writing teaching, according to the *English Language Curriculum for Senior Secondary Schools*. High-stakes tests in China have influenced teachers' instructional priorities and exerted a negative washback effect on English writing instruction in Chinese high schools. Despite the intention of and effort made in the *English Language Curriculum for Senior Secondary Schools* and the writing section in the NMET to promote the development of language-use ability, in reality, English teachers still teach to raise scores. Offering an independent writing course should be the most direct and effective way in improving students' writing ability, but it is the most difficult solution, too, considering the difficulty and budget in recruiting writing teachers, the heavy workload of grading, and the difficulty in implementing communicative pedagogies and process writing in large classes. Therefore, the reform of the high stakes tests may help minimize the negative washback effect on English writing teaching. Other feasible ways may include increasing the weighting of the writing section in the total score of the NMET, changing the form of the prompt from guided writing to



more free writing, and using writing portfolios for the evaluation of writing ability instead of a one-shot writing test.

In addition to these implications for second language writing teaching, this dissertation also contributes to the field of second language writing and contrastive rhetoric in terms of providing writing instruction in a context that is different from U.S. and less researched—English writing instruction in high schools in China. The context where English writing teaching takes place influences the way writing is taught. The investigation of writing teaching in this context adds the educational context of writing instruction to the body of contrastive rhetoric studies. Moreover, the investigation of PST in English writing in cram schools sheds light on the field of second language writing by painting a picture of second language writing instruction and PST, which is usually hidden to second language writing teachers and researchers. Similarly, the investigation of students' experience with online writing and using online resources also add to the research of out-of-school writing, a situation in China which has been rarely reported.

### 7.5 Limitations

Despite the many implications from the findings of the dissertation, there were some limitations. First, this study involved Chinese students in one institution in the U.S. and high schools and cram schools in one city in China. Although the curriculum of English teaching in Mainland China in different cities is fairly homogeneous, multiple in-depth studies could have made the results more generalizable.

Secondly, the number of class sessions that were observed in Chinese high schools was fairly small compared to the number of schools from which Chinese students

in U.S. universities came. I tried to observe in as many schools as possible and as long as I could, but it was not achieved due to the constraint of time, budget, and the participants' reluctance.

Finally, the answers to the questionnaire were based on students' reflection of their past writing experience and instruction received, and therefore, may not be fully reliable considering the influence of time on memory. To mitigate this limitation, I intended to collect longitudinal data by following several Chinese high school students who were preparing for U.S. university applications until they finished their first year composition courses to track their practices at every stage. However, I was only able to recruit three participants who wanted to participate in this longitudinal study; later, they all quit from the study for various reasons.

#### 7.6 Directions for Future Studies

As noted above in the limitations, multiple in-depth studies are valuable. Therefore, future studies may consider replicating this study in different sites to see if the results still hold true.

Future studies should also consider observing more class sessions in more schools in order to get a fuller picture of English writing instruction in Chinese high schools and cram schools. This requires commitment both synchronically by investigating a number of different types of schools at the same time, and diachronically by spending a long period of time in the schools. This is a challenging task; therefore, co-researching for such a study is more feasible.

Finally, future studies may be longitudinal studies as mentioned in 7.4. In order to ensure successful data collection, researchers need to recruit as many participants as possible at the beginning since the loss of participants is one of the biggest challenges for such type of study. Once participants are recruited, researchers want to obtain their past writing experience and instruction received by asking them to fill in a questionnaire or agree to an initial semi-structured interview, or both. After that, researchers need to interview the students regularly, e.g., once every other week, to track students' practices, plans, and perceptions of different resources they use; researchers should also collect all written materials that are available, e.g., the materials the students' instructors or tutors used in teaching and feedback given on students' writing, the written texts produced by the students, and so on. When students are enrolled in writing courses in U.S. universities, the researchers may want to track their perceptions of the lecturing, conferences, assignments, and feedback, their difficulties and challenges, and their perceptions of and attitudes toward the role of their past writing experience in preparing them for university writing courses.

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## APPENDICES



## Appendix A: Questionnaire for Chinese Students

Part I. General information

Semester in University: \_\_\_\_\_ Major: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

1. In which country and city did you finish your high school?
2. What was the type of your high school? If you went to different schools, please list all of them.
  - a) Public schools
  - b) Foreign language schools
  - c) International schools
  - d) Private schools other than foreign language schools and international schools
  - e) International classes/departments in public/foreign language schools
  - f) Other \_\_\_\_\_

Part II. High School Writing Instruction Experience

3. Please rank the importance of the four skills of English in your school.
  - a. Listening b. Speaking c. Reading d. Writing
4. Please rank the difficultness of writing compared to other skills of English from most difficult to least difficult.
  - a. Listening b. Speaking c. Reading d. Writing
5. Which country did your English teacher come from?
6. How many times did you meet for English classes every week? How long did it last for each time?

7. Was English writing a separate subject outside English in your high school? If so, how many hours of English writing classes did you have every week?
8. How many essays did you write in a semester? How many words did you usually write for each essay?
9. Did you rewrite (revise) papers?
- a. Always b. Usually c. Sometimes d. Never
10. When you rewrote papers, what sorts of changes did you make? (Select as many as apply)
- a. Grammar b. Spelling c. Organization d. Word choice e. Logic f. sentence structures  
g. Overall content h. Other\_\_\_\_\_
11. What types of writing did you do in high school? (Select as many as apply)
- a. Narrative b. Argumentative c. Expository d. Book reports e. Letters f. Research papers  
g. Literature reviews h. Emails i. Compare and contrast essays j. Critiques  
k. Annotated bibliographies l. Movie reviews m. Other\_\_\_\_\_
12. What kinds of topics did you write about?
- a. Economy b. Daily life c. Culture d. Political issues e. Education f. Work g. Other\_\_\_
13. In high school, did you usually write essays in class or after class?
- a. In class b. After class c. Both
14. Did your teacher teach how to write English essays explicitly? If so, how much time did your teacher spend on English writing every week?
- a. Never b. Less than 10min c. 10-30min d. 30min-1h e. 1-2hs f. more than 2hs

15. What aspects of English writing did your teacher teach?

a. Vocabulary b. Grammar c. Sentence structures d. Organization e. Logic f.

Transitions

g. Introductions h. Conclusions i. Thesis statements j. Documentation k. Use of

source texts l. Punctuation m. Format n. Rhetoric o. Other\_\_\_\_\_

16. What techniques did your teachers use to teach writing? (Circle as many as apply)

a. We read and imitated examples of famous writers.

b. We read and imitated examples of student writers.

c. We re-copied examples.

d. The teacher lectured.

e. We wrote in class.

f. We discussed writing.

g. We read books about writing.

h. We learned different patterns of organization.

i. We practiced handwriting.

j. The teacher analyzed sample essays for us.

k. The teacher taught us to write in different genres.

l. We read our papers out loud.

m. We wrote journals or diaries.

n. We studied grammar and did grammar exercises.

o. We were asked to memorize writing done by famous people.

p. We were asked to memorize model essays.

q. We were asked to memorize our own essays.

- r. We participated in writing contests.
- s. The teacher guided us to do planning before writing.
- t. We did workbook exercises.
- u. We read and corrected each other's papers.
- v. The teacher taught specific strategies for planning, drafting, and revising
- w. We wrote letters/emails to other people.
- x. The teacher provided useful sentence structures for us to use in writing.
- y. We memorized good words and phrases.
- z. Other\_\_\_\_\_

17. Did your English teacher give feedback to students' paper?

- a. Always b. Most of the time c. Sometimes d. Never

18. If your answer to question 17 is yes, what kind of comments did you get from your teacher when you got your essay back?

- a. Grammar b. Spelling c. Organization d. Word choice e. Logic f. Sentence structures
- g. General comments like "Good job." h. Grade without specific comments i. Overall content j. Other\_\_\_\_\_

19. Which kinds of feedback helped you improve your writing most? Which were not helpful?

20. Which of these things did your teachers emphasize when they graded your papers?

(Circle as many as apply.)

- a. Beauty of language
- b. Clarity of main idea

- c. Correctness in grammar or spelling
  - d. Expressing your true feelings honestly
  - e. Length of paper
  - f. Neatness and handwriting
  - g. Originality and imagination
  - h. Organization
  - i. Content
  - j. Quoting experts and other sources
  - k. Originality and imagination
  - l. Using good examples and details to illustrate main ideas
  - m. Critical thinking
  - n. Logic
  - o. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - p. I don't know
21. Did your high school English classes prepare you well for the writing tests in the English exams such as TOEFL, IELTS, SAT and ACT?
- a. Yes b. No

Part III. Experience with PST in English Writing

22. To prepare the writing tests in the TOEFL or SAT, did you receive any private supplementary tutoring?
- a. Yes b. No
23. What form of private tutoring and how long did you take?

- a. a. One-to-one private tutoring in cram schools \_\_\_\_\_hours/week \* \_\_\_\_\_weeks
- b. Small group PST in cram schools \_\_\_\_\_hours/week \* \_\_\_\_\_weeks
- c. c. Large classes in cram schools \_\_\_\_\_hours/week \* \_\_\_\_\_weeks
- d. Home tutoring \_\_\_\_\_ hours/week\*\_\_\_\_\_weeks
- e. Other \_\_\_\_\_ hours/week\*\_\_\_\_\_weeks

24. Why did you receive PST in cram schools? (Circle as many as apply.)

- a. My high school teacher did not teach English writing
- b. My high school teacher didn't teach the type of writing that is tested in TOEFL/IELTS/SAT/ACT
- c. The examination-taken strategies writing teachers in cram schools taught me can help me obtain a higher grade in TOEFL/IELTS/SAT/ACT writing quickly
- d. I didn't understand what the teachers taught in high school
- e. My parents wanted me to.
- f. My friends went to, so I wanted to go with him/her.
- g. Writing teachers in cram schools provided more comprehensive instruction in English writing
- h. Writing teachers in cram schools gave more detailed feedback
- i. Writing teachers in cram schools could provide tailor-made instruction to me, which could improve my English writing quickly
- j. Other

25. What aspects of English writing did the teacher in cram schools teach?

- a. Vocabulary b. Grammar c. Sentence structures d. Organization e. Logic f.

Transitions

g. Introductions h. Conclusions i. Thesis statements j. Documentation k. Use of source texts l. Punctuation m. Format n. Rhetoric o. Other\_\_\_\_\_

26. What kind of techniques did the cram school teachers use?

- a. We read and imitated examples of famous writers.
- b. We read and imitated examples of student writers.
- c. We re-copied examples.
- d. The teacher lectured.
- e. We wrote in class.
- f. We discussed writing.
- g. We read books about writing.
- h. We learned different patterns of organization.
- i. We practiced typing.
- j. We were taught strategies for taking the writing test.
- k. We learned to write in different genres.
- l. The teacher analyzed model essays for us.
- m. We wrote journals or diaries.
- n. We studied grammar and did grammar exercises.
- o. We memorized writing done by famous people.
- p. We memorized model essays.
- q. We memorized our own essays.
- r. We memorized useful words and phrases
- s. We were given writing templates.
- t. We were given detailed feedback.

- u. We read and corrected each other's papers.
  - v. Other
27. What kind of feedback did you get from your teacher in cram schools on your writing?
- a. Grammar b. Spelling c. Organization d. Word choice e. Logic f. Sentence structures
  - g. General comments like "Good job." h. Grade without specific comments
  - i. Overall content j. Other\_\_\_\_
28. Which one was more helpful to improve your writing skills?
- a. The writing instruction you received from your high school teachers
  - b. The instruction from cram school teachers
  - c. They were equally helpful
  - d. Neither was helpful
29. Which one was more helpful to help prepare the TOEFL writing and SAT writing tests?
- a. The writing instruction you received from your high school teachers
  - b. The instruction from cram school teachers
  - c. They were equally helpful
  - d. Neither was helpful

Part IV. Experience with Writing Online and Using Online Resources

30. Did you do any English writing outside school?
- a. Yes b. No
31. If your answer to question 13 is yes, did you write online or offline?



- a. Online b. Offline c. Both

32. Did you write in English in those places and if so, how often did you write?

- a. Weibo Daily; Weekly; Monthly; Yearly; Seldom; Never  
 b. Blogs Daily; Weekly; Monthly; Yearly; Seldom; Never  
 c. Facebook Daily; Weekly; Monthly; Yearly; Seldom; Never  
 d. Renren Daily; Weekly; Monthly; Yearly; Seldom; Never  
 e. Weibo Daily; Weekly; Monthly; Yearly; Seldom; Never  
 f. Wechat Daily; Weekly; Monthly; Yearly; Seldom; Never  
 g. Forums Daily; Weekly; Monthly; Yearly; Seldom; Never  
 h. Other\_\_\_\_Daily; Weekly; Monthly; Yearly; Seldom; Never

33. What kinds of writings did you do outside school?

- a. Narrative b. Argumentative c. Expository d. Book reports e. Letters f. Research papers  
 g. Poems h. Emails i. Diaries j. Posts k. Writing practice for tests l. other\_\_\_\_\_

34. Why did you write in English online?

- a. To improve my English writing skills  
 b. To raise scores on writing tests  
 c. To communicate with friends who use English  
 d. Feel more comfortable when writing in English  
 e. Feel cool  
 f. Other \_\_\_\_\_

35. Did you use any online websites to improve your English writing or help prepare for the writing tests? What websites did you use?

a. Taisha b. Xiaomaguohu c. Hujiang English d. Other\_\_\_\_\_

36. How did you use the websites?

- a. To look for Jijing
- b. To practice writing
- c. To get peer-review feedback from the website users
- d. To look for model essays
- e. To look for writing templates
- f. To look for useful words, phrases, and sentence structures
- g. Other\_\_\_\_\_

37. Do you trust the online resources?

- a. Trust b. Trust most of them c. Do not trust most of them b. Do not trust

38. Did you think the online website helpful?

- a. Very helpful b. Helpful c. Not very helpful d. Not helpful at all

39. In what aspects have the prior writing instruction in English in high schools prepared you for writing courses at Purdue University?

- a. Vocabulary b. Grammar c. Sentence structures d. Organization e. Logic f. Genres
- g. Length h. Other\_\_\_\_\_

40. In what aspects have the private supplementary tutoring in English writing in cram schools prepared you for writing courses at Purdue University?

- a. Vocabulary b. Grammar c. Sentence structures d. Organization e. Logic f. Genres
- g. Length h. Other\_\_\_\_\_

41. In what aspects have your prior experience with writing online and using online materials prepared you for writing courses at Purdue University?

- a. Vocabulary b. Grammar c. Sentence structures d. Organization e. Logic f. Genres  
g. Length h. Other\_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY.

## Appendix B: Interview Questions for Purdue Students

1. What kind of school was your high school?
2. How did you learn to write, or in other words, improve your English writing before coming to Purdue?
3. What kind of English writing instruction did you receive in high school?
4. Did you find the instruction helpful? Why?
5. Did the instruction on writing in your high school prepare you for the writing tests in TOEFL and SAT? If not, how did you prepare for those tests?
6. Did you receive any PST in cram schools? What kind of instruction in English writing did you receive in cram schools?
7. Did you find the instruction helpful? Why?
8. Did the instruction on writing in cram schools prepare you for the writing tests in TOEFL and SAT? If not, how did you prepare for those tests?
9. Did you write in English online or use online materials on the websites to help you improve your writing? What were your practices?
10. Which way did you think was the most helpful for improving your writing skills?
11. Which way did you think was the most helpful for preparing the writing tests in TOELF and SAT?
12. How did your prior writing instruction and writing experience prepare you for writing courses at Purdue?

## Appendix C: Interview Questions for High School Teachers

1. What is your age? What is your highest degree earned? What is your major? How long have you been teaching English?
2. What is your objective in teaching English writing?
3. How important is writing compared to other skills? Why?
4. How much time do you spend teaching writing every week? How about other skills?
5. How do you teach writing?
6. How often do you ask students to write essays?
7. What kinds of writing assignments do you teach students to write?
8. What do you think are the most important types of writing for students to learn?
9. What kinds of class activities and homework do you assign to help students become better writers?
10. How many drafts do you ask students to write for an essay?
11. What kind of feedback do you give for students' writing?
12. What do you look for when you grade a student's writing?
13. How do you use the writing activities in the textbooks?
14. Do you teach writing according to the requirements in the national curriculum and syllabus? If yes, how? If not, why?
15. What do you think are good ways to become better writers in English?

#### Appendix D: Interview Questions for High School Administrators

1. What is your title and what are you responsible for? How long have you been doing this?
2. What is involved in the training of the teachers-in-training for English?
3. What is most emphasized in English teaching? Why?
4. What role does writing play in the curriculum and syllabus for English? Does your school emphasize English writing? Why?
5. What kinds of training or information do teachers-in-training get in regard to teaching writing in English? In other words, how are English teachers prepared for teaching writing?
6. What resources exist for teachers of English writing?
7. What are the teachers' qualifications?
8. What is the teachers' workload?

## Appendix E: Interview Questions for the Cram School Teacher

1. What is your age? What is your highest degree earned? What is your major? How long have you been teaching English?
2. How do you teach writing?
3. How often do you ask students to write essays?
4. What kinds of writing assignments do you teach students to write?
5. What kinds of class activities and homework do you assign to help students become better writers?
6. How many drafts do you ask students to write for an essay?
7. What kind of feedback do you give for students' writing?
8. What is your objective for teaching writing?
9. What kind of materials do you use to teach writing?
10. What kind of teacher training do you receive? Do you think it is helpful? What kind of teacher training do you want to get?
11. How do you think the students benefit from the writing instruction in cram schools?

### Appendix F: Interview Questions for the Cram School Administrator

1. What is your title and what are you responsible for? How long have you been doing this?
2. What kind of PST does your school provide for students who are preparing to go abroad for higher education?
3. What are the qualifications of teachers in your school?
4. What is the quality of teaching?
5. What kinds of training or information do teachers-in-training get in regard to teaching writing in English? In other words, how are English teachers prepared for teaching writing?
6. What resources exist for teachers of English writing?
7. What is the objective of teaching English?
8. Why do you think students come to cram schools to learn to write?
9. How do you think the students benefit from the writing instruction in cram schools?



VITA

## VITA

Cong Zhang

**EDUCATION**

Ph.D., English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, USA (May, 2016)

M.A., Applied Linguistics, Shandong University, Jinan, China (June, 2011)

B.A., English, Shandong University, Jinan, China (July, 2008)

**PUBLICATIONS*****JOURNAL ARTICLES & REPORTS***

**Zhang, C., Yan, X., & Liu, X. (2015).** *The development of EFL writing teaching and research in China: An update from the international conference on English language teaching. Journal of Second Language Writing, 30, 14-18.*

**Zhang, C. (2014).** Plagiarism in their own words: What Chinese and American students say about academic dishonesty. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics, 37(3), 373-391.*

**Yan, X., & Zhang, C. (under review).** Reconsidering language assessment training and framework of teacher education: Focusing on assessment contexts, practices, and teachers. *System.*

**EDITED BOOK**

Silva, T., Wang, J., Paiz, J., & **Zhang, C.** *L2 writing in the global context: Represented, underrepresented, and unrepresented voices.* (Under contract.)

**NEWSLETTER ARTICLES**

Silva, T., Park, K., **Zhang, C.**, & Chen, Y. Scholarship on L2 writing in 2014: The year in review. *SLW News*, March 2016. Accessible from

<http://newsmanager.commpartners.com/tesolslwis/issues/2016-02-26/email.html>

Silva, T., Thomas, S., Park, K., & **Zhang, C.** Scholarship on L2 writing in 2013: The year in review. *SLW News*, September 2014. Accessible from

<http://newsmanager.commpartners.com/tesolslwis/issues/2014-09-24/6.html>

**Zhang, C.**, & Paiz, J. M. Different voices were heard: The 2013 Symposium on Second Language Writing. *SLW News*, March 2014. Accessible from:

<http://newsmanager.commpartners.com/tesolslwis/issues/2014-03-05/10.html>

Paiz, J. M., & **Zhang, C.** The Symposium on Second Language Writing goes to Mainland China. *NCTE ESL Assembly News*, November 2013, p. 4.

**PRESENTATIONS****SYMPOSIA, WORKSHOPS, AND INVITED TALKS**

**Zhang, C.** (2014, November). A sketch of English writing textbooks in Chinese universities. In J. Wang (Chair), *Teaching of EFL writing in Chinese higher education institutions: Curriculum, textbooks, instruction, and assessment.* Invited colloquium at the Symposium on Second Language Writing, Tempe, AZ.

- Zhang, C.** (2014, September). *Knowing what first year composition courses in the U.S. require: Facilitating the transition from EFL high school classrooms to ESL university writing classes.* Invited talk at the International Department, Shandong Experimental High School, Jinan, China.
- Berns, M., & **Zhang, C.** (2013, November). *China English: Constructing a national face.* In M. Berns (Chair), *Centrifugal forces and policies/politics: From constructing the Queer to facing the nation and points in between.* Invited talk at the International Association of World Englishes Conference, Tempe, AZ, USA.
- Berns, M., & **Zhang, C.** (2013, November). *Why China English?* In M. Berns (Chair), *Current issues in World Englishes—Six perspectives.* Invited talk at the Indiana Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (INTESOL) Conference, Indianapolis, IN, USA.
- Silva, T., Paiz, J., & **Zhang, C.** (2013, November). *The making of a professional conference: The 12th Symposium on Second Language Writing.* Invited talk at the *English as a Second Language Speaker Series, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN.*
- Zhang, C.** (2012, June). *Building the way into American graduate schools.* Invited talk at the *School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Shandong University, Jinan, China.*

**CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS & POSTERS**

**Zhang, C.** (2016, April). *Writing their way to American Universities: An investigation of Chinese students' experience with private supplementary tutoring*. Poster presented at the 1<sup>st</sup> Research on Asian and Asian American Students, West Lafayette, IN, USA.

Silva, T., **Zhang, C.**, Park, H., & Chen, Y. (2015, March). *Scholarship on L2 writing in 2014: The year in review*. Paper presented at the annual Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Conference, Toronto, Canada.

**Zhang, C.**, & Yan, X. (2014, October). *An investigation of test preparation practices by K-12 English learners and EFL teachers in China*. Paper presented at the International Conference on English Language Teaching, Nanjing, China.

Yan, X., & **Zhang, C.** (2014, October). *Assessment literacy for K-12 EFL teachers: Evidence from psychometric properties of a regional high-stakes EFL test in China*. Paper presented at the International Conference on English Language Teaching, Nanjing, China.

**Zhang, C.** (2014, June). "We don't do that in Chinese"—*Textual borrowing in different cultures*. Paper presented at the Research and Teaching Intercultural Competence and 8<sup>th</sup> Intercultural Rhetoric and Discourse Conference, Indianapolis, IN, USA.

Koyama, D., Gherwash, G., & **Zhang, C.** (2014, April). *Speech acts in email requests*. Poster presented at the 19<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Pragmatics and Language Learning, Bloomington, IN, USA.

- Silva, T., Thomas, S., **Zhang, C.**, & Park, H. (2014, March). *Scholarship on L2 writing in 2013: The year in review*. Paper presented at the annual Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Conference, Portland, OR, USA.
- Zhang, C.** (2014, March). *English writing instruction in Chinese high school—Clues from the textbooks used*. Paper presented at the Purdue University Graduate Student Symposium on Second Language Studies and English as a Second Language, West Lafayette, IN, USA.
- Zhang, C.**, & Partridge, S. (2014, March). *Academic midwifery: The birth of a new English*. Paper presented at the Purdue University Graduate Student Symposium on Second Language Studies and English as a Second Language, West Lafayette, IN, USA.
- Zhang, C.** (2013, October). “*Is it Confucius’ Fault? A Study of Chinese Students and Plagiarism.*” Paper presented at the Symposium on Second Language Writing, Jinan, China.
- Zhang, C.**, Koyama, D., & Gherwash, G. (2013, October). *L1 and L2 Email requests: An explorative study of inter/intrasubjective comparisons*. Paper presented at the Symposium on Second Language Writing, Jinan, China.
- Zhang, C.** (2012, April). *A pilot study of how Chinese students perceived plagiarism*. Paper presented at the Purdue University Graduate Student Symposium on Second Language Studies and English as a Second Language, West Lafayette, IN, USA.

## **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

### **Graduate Teaching Assistant**

Department of English, Purdue University (August, 2011-present)

- *ENGL106i First Year Composition for International Students*
- *ENGL106 First-Year Composition: Academic Writing and Research*

### **Graduate Teaching Assistant**

School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Shandong University (September, 2008-June, 2011)

- *English-Chinese Interpretation*
- *English Listening—Advanced Level*
- *English Listening—Intermediate Level*
- *English Listening—Beginner Level*
- *Family Album U.S.A*

### **Instructor**

New Oriental School, Jinan, China (September, 2008-June, 2011)

- *English-Chinese Interpretation*
- *TOEFL Writing*
- *English Vocabulary*
- *New Concept English—Book I, II, and III.*

**Instructor**

Li Yang Crazy English Intensive English Program, Shandong, China (September 2006-May 2008)

- *English Speaking*

**PROFESSIONAL SERVICES**

2014-2015    **Professional Development Committee**, English as a Second Language Graduate Organization (ESL GO), Purdue University

2013-2014    **Vice President**, English as a Second Language Graduate Organization (ESL GO), Purdue University

2013-present **Proposal reviewer**,

*TESOL 2015*

*Purdue University Second Language Studies Symposium 2012*

2008-present **Organizing committee member**,

*Symposium on Second Language Writing, 2012-2013*

*Purdue University Second Language Studies Symposium 2012-2014*

*Annual Conference of China English Language Education Association, 2010*

*International Conference on Chinese and East-Asian Learners, 2008*

2012-2013    **Conference/Program/Session chair**

*Assistant chair, Program co-chair, Symposium on Second Language Writing, 2013*



*Session chair, Symposium on Second Language Writing, 2012*

*Session chair, Conference on College Composition and Communication,  
2012*

- 2012-2013 **Symposium chair**, English as a Second Language Graduate Organization  
(ESL GO), Purdue University
- 2008-2010 **Graduate Studies Committee**, Shandong University, Jinan, China
- 2006-2007 **President**, English Association, Shandong University, Jinan, China

#### **ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIPS & AWARDS**

- 2015 **Excellence in Teaching Award**, Department of English, Purdue University
- 2015 **Quintilian-Award for Excellence in Teaching in the Composition Program**,  
Department of English, Purdue University
- 2012 **Student Award**, 7<sup>th</sup> Intercultural Rhetoric and Discourse Conference,  
Indianapolis, IN, USA
- 2011-present **Teaching assistantship**, Department of English, Purdue University
- 2009-2011 **Teaching Excellence Award**, New Oriental School, Jinan, China
- 2008 **Outstanding Thesis Award**, Shandong University, Jinan, China
- 2005-2008 **First-class Scholarship**, Shandong University, Jinan, China

#### **GRANTS**

- 2015 *Graduate School Summer Research Grant, Purdue University* \$3090