

Original Paper

Measuring the Impacts of Using the Process Approach to Teach Second-Year English Major Students Essay Writing

Moussa Tankari^{1*}, Ayodele Adebayo Allagbé¹, & Abdou Maigüero¹

¹ Unité de Recherche en Sciences Sociales, Humaines, et de l'Éducation (UR_2SHE), Université de Zinder (République du Niger), Niger

* Moussa Tankari, mtankari@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper aimed at measuring the impacts of using the process approach to teach second-year English major students at the English Department of Université de Zinder (henceforth, UZ) essay writing. Drawing on the pre-test-post-test repeated measures design, this study examined the written essays produced by the EFL students before and after the writing class. These pre and post tests were scored based on a criterial fair copy, and the scores were compared by means of an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to check whether there were any statistically significant differences between the mean scores. The findings revealed that the process approach had a positive impact on the participants' essay writing skills. Also, employing Classroom Observation, the article attempted to qualitatively measure student engagement in the writing class. The findings further exuded that the EFL students observed were cognitively involved in the learning activities conducted in the class. Based on the foregoing findings, this study recommends that the process approach to (the teaching of) writing be adopted and used to teach writing in EFL classes across/in Niger.

Keywords

EFL, essay writing, process approach, student engagement, Université de Zinder

1. Introduction and Conceptual Clarification

Essay writing is one of the essential skills any student reading English as a major in any university worldwide is expected to know and have a good command of. EFL students, especially those majoring in the English language, need to learn how to write for some basic reasons: 1). writing is a means of communication; 2). it is a means of consolidating grammar and vocabulary; 3). it is a means of practising and using the target language outside the classroom (Watkins, 2004 as cited in Ahamad, 2016; Khatter,

2019); 4). it is a recursive problem-solving process to discover meaning (Anastasiadou, 2014); 5). it provides students with the opportunity to support other learning experiences such as recording, assimilating, and reformulating knowledge, and developing and working through ideas. In other words, writing is a means of personal discovery, creativity and self-expression (Wirawati, Tantra, & Ratminingsih, 2013). According to Nik et al. (2010), learning how to write well and effectively helps students to achieve three very important objectives: 1). it helps reinforce their command of grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary; 2). it provides them with the opportunities to be more adventurous with the language, to go beyond what they have learnt and to take risks with the effects of writing; and 3). it helps build and develop their language skills in terms of fluency, accuracy and appropriateness, in the communication of meanings and messages.

However, before a student can know how to write in general, an essay in particular, s/he is expected to take a course in composition or writing. It is in this perspective that Université de Zinder (henceforth, UZ) has foreseen a course entitled ‘ANG 204 English Composition’, which aims to equip second-year English major students with the necessary skills to write good sentences, paragraphs, and essays with a particular emphasis on the writing process. The quality of students’ writing, as it is argued in the literature, depends on the approach used to teach it. There are two basic types of writing approach, namely: product approach and process approach. Nunan (1998, p. 36) defines the product approach to (the teaching of) writing as an approach which focuses on the end result of the writing activities. This approach is also considered as a teacher-centred approach in that it is the teacher who provides the students with a model that they are to imitate. The product approach is also called a model approach (Akinwamide, 2012). Unlike the product approach, Nunan (1999, p. 312) claims that the process approach to (the teaching of) writing is “an approach to writing pedagogy that focuses on the steps involved in drafting and redrafting a piece of work. Learners are taught to produce, reflect on, discuss and rework successive drafts of a text.” In the same vein, Tribble (1996) (quoted in Alodwan & Ibnian, 2014, p. 143) contends that the process approach is “an approach to the teaching of writing which stresses the creativity of the individual writer, and which pays attention to the development of good writing practices, rather than the imitation of models”.

According to Onozawa (2010, p. 154), the process approach to writing is “an approach to writing, where language learners focus on the process by which they produce their written products, rather than on the products themselves.” In a bid to prove the learner-centred nature of this approach, this scholar further posits that “In the Process approach, learners are looked upon as central in learning, so that learners’ needs, expectations, goals, learning styles, skills and knowledge are taken into consideration.” (ibid., p. 155). In the same token, Alodwan and Ibnian (2014, p. 147) hold that “The process approach takes the stance that language teaching should be concerned more with what the learner wants to say. [This implies thus that] The learner’s interaction or purpose becomes of paramount importance [in the writing class].” Drawing on the forgoing claims, Bayat (2014, p. 1133) submits that “This approach focuses on the

student in writing lessons, and the teacher only acts as a guide. The process writing approach involves activities occurring during the production of a written text.”

The current paper is set against the backdrop of the foregoing theoretical claims. It specifically aims to measure the impacts of using the process approach to teach second year English major students, from the UZ, essay writing. In other words, this study examines whether or not the process approach fosters EFL university students’ essay writing skills. It also checks whether or not the process approach to writing gets EFL university students engaged in the writing process. Following this, this article seeks to answer the two epistemological questions below:

- 1) Does the process approach to writing influence the EFL students’ performance on essay writing?
- 2) Does the process approach foster the EFL students’ engagement in the writing process?

2. Literature Review

There is an increasing body of empirical research studies which have measured the impacts or effects of the process approach on the teaching of writing in ESL, EFL and ESP contexts. Akinwamide (2012), for example, examined the influence of the process approach on English as second language students’ performances in essay writing. The investigation covered two states in the South-western part of Nigeria: Ekiti and Ondo. Two senior secondary schools were purposively selected from the states and the sample comprised 80 students divided into two groups: experimental and control. One research instrument was used to collect data from the students. The instrument was the Essay Writing Achievement Test (EWAT); an adapted West African Examination Council (WAEC) Essay Writing past question paper. Again, the researcher used a test retest method to collect data (pre and post test scores) for his study and t-test to compare the pre-test and post-test scores of the two groups to check whether there were significant differences between the two mean scores. From the findings, the researcher inferred that there was a significant difference in the post-test scores of the Experimental and the Control groups, but there was no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the students in the Control group.

Alodwan and Ibnian (2014) also investigated the effect of using the process approach to writing on developing university students’ essay writing skills. The study was conducted at the World Islamic Sciences and Education University and the sample population consisted of 90 non-English major students randomly selected from English 101 sections at the aforementioned university. These students were classed into two groups: experimental and control. To elicit data from these students, the researchers used the descriptive method and the quasi-experimental design. From these data, Alodwan and Ibnian reported that the process approach to writing had positively affected the students’ essay writing skills in EFL. In addition, they noted that the experimental group performed much better on the post-essay writing test than the control group. As a result of the foregoing, they concluded that the process approach had a positive effect on developing university students’ essay writing skills.

In the same token, Sukanaya (2020) explored the effect of the process approach on students’ writing competency at SMK Negeri 1 Kubutambahan Bali. The sample population comprised 33 students. To

collect data from the sample population, the researcher used the pre-post-test experimental research design. The collected data were analysed using descriptive and inferential analysis. From the analysis, the researcher reported that the students' mean score in pre-test was 6.3 and the mean score in post-test was 7.7. Again, it was reported that the t test result showed a significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test with Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.000. As a result of this, it was suggested that English teachers should focus on the process of writing rather than on the product, especially when they teach students whose level of language proficiency is low.

Bayat (2014) investigated the effect of the process writing approach on writing success and anxiety. The participants in this study were first-year students studying preschool teaching at Akdeniz University, Faculty of Education in fall term of 2012. They were subdivided into two groups: experimental and control. To collect data from the students, the researcher employed a pre-test-post-test control group quasi-experimental design. The data collection instruments involved by Daly and Miller (1975)'s Writing Apprehension Test and the students' academic essays. The collected data were statistically examined through a single factor analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). From the findings, the scholar reported that the process writing approach affected writing success and anxiety in a positive and statistically significant way. Based on this, he recommended the use of the process writing approach for written expression studies.

Sheir, Zahran and Koura (2015) examined the effectiveness of the process writing approach in developing EFL writing performance of ESP college students. The research was conducted in Delta University and comprised 33 engineering students. To elicit data from the participants, the researchers adopted the quasi-experimental design (including experimental and control groups), they first pre-tested two groups before teaching them writing sub-skills using respectively the process approach and the traditional method. These scholars also drew on three instruments: a writing skills checklist, a pre-post-test and an analytic scoring rubric, and formulated three hypotheses: 1) There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control one on the writing performance pre-test, 2) There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and that of the control one on the writing performance post-test favouring the post-test scores of the experimental group, and 3) There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group students on the writing performance pre-post-test favouring the post-test scores.

In the analysis, Sheir, Zahran and Koura (2015) further paired the t-test results of the two groups. The findings revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control group on the writing performance pre- and post-test in overall writing performance, as t value (1.769) is generally not deemed to be statistically significant. On the contrary, the results showed that there were statistically significant differences between the experimental group and the control one on the writing post-test as the t test results were in favour of the experimental group. Finally, the t-test results exuded that there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental

group on the pre-post writing test favouring the post-test. Based on the foregoing, the researchers inferred that the process writing approach could be effective in developing students' writing skills.

Unlike the foregoing scholars, Wirawati, Tantra and Ratminingsih (2013) studied the effect of process and product approaches to the eighth-grade students of SMP Harapan 1 Denpasar on their competency in writing different types of texts. To elicit data from the sample population, the researchers used the experimental research design, involving a written test (or a post-test). The sample population comprised two classes, one of them was assigned the process approach and the other the product approach. The collected data were analysed by means of a Two-Way ANOVA which was assisted by SPSS 15.0. From the data, the researchers reported that: 1) there is a significant difference on the eighth-grade SMP Harapan 1 Denpasar students' competency in writing different texts, 2) there is a significant difference on the students' competency in writing narrative paragraph between the group of students taught using the process approach and the one taught using the product approach, 3) there is significant difference on the students' competency in writing recount paragraph between the group of students taught using the process approach and the one taught using the product approach, 4) there is a significant difference on the students' competency in writing descriptive paragraph between the group of students taught using the process approach and the one taught using the product approach, and 5) there is an interaction between the two approaches teaching writing and types of texts. As the use of the process approach seemed to produce a better result in the teaching of writing different types of text, the researchers concluded that teachers could use it in their writing class to teach any type of text.

In the same token, Rohmatika (2014) examined the effectiveness of the process approach in teaching the Eighth Grade Students of SMP Terpadu Ponorogo how to write, the study was conducted in the Academic Year 2011-2012, from June to December, 2011. This scholar specifically mapped out three purposes for the study: (1) To know whether the process approach is more effective than the product approach in teaching writing to the Eighth Grade Students of SMP Terpadu Ponorogo, (2) To know whether the Eighth Grade Students of SMP Terpadu Ponorogo who have high creativity have better writing skill than those having low creativity and (3) To know whether there is an interaction between the teaching two approaches and students' creativity in writing. To collect data from the sample population, the researcher drew on the quantitative approach which consisted of two instruments, namely: writing test and verbal creativity test. The sample population was divided into two groups: experimental and control. The approach used in the experimental class was the process approach to writing while the one used in the control class was the product approach.

From the data, Rohmatika noted that there was no significant difference between students who were taught using the process approach and those who were taught using the product approach. The scholar actually accounted for this observation with two factors. The first factor is that the product approach comprises a step of studying a model. The researcher holds that if students taught with the product approach make use of this stage maximally, there is a great possibility that they will learn how to reproduce the model. The second factor alluded to in the study is the effect size. Comparing this finding

with prior studies, the scholar confirms that both approaches have a mild effect size: 0.32 for the process approach and 0.25 for the product approach. In the subsequent section, the methodology this study employs is clearly outlined.

3. Methodology

This study follows the pre-test-post-test repeated measures design. The reason for the choice of the pre-test-post-test repeated measures design is that it allowed the participants to take a written essay test twice (pre and post). In other words, all the students were tested at the beginning and the end of the 10-week writing class, and the tests were scored based on a criterial fair copy. In fact, a five-point (1: very poor through 5: very good) scale or scoring rubric was used to rate the quality of the participants' essay on four components: 1) organisation, 2) content, 3) expression, and 4) grammar and mechanics (see *appendix*). During the pre-test, the participants were asked to choose one of the following topics and write a well-structured descriptive essay on it.

- 1) Describe a memorable day in your life.
- 2) Describe your first day as a new student at your university.
- 3) Describe the person you admire the most.

During the post-test, the participants were asked to choose one of the topics below and write an argumentative essay on it:

- a) Should students be allowed to use their smart phone in class?
- b) Modern technology has made the world a better place to live in today.

The pre and post test scores were also compared by means of an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to check if the use of the process approach truly had some effects on the students' essay writing skills in an EFL context, in general and on their engagement in the writing class/process, in particular.

To measure the students' engagement effectively, the researchers further conducted, all in all, eight classroom observations, from May to July, 2021. During this period, the EFL students were directly observed in the writing class and their behaviour and attitudes to the writing activities undergirded by the process approach were duly documented. The participants of the current research were second-year English major students at the English Department of UZ. There were actually 80 students who enrolled in the English Composition course. To qualify for the study, a participant must have taken both the pre-test and post-test. At the end of the course, only half of the students truly satisfied this criterion. Thus, the total sample used for the study was 40 participants (11 females and 29 males) with a mean age of 24.15 years old. Table 1 below highlights the participants' general profile.

Table 1. Participants' General Profile

Characteristics	<i>N</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Gender			1.28	.452
Male	29	72.5		
Female	11	27.5		
Total	40	100		
Age			24.15	4.492
20 years old	1	2.5		
21 years old	7	17.5		
22 years old	5	12.5		
23 years old	10	25		
24 years old	4	10		
25 years old	5	12.5		
26 years old	4	10		
27 years old	2	5		
32 years old	1	2.5		
48 years old	1	2.5		
Total	40	100		

4. Data Presentation and Discussion of the Findings

This section presents and discusses the major findings inferred from the analysis. These findings are actually arranged by research questions for the sake of clarity. The quantitative results reveal a statistically significant and positive difference between the pre-test and post-test in terms of participants' performance in the essay writing. These results clearly suggest that the process approach has a positive effect on students' essay writing outcome. The qualitative findings further confirm that the process approach truly fosters students' engagement during the writing activities.

Research Question 1: Does the process approach to writing influence the EFL students' performance on essay writing?

As stated earlier on, this question was analysed using a descriptive statistical technique and a one-way repeated measure ANOVA. The aim was to find out whether there is any statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores on essay writing between students who passed the exam and the students who failed the exam. In a bid to measure the effect of the process approach on EFL students' essay writing skills, we computed and compared means and standard deviation scores of the participants across four dependent variables (*organisation, content, expression, and grammar and mechanics*), on the pre-test and post-test. Overall, 12 participants (8 males and 4 females) passed the pre-test while 28 (21 males and 7 females) failed it. The post-test results show that participants significantly

performed better in the post-test than in the pre-test. In sum, 28 participants (19 males and 9 females) passed the post-test while only 12 failed it (10 males and 2 females), suggesting therefore that the process approach has significantly and positively affected the participants' performance scores. The following table plainly recapitulates the aforementioned findings.

Table 2. Participants' Results on Pretest and Post-test by Frequency Across Gender

Variables	Pass	%	Fail	%	Total N	Total %
Pre-test						
Gender						
Male	8		21		29	
Female	4		7		11	
Total	12	30	28	70	40	100
Post-test						
Gender						
Male	19		10			
Female	9		2			
Total	28	70	12		40	100

Again, we compared the means and standard deviation of subjects during the pre-test and post-test based on the four variables (*organisation*, *content*, *expression* and *mechanics*). Out of these variables, "*organisation*" was the only variable on which participants mean score is above 3.0. As can be seen in the table below, the pre-test mean scores range from 1.13 out of 5 to 2.68 for the remaining three variables.

Table 3. Participants' Means and Standard Deviation Scores on the Pre-test Across the Four Dependent Variables

	Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Org_1	40	1	5	3.25	1.481
Content_1	40	1	5	2.68	.917
Express_1	40	1	4	2.13	.723
Mechan_1	40	1	3	1.13	.404
Valid N (listwise)	40				

As for the post-test, the results clearly show an overt improvement of participants' scores on all the four variables, ranging from 2.18 for "*grammar and mechanics*" to 3.80 for "*organisation*" as summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Participants' Means and Standard Deviation Scores on the Post-test Across the Four Dependent Variables

	Descriptive Statistics				
	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Organization_2	40	2	4	3.80	.464
Content_2	40	1	5	3.43	1.107
Expression_2	40	1	5	2.53	.933
Mechanics_2	40	1	4	2.18	.903
Valid N (listwise)	40				

Furthermore, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was conducted to measure the exact effect of the process approach on the participants' essay writing performance. The ANOVA results plainly reveal that the Levene's test which assumes the equality of variances is not significant ($p = .621$) at $p < .05$ or 95% confidence level for Writing Test_1 and Writing Test_2 ($p = .803$). Thus, we retained the null hypothesis and assumed that the variances are equal between the groups (students who passed vs students who failed) as shown in the table below.

Table 5. Test of Homogeneity of Variances

	<i>Levene Statistics</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Writing_Test1	.248	1	38	.621
Writing_Test2	.063	1	38	.803

The ANOVA *F*-test of significance result for *Writing Test_1* is $p = .901$ and $p = .038$ for *Writing Test_2* at $p < .05$ level of confidence. Technically, these results suggest that the process approach to teaching essay writing has had a significant effect on the participants' performance as clearly outlined in Table 6.

Table 6. ANOVA Results for Writing Test_1 and Writing Test_2

		<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Writing_Test1	Between Groups	.007	1	.007	.016	.901
	Within Groups	16.104	38	.424		
	Total	16.111	39			
Writing_Test2	Between Groups	1.963	1	1.963	4.636	.038
	Within Groups	16.086	38	.423		
	Total	18.048	39			

In summary, the ANOVA shows that a statistically significant difference does exist between the mean scores of *Writing Test_1* (the *pre-test*) and *Writing Test_2* (the *post-test*) between the students who passed and those who failed the essay exam. Having presented the findings of the first question, let us now move on to the second one.

Research Question 2: Does the process approach foster the EFL students' engagement in the writing process?

As stated in the Methodology section, to answer this question, a direct classroom observation was conducted. In fact, a series of eight classroom observations was conducted, from May to July, 2021. It follows from the observations that most of (not to say all) the students were cognitively involved in the learning activities conducted in the class. Four major factors actually helped us to draw this inference: *students' interaction with the writing topic or/and process, students' interaction with their mates or/and the teacher, students' emotional tone, and students' attitude towards teacher's feedback on writing.* It was noted that the students effectively interacted with the writing topic or/and process as most of them positively and recursively reacted to all the stages involved in the process. The topics dealt with in the writing class included *Corona Virus (COVID 19), New Technologies, Effects of Social Media in Our Life,* etc. From the pre-writing stage involving the generation of relevant ideas on a given topic to the revising stage, it was observed that the students were cognitively engaged. And this somehow denotes their behavioural involvement in the writing exercise.

Again, given the compatibility of language teaching strategies (brainstorming, individual work, group work, lockstep, etc.) with the stages (pre-writing, drafting and revising) involved in the process approach, not only did the students recursively interact with the topic at hand, but they also interacted with one another or/and the teacher. For example, when the teacher asked the students to brainstorm on the topic 'Corona Virus (COVID 19)', they individually reflected on it, rubbed minds with their mates and later generated the following ideas which the teacher displayed on the chalk board:

- a. Symptoms of COVID 19
 - 1) Fever and cough
 - 2) Respiratory problems
 - 3) Nasal congestion
- b. How does COVID 19 spread?
 - 1) This disease can spread from one person to another, through droplets from the nose or mouth which are spread when a person with COVID 19 coughs or breathes out.
 - 2) People can be infected when they touch a contaminated object with their hand and use the hand to touch their face (eyes, mouth or nose).
- c. Prevention of COVID 19
 - 1) Maintaining safe distancing from others of at least one metre.
 - 2) Washing one's hands regularly with soap and water or Using an alcohol-based rub to clean one's hands regularly.

With the above-mentioned ideas generated on the topic ‘Corona Virus (COVID 19)’, we noticed that writing the first draft of the essay was fun for almost all (not to say all) the learners. The same thing was also observed with other topics. And this clearly indicates once more the students’ engagement in the writing activities. It also indicates that they had a positive emotional tone or were less anxious towards writing in this context. The foregoing actually confirms Bayat’s (2014) discovery that the process writing approach affected writing success and anxiety in a positive and statistically significant way. Further, when the teacher asked the students to share their production with the class, we noticed that every single group of students was eager to write their essay on the board. This is another indicator of their engagement in the writing class. The teacher’s recursive feedback on writing at every stage of the students’ essay writing also reinforced the students’ behavioural involvement in the writing activities. In fact, the students’ attitude towards the teacher’s feedback on their productions was positive. Obviously, none of them felt hurt or embarrassed, for instance, when the teacher openly corrected the grammatical errors in their written essay.

5. Conclusion

This paper has set out to measure the impacts of using the process approach to teach second-year English major students at the English Department of UZ essay writing. Using the pre-test-post-test repeated measures design, this study has examined the written essays produced by the EFL students before and after the writing class. These pre and post tests were scored based on a criterial fair copy, and the scores were compared by means of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to check whether there were any statistically significant differences between the mean scores. The findings show that the process approach has had a positive impact on the participants’ essay writing skills.

Further, to measure the students’ engagement effectively in the writing class, the study has employed Classroom Observation. In fact, a series of eight classroom observations has been conducted from May to July, 2021. The findings exude that the EFL learners observed were cognitively involved in the learning activities carried out in the class. There were four factors which led to the foregoing observation, namely: *students’ interaction with the writing topic or/and process, students’ interaction with their mates or/and the teacher, students’ emotional tone, and students’ attitude towards teacher’s feedback on writing*. The foregoing findings corroborate prior studies on the use of the process approach to teach writing reviewed here, most especially Bayat’s (2014), that revealed that the process writing approach affected writing success and anxiety in a positive and statistically significant way. It follows from the foregoing findings to recommend that the process approach to (the teaching of) writing be adopted and used to teach writing in EFL classes across/in Niger.

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Appendix: Pre-test and Post-test Writing Scoring Rubric

Item	Excellent (5)	Good (3)	Average (2)	Poor (1)	Unacceptable (0)
Organisation:	Well-planned and well-thought out. Includes title, introduction, statement of main idea, transitions and conclusion.	Good overall organisation includes the main organisational tools.	There is a sense of organisation.	Some of the organisational tools are used weakly or missing.	No sense of organisation
Expression:	Essay demonstrates excellent composition skills including a clear and thought-provoking thesis, lively and convincing supporting materials, effective diction and sentence skills.	Essay contains strong composition skills including a clear and thought-provoking thesis although development, diction, and sentence style suffer minor flaws.	Essay contains above average composition skills, including a clear, insightful thesis; development is insufficient in one area and diction and style may not be consistently clear and effective.	Essay demonstrates competent composition skills; development of ideas may be trite, assumptions may be unsupported in more than one area, the thesis may not be original,	Composition skills may be flawed in either the clarity of the thesis, the development, or organisation. Diction, syntax, and mechanics may seriously affect clarity.
Content	Exceptionally	Well-	Content is	Some	Content is not

	well presented and argued; ideas are detailed, well developed, supported with specific evidence & facts, as well as examples and specific details.	presented and argued; ideas are detailed, developed and supported with evidence and details, mostly specific.	sound and solid; ideas are present but not particularly developed or supported;	evidence, but usually of a generalised nature.	sound.
Grammar & Mechanics	Excellent grammar, spelling, syntax and punctuation.	A few errors in grammar, spelling, syntax and punctuation, but not many.	Shows a pattern of errors in spelling, grammar, syntax and/or punctuation.	There is a sign of lack of proofreading.	Continuous errors.
