

THE EFFECTS OF TIME CONSTRAINTS ON STUDENTS' WRITING PERFORMANCE

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Abstract: Most of the standardized tests that are administered today exist with time constraints for completion. However, these prescribed time constraints are often not allowing test takers enough time to do the test calmly and rationally. Rooted in the phenomenon, this study was conducted. By using factorial design as the design of this study, the objective of this study was specifically to find out whether or not time constraints significantly affected on students' writing performance. This study was conducted among EFL learners of English Education Study Program at STKIP Siliwangi Bandung. They were asked to write two equivalent types of an argumentative essay writing based on a certain topic under varied testing conditions, a standard time constraint (90 minutes) and under an extended time constraint (120 minutes). To collect the data, the instruments used in this study were a writing test and semi-structured interview. To achieve the objective of this study, the one-sample Wilcoxon signed-rank test and Mann-Whitney U test were used. The findings of the study showed that there was any difference on the students' writing performance between students with 90 minute test taking time and 120 minute test taking time. In short, time constraints affected the students' writing performance.

Keywords: *time constraints, the effects of time constraints, students' writing performance*

Most of the standardized tests that are administered today exist with time constraints for completion. More often than not, these prescribed time constraints for testing are not allowing test takers enough time to consider all of the items on a test calmly and rationally, without the overwhelming feeling of being rushed (McGrath, 2009). Therefore, this study was conducted. This present study gave an attempt to find out whether or not time constraints affected students' writing performance, which in turn, EFL students' performance on essay writing test became of the major concerned. EFL students' performance on essay writing test became of the major concerned since it was in association with the process of writing test itself. This is what has been advocated by Reimes as cited in Chaudrey (1990).

Time is a crucial element of the writing process... Writers have time to make decisions, time to play around with ideas, time to construct and reconstruct sentences, to form and re-form arguments, to experiment with new words, and above all, time to change their minds. Time should not be a constraint, and revision should ... be a built-in part of the writing process (p. 122).

Therefore, it could be assumed that time allocated is considered decisive. Writing activities do not only revolve around how to write some correct sentences and how to make them coherent one another, but also require test takers to put their ideas into a piece of writing. As the consequence, it is indisputable that the test takers need time to determine and/or settle as well as to attempt to give a try on the use of some ideas.

Concerning the issue of time limits and the examinee's performance, Elliot and Marquart (2004) have conducted a study. The objective of their study was to examine the effect of extended time during testing on the performance of students who either did or did not have disabilities or who were at risk in math. 97 students were selected from eighth grade classes and were asked to complete two equivalent types of a standardized math test under varied testing conditions, a standard time limit (20 minutes) and also under an extended time limit (40 minutes). Results of this study showed that there were no significant differences among groups with or without disabilities and those at risk in mathematics. However, evidence supported significant differences among the three groups of students (those with a disability, those without a disability, and those at risk in mathematics) regarding the amount of change that occurred in terms of their performance in each of the two time conditions.

Being inspired by Elliot and Marquart, this study was conducted. This study was conducted among EFL learners of English Education Study Program at STKIP Siliwangi Bandung. In this regard, 38 students of semester 6 became the subjects of this study. They were asked to write two equivalent types of an argumentative essay writing based on a certain topic (i.e. the use of English in campus) under varied testing conditions, a standard time constraint (90 minutes) and also under an extended time constraint (120 minutes).

Specifically, the objective of this study was to find out whether or not time constraints significantly affected on students' writing performance (argumentative essay writing). It is expected that the results of the study will give some benefits for teachers and EFL students in particular. Through this study, the teachers will be

aware of the phenomenon that happens to their students and try to find the best solution for time constraints experienced by the students while facing writing test.

Methods

This study mainly used a factorial design. This study was conducted among EFL learners of English Education Study Program at STKIP Siliwangi Bandung. In this regard, 38 students of semester 6, who have been already occupied in Writing for Academic Purposes subject course, became the subjects of this study. The students consist of 11 males and 27 females.

To collect the data, the instruments used in this study were a writing test and semi-structured interview. The first instrument was employed to find out the effects of time constraints on students' writing performance, whereas the second one was used to gain rich and meaningful data as support for the first instrument's findings.

In more detail, to collect the data, firstly, the students were asked to write two equivalent types of an argumentative essay writing based on a certain topic (i.e. the use of English in campus) under varied testing conditions, a standard time constraint (90 minutes) and also under an extended time constraint (120 minutes). This section was conducted on April 9th, 2011 and April 10th, 2011. Then, the results of this section were interpreted to answer research problem and compared to the theories underpinning the study (Emilia as cited in Emilia, 2008, p. 197).

Secondly, to capture the richness and detail of the effects of time constraints on students' writing performance, a semi-structured interview was conducted on a one-to-one and face-to-face basis and recorded (as suggested by Silverman, 2005) to provide a permanent record. To do so, two male students and two female students were selected. The interview itself was conducted on May 20th, 2013.

To answer the research problem of this study, which was "*Do different time constraints have an effect on students' writing performance (argumentative essay writing)?*", the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0 was used to analyze and calculate the data. Specifically, the data was calculated by using the one-sample Wilcoxon signed-rank test. Meanwhile, to show the difference of writing performance for students at two different levels of gender (i.e. male and female), this study used the Mann-Whitney U test.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of research problem of this study are reported as follows.

The Effects of Time Constraints on Students' Writing Performance (Argumentative Essay Writing)

Based on the calculation by using the one-sample Wilcoxon signed-rank test, it can be identified that time constraints affected students' writing performance. In this study, the Sig. value was 0.001 (which really meant less than 0.005). Therefore, the two sets of scores were significantly different. In other words, the null hypothesis of this study (i.e. there was no difference on the students' writing performance between students with 90 minute test taking time and 120 minute test taking time) was rejected. Table 2 displays the effect of time constraints on students' writing performance.

Table 2
The Effect of Time Constraints on Students' Writing Performance
Test Statistics^b

	120 minutes - 90 minutes
Z	-3.363 ^a
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.001

a. Based on negative ranks.

b. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

Supporting the finding above, from a semi-structured interview, the researchers found out the similar finding. Three out of four interviewees reported that the length of time mattered for them as test takers. For them, writing an argumentative essay under an extended time constraint (120 minutes) was considered sufficient. It was because they could use the time to reread their own writings, make correction to the grammar errors, make coherent paragraphs, and develop more their own writings. As the result, they felt optimistic that they produced a better writing under an extended time constraint (120 minutes), which in turn, the scores of their writings became higher.

Overall, the findings showed that time constraints affected students' writing performance (argumentative essay writing). The finding of this study has confirmed Elliot and Marquart's (2004) study showing the effect of time constraints on students' writing performance.

The Difference of Writing Performance for Students at Two Different Levels of Gender

Based on the calculation by using Mann-Whitney U test, it could be identified that there was no difference of writing performance for students at two different levels of gender (i.e. male and female). Based on the way to interpret output from Mann-Whitney U test stated by Pallant (2005, p. 292), the two values that need to look at in the output are the **Z** value and the significance level (presented as **Asymp. Sig (2-tailed)**). In this study, the Z value was -1.048 with a significance level of $p = 0.295$. The probability value (p) was not less than or equal to 0.05, so the result was not significant. It could be concluded that there was no statistically significant difference in the students' writing performance of males and females. The insignificant difference in the students' writing performance of males and females is reflected in Table 3.

Table 3
The Insignificant Difference in the Students' Writing Performance
of Males and Females
Test Statistics^a

	Students' Writing Performance
Mann-Whitney U	502.500
Wilcoxon W	1987.500
Z	-1.048
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.295

a. Grouping Variable: gender

Conclusions and Suggestions

Based on the findings and discussion, there was any difference on the students' writing performance between students with 90 minute test taking time and 120 minute test taking time. In short, time constraints affected the students' writing performance. However, there was no statistically significant difference in the students' writing performance of males and females. The findings of this study have confirmed Elliot and Marquart's (2004) study showing the effect of time constraints on students' writing performance.

By looking at the findings of the study, it can be concluded that time constraints cannot be taken for granted. Otherwise, it is necessarily important to consider the extended time constraints for administering essay writing tests. For the next researchers, like every other study, this study had certain limitations. The first possible limitation was regarding the sample size. As the result, the generalizability of the findings of this study would be limited with this sample. Leaving from this limitation, further studies should use a large sample for the desired results. The second limitation was consideration that this study was still a mini-scale study. Hence, there is need for further studies in this area by using the different designs, instruments, and subjects of the study. Therefore, those studies can enhance the richness of aspects related to time constraints and students' performance.

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Biodata

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