

## STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR WRITING SKILLS AND THE APPLICATION OF PROCESS WRITING APPROACH IN THE ACADEMIC WRITING CLASSROOM

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### A B S T R A C T

This paper describes the result of student self-reflection on their writing ability and the application of the process writing approach conducted in their academic writing class. The data was collected through a self-reflection written by the participants. The students were guided to reflect on their learning experience in two aspects: their views on their writing ability and the application of the process writing approach in the classroom. Forty-four students of the English literature program from the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Mahasaraswati Denpasar University, were chosen as the participants for this study through a purposive sampling method. This method was ideal because these students have undergone similar learning experiences within the same context, which provided rich data for the study. The result of their self-reflection was analysed using a qualitative approach. The findings indicate that more than half of the participants perceived their writing ability as lacking. Less than 10% of the participants were confident in their writing ability, and the rest saw improvement in their ability but required further practice and guidance. In terms of the application of process writing, the majority of participants agreed that it had a positive impact on their writing process.

### Introduction

As one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, the English language has developed in many aspects. English has become one of the languages that have massive numbers of users from all over the world. It is the language for global communication (Amri, 2022). To be proficient, users of English require an ability to comprehend four skills of the language. These four skills are divided into productive skills (speaking and writing) and receptive skills (reading and listening). Unfortunately, there is a slight misconception among people who learn or teach English in an EFL environment that the speaking skill is the benchmark for English proficiency. As a result, writing is considered a secondary skill by the majority of the people.

Abstaining from writing is not possible when English is learned formally at educational institutions. It should be acquired sufficiently by students to support the development of other skills in English language acquisition (Santri, Ikhsanudin, & Rezeki, 2022). Several studies documented that writing has been perceived negatively by learners at educational institutions (Pratama, Irwandi, & Hudri, 2019; Saptarina, 2021; Wahdan & Buragohain, 2019; Setyowati & Sukmawan, 2016). Rosidiana (2019) wrote that writing is the most challenging language activity for students as it encompasses not only one but several skills, namely communication ability, language use, and language style. A majority of the students who learn to write in a foreign language, are not able to meet these language requirements (Jabali, 2018). It also appears that when there is a lack of competence in the language, writing activities become harder for students to complete

(Martinez, 2005). Finally, a strong emphasis is given to language forms making the result of the students' writing even more unsatisfactory (Mahdieh, 2020).

Over time, different approaches are used in the practice of teaching and learning writing in the classroom. The connection between approaches taken by teachers to teach writing has been said to influence the students' views on writing skills (Jabali, 2018). Earlier approaches focused on the final product of the activity. That is why it is called a product approach. It is also regarded as the traditional approach to writing (Wahdan & Buroghoin, 2019). However, growing interest in the students' process of producing a writing product makes the product approach less popular. It has been replaced by the process writing approach. Unlike the product approach towards writing which requires a teacher to interfere in the students' writing when the product is ready, in the process writing approach, teachers and students are involved throughout the writing process. The approach is believed to focus more on the involvement of the students in their writing from beginning to end.

Various research has provided insight regarding the application of process writing in the classroom. Some focus on the application of the method in different genres of texts (Novia & Saptarina, 2021; Brime & Al-Bajani, 2018), while others focus on the student's perception of the application. Earlier research conducted by Dewi (2021) mentioned that students' writing abilities are highly influenced by the approach applied in the classroom. Similarly, Eliwarti and Maarof (2017) also researched the same topic but emphasized students' views on the strategies applied in the process writing classroom. In addition to students' perceptions, Suprapno et al. (2022) added students' challenges in the application of process writing.

In this study, students' reflection is the primary source of data. Investigating students' points of view is believed to be one way to evaluate the whole program conducted in the classroom (Dewi, 2021); it is used to assess the success of teaching and learning activities (Kavaliauskienė, Suchanova, & Veličkienė, 2012). Students as the main actors of the activities provide a valuable source of information to develop the activities better. It is also argued that the teaching and learning approach used in the writing classroom will influence the attitudes of the students towards the writing class. When students have positive attitudes towards writing, they will be more confident in their ability to write (Brown, 2009). Jabali (2018) further explained that student's behaviour towards writing either increases or decreases their motivation to learn, which eventually affects their writing ability.

The present study attempts to describe the students' views on their writing ability and the application of the process writing approach in the classroom. Instead of researchers conducting interviews and delivering questionnaires, the students were guided to reflect on their own experiences in process writing. It is believed that the reflection provides more personal and honest views on the application of process writing in the classroom. The use of reflection on the activities undertaken in the classroom is also a valuable aspect to assess the success of teaching and learning activities (Kavaliauskienė, Suchanova, 2012).

To reach these aims, two research questions were addressed throughout the study. These are:

1. How do students view their English writing skills?
2. How do students perceive the application of the process writing approach in their academic writing classroom?

There have been various discussions about the approach used to teach writing. Two of the phenomenal approaches are the opposite of one another. These two approaches are product and process approach to teaching writing.

### ***Product Approach***

This approach is considered the classic example of how to teach writing in the classroom in an EFL setting. In this method, model writing is the centre, and students are encouraged to write based on the model given. Very few changes are made to the writing procedure. There are four steps in applying this method: familiarisation, controlled writing, guided writing, and free writing (Palpanadan, et al., 2014). Familiarisation activity is designed to support the students to understand and familiarize themselves with the construction of a text. The controlled practice involves the separation of each structure in the text. Students are guided to further discuss each section in more detail. When students start to produce ideas and practice to organise them in writing, they are moving towards guided writing. Students are then expected to apply what they have practiced in the previous steps to produce a piece of writing during free writing stage.

In the product approach, teachers focus on students' knowledge of the language, not on their ability to share information in a written product. In other words, students' linguistic skills are not developed well (Eliwarti & Maarof, 2017). Too much focus is given to grammatical and syntactical forms (Suryana, et al., 2015). A strong emphasis is also given to error production which teachers are obliged to correct. As a result, it encourages students to imitate, copy, and transform the model writing provided by teachers into a new essay of their own (Palpanadan, Salam, & Ismail, 2014). In the product approach, the teachers' role appears to be at the end when the product is ready. They are not involved in the production of the text by the students.

### ***Process Approach***

The process approach to writing highlights the idea that there are valuable learning processes behind every writing product. It is believed that producing a piece of good writing is not a one-time activity. It undergoes several stages that may require several repetitions. Changes may happen in one stage, or they may happen throughout the whole stage (Hyland, 2019 as cited in Winarti & Cahyono, 2020). A significant different is that students are expected to be fully involved in their writing, and teachers' support is provided throughout the process instead of when the product is submitted. Students' writing tasks are evaluated from beginning to end (Wahdan & Burogahoin, 2019; Bayat, 2014). Instead of seeing the students' writing as an end product, process writing sees it as a process. Therefore, students are given a chance to make revisions to their writing.

The process that occurs in process writing varies depending on the experts. Onozawa (2010) provided three steps in process writing that consist of prewriting, drafting, and revising. According to Seow (2002), there are four aspects of process writing namely planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Several studies also introduced five steps in process writing that are prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (Hyland, 2003; Laksmi, 2006; Tangpermpoon, 2008; Faraj, 2015). Regardless of which study, they all emphasise the work undertaken during the process, not the product of the process. The steps involved may appear linear, but their application is mostly non-linear. Changes to one stage often affect other stages, which makes this procedure recursive. Even though the writer should follow all steps provided in process writing, the model allows the writer to move backward and forwards depending on the needs of the writing.

Prewriting is the initial step in this process. It is when students gather their ideas, thoughts, and opinions they want to write. Many techniques can be used to collect information, such as brainstorming, listing, outlining, sharing thoughts with others, etc (Johnson, 2008). Drafting means giving a body and more content to the collection of ideas. It is also when writers decide on the ideas that they will develop further. Once ideas are given a body, feedback will also need to be delivered. It is the beginning of a recursive procedure in process writing. The next step will be revising. During revision, students will mediate feedback givens and rethink their writing. Feedback and revision come hand in hand and can be more than one occasion in all stages depending on the writing product. Editing is the next step. It is usually carried out when the content of the product is ready but not the mechanical aspects of the writing (Maolida & Mustika, 2018). The last step is publishing, when the writing is shared with readers.

### **Research Method**

The study was designed as a qualitative study because it suited the nature of the issues. Creswell (2007) explained that in qualitative research individuals' stories matter. It has a certain degree of power to describe the phenomena that happen around the individuals. It is on the same page as the current topic of the study in which it tries to present students' perspectives on two topics. The current study also represents one of the characteristics of qualitative research i.e. bringing the views and perspectives of people into a study setting (Yin, 2011). The qualitative method was therefore chosen as the most suitable to apply in the current research.

### **Participants**

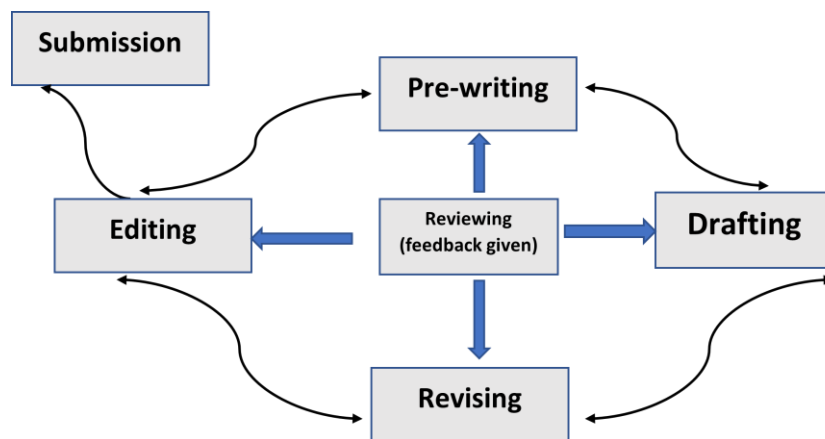
Two student cohorts participated in the study. The total number was 44 students who were enrolled in the academic writing class at the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Mahasaraswati Denpasar University in the academic year 2021-2022. The students were divided into two classes and their English language proficiency varied from beginner to intermediate. The students had experienced writing in English during their first, second, and third semesters at the university which give them the basis for English writing.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

The data collection instrument was the self-reflection written by the students at the end of their project. The students were guided to reflect on their learning experience in two aspects: their views on their writing ability and on the application of the process writing approach in the classroom. As the main aim of this activity was to ensure that the students reflected on and evaluated what they experienced during the eight meetings, no specific form was provided for them. Students were free to write in any format they chose within the boundary of the two reflection aspects above. This method was administered to help the students felt comfortable with the process and would be able to describe their experience in better ways.

### **Procedures**

The writing process approach was conducted for one writing project. The project required eight classroom meetings. The diagram below illustrates the application of the writing process approach in the classroom:



**Figure 1.** Process Writing Application

1. Pre-writing

At this stage, students gathered their ideas and presented them in front of their friends and teachers. It was conducted to finalize whether the ideas can be continued for further writing. Any confusing aspects of the students' plans were discussed at this stage.

2. Drafting, Reviewing, and Revising

Drafting, reviewing, and revising were conducted simultaneously. The final project of their writing was divided into several parts: introduction, methods, main discussion, and conclusion. Students presented each part to the teachers to get feedback for further writing. This was the stage where recursive writing happened. As they were working on the feedback of their “introduction”, they also draft the next part of the writing. As the writing included many parts, this procedure required more meetings than the others. Several meetings were set aside to discuss the draft and its revision.

3. Editing

At this stage, students had completed their final draft after revision. Teachers and students checked for mechanical issues in the writing

4. Submission

The final writing was submitted to the teachers for grading.

The table below provides information on the application of process writing approach in each meeting in the classroom:

**Table 1.** Classroom Activities

Meeting	Activity
Meeting 1	Introduction to the writing project Pre-writing activity of the project
Meeting 2	Presentation of the result of the pre-writing activity Feedback given Finalization of the student’s project
Meeting 3	Presentation of the first part of their writing Feedback given
Meeting 4	Finalization of the first part of the writing Presentation of the second part of their writing Feedback given
Meeting 5	Finalization of the second part of the writing Presentation of the third part of their writing

	Feedback given
Meeting 6	Finalization of the third part of the writing Presentation of the fourth part of their writing Feedback given
Meeting 7	Finalization of the fourth part of the writing Feedback given Editing
Meeting 8	Editing Feedback Finalisation of the writing
Meeting 9	Project submission

### Data Analysis

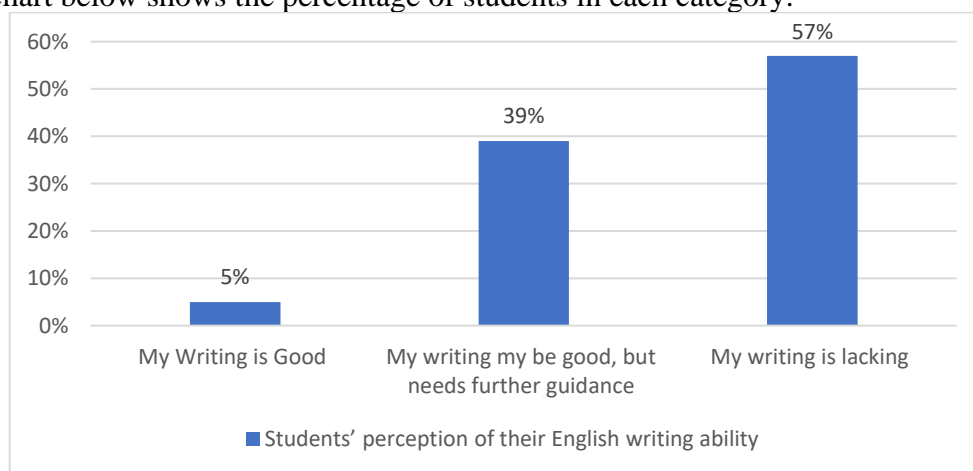
The reflective writing of forty-four students was collected and analysed. The first step was to separate written statements about writing ability and the application of process writing. Several sub-themes (topics) were then extracted from the two main themes. A simple percentage calculation provided more accurate data for the findings.

### Result and Discussion

The data collected was grouped into the two main elements of the study: English writing ability and the process writing approach.

#### *Students' perception of their English writing ability*

The data on students' perception of their writing ability fell into three categories. The chart below shows the percentage of students in each category.



**Figure 2.** Students' Perception of Writing Ability

The data shows that more than half of the students admitted that they see their writing skills as lacking despite their long history of learning the language. A further 39% of the students mentioning their writing skills may be moderate, but they need constant guidance throughout their writing. Only 5% of the students were confident about their writing skills.

#### **Theme 1 – Lacking and need guidance**

The findings show that more than half of the participants viewed their writing skills as lacking even though they were in their fourth semester learning the English language as a major at university level. Various reasons were mentioned by the students,



which were similar to those who claimed that they have a moderate ability to write in English. Grammatical issues were the main reason they considered their writing was lacking and not presentable for their readers. The findings are similar to an earlier study undertaken by Setyowati and Sukmawan (2018), in which the students evaluated their writing based on the number of grammatical errors found in the writing. Below are several quotes taken from the reflections:

- *In my opinion, writing skill is the most difficult thing to learn because in writing, we have to pay attention to vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and so on. Yet, these circumstances are what make us learn the basics of English writing skills*
- *My writing ability in English is still having problems with grammar*
- *In writing English, I sometimes use a wrong grammar in a sentence*
- *In my opinion, my writing skills are still very lacking. Sometimes I'm confused about choosing the right words, or sometimes I have a lot of problems with grammar*
- *It's still lacking because I still rely on Google Translate to help me with the English version of my writing. As a result, the grammar in the paragraph can be quite irregular.*
- *I am still very lacking in writing, especially in determining grammar*

Another important reason described by the students was the difficulties in beginning writing due to writing blocks and lack of inspiration. One student directly connected the situation to their mood, saying that writing needs a good mood. When there is no mood, there is no inspiration, and they will not be able to write.

- *In my opinion, my writing skills are not perfect yet, and I still have many difficulties in writing. I really need to learn more and find inspiration by reading or searching for information on the internet*
- *It is not so good because finding a good mood for writing is difficult*

Only a small number of the students identified sentence construction and lack of learning experience in writing as the main cause of their lack of writing ability. Even though the percentage is less, a similar finding can be identified in an earlier study conducted by Suprpto, et al. (2022), which put sentence and ideas construction on the list of students' constraints to writing. Below are the two views taken from the participants' writing:

- *When writing (especially when expressing ideas in the form of paragraphs), I often find it difficult to write supporting sentences consistently that match the topic sentence. Sometimes, what I write is out of the main topic of the paragraph*
- *Personally, my writing skills are still lacking because of a lack of learning experience in writing subjects and a lack of previous knowledge on the topic given*

### **Theme 2 – Moderate with guidance**

Even though over a third of the students claimed that they have moderate understanding and ability to write in English, they admitted that they still encountered several issues during their writing process. Surprisingly, the issues identified in this category were the same as those who see their writing lacking. Below is a selection of student comment:

- *In my opinion, my writing ability is quite good. It's just that I still don't know a lot of vocabulary*

- *So far, it is not perfect yet because there are still some improvements to be made and the lack of understanding of grammar*
- *In my opinion, my ability to write in English is not too bad but also not too good because I am not good at grammar, and there are still many rules about writing styles that I don't know.*
- *My opinion on my English writing ability is that I am at the medium level, where I am able to write a few paragraphs in simple language. If I have to write a paper or an article, I still need to use google translate/internet to find out what the meaning of the word is.*

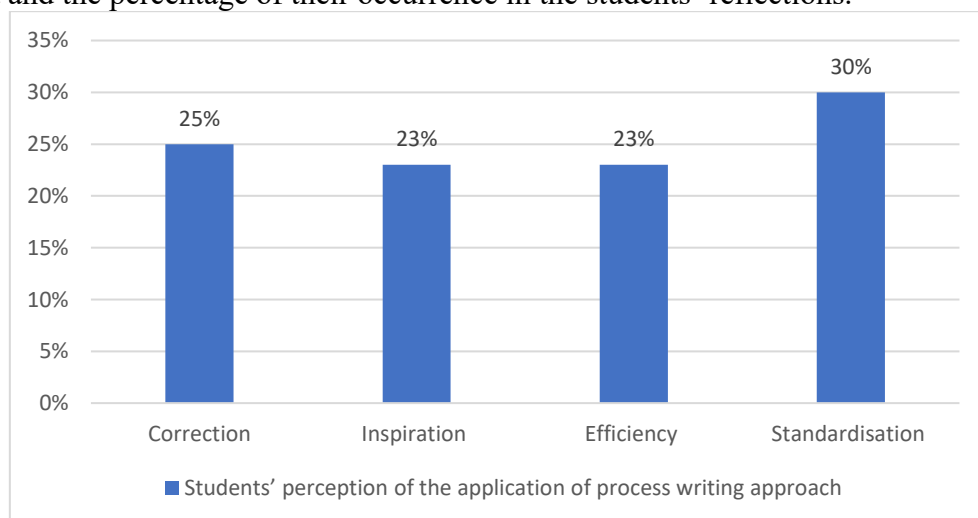
### **Theme 3 – Good**

Merely 5% of the students described their writing as good. It is generally expected that students may not be confident enough to claim that their writing skill is good. Following are two quotes taken from the students' reflection to illustrate this matter:

- *My writing is probably quite good.*
- *I am ok with my writing skill. I think it is satisfying. The more writing practice given to me, the better I get with my writing ability.*

### **Students' perception of the application of process writing approach**

All participants had positive views on the application of the process writing approach in the classroom. This finding strongly supports the result of an earlier research conducted by Dewi (2020), Eliwarti & Maarof (2017), and Amri (2022), which also found that students viewed their process writing experience as a positive experience for their learning. Four main themes can be taken from the data in this study namely correction, inspiration, efficiency, and standardisation. Interestingly, the themes seemed to be equally shared by all participants in the current study. All participants described these themes in all stages of process writing. The chart provides information on the types of themes that appeared and the percentage of their occurrence in the students' reflections.



**Figure 3.** Students' Perception of the Application of Process Writing Approach

### **Theme 1 – Correction**

Unlike Eliwarti & Maarof (2017), who found that editing and revising were the most important steps in process writing, the current study found that pre-writing and drafting are the most advantageous for students. The involvement of reviewing and



revising during these two stages appears to keep the students highly involved in creating a better version of their writing. The majority of the students were positive about getting feedback on their writing product. The following are several examples to better illustrate this point.

- *Writing drafts and getting some corrections to help me to gain new knowledge to help with my writing*
- *Drafting can help me to know the steps in writing the right way*
- *I know what steps I need to take before moving on to the next stage*
- *Making a draft makes it easier to correct existing mistakes*
- *Making a draft helps me to search for errors or missing information in writing. So, when the finale, my writing is getting neater*
- *Drafting makes us more aware of where our shortcomings and mistakes are in writing so that they can be revised to get maximum results*

From the above comments, it is clear that students found it acceptable to keep revising their writing during the drafting stage as they could see a change in their writing after the review and revision stages. It gave assurance to students about their writing product. This finding supports the idea that re-establishing their writing product based on feedback enables students to have a better understanding of what they want to convey through their writing (Gebhard, 2002).

### **Theme 2 - Inspiration**

Finding inspiration to write can be one of the most difficult issues people face. The application stages in the process writing approach are established to help students to get inspired. This can be seen from the students' statements below:

- *It helps because of how time is used in the process. I was able to get enough time to get inspiration for the next part of my writing*
- *Because we need to think about and prepare what we will put in our writing, drafting is very helpful in writing*
- *Before we write, making a basic concept is one of the most important things, and drafting will be very helpful. We can first write down the ideas we think and rewritten it into a neater form*
- *Drafting encourages me to write word per word of my writing which helps me in creating my writing*

These reflections convey that the students feel that they can work better as there is no strict time constraint given for each stage. They can move from one stage to the other depending on their working speed and the feedback given to them. As a result, they will feel less pressure in the process of creating a writing product.

### **Theme 3 - Efficiency**

The development of an initial draft was viewed by students as an efficient approach to their writing. The following statements imply that even though they may have to undergo several stages in the writing process, the stages do not hinder their writing production, but helps them to work more efficiently with their ideas within the time given. Students' focus is directed to the process of creating a writing product which they will experience firsthand repeatedly, not the end product (Kurniasih et al., 2020). It means that students will experience learning in every stage of the approach, not only when the product is ready. Below are how the participants views.

- *Drafting and revising help me to be more efficient with my writing*

- *Drafting helps me to remember the little things that I easily forget*
- *Drafting helps me to design and develop ideas easily for my writing*
- *When you write a draft, writing will be easier as it takes less time than keep writing things as they come into our head*

#### **Theme 4 - Standardisation**

Deciding on writing topics can be really challenging for students. When there is a clear process for drafting and revising, students become more confident in the final product. The following is taken from the written reflections of the students:

- *The process allows me to understand the flow of my own writing. My draft serves as a guide to direct my writing direction. The revision helps me to decide whether the ideas are worth continuing or not*
- *When we draft our writing and receive revision, I feel like I can start to see the body of my writing. It becomes more organized. I know what's lacking, what needs to be added, or what's wrong with my writing*
- *My draft revision helps me to set a benchmark for writing during the next stage*
- *When writing a draft is very helpful because it makes our writing structured and not messy.*

What can be inferred from the testimony of the students above is that the students could find a systematic writing flow through the application of process writing. The students feel like they are guided through step-by-step procedures. As a result, they have a better structure for their writing product. It is essential, especially when the students are required to produce an academic style in their writing.

#### **Conclusion**

Two conclusions can be drawn from the students' written reflections. Firstly, the writing illustrated how students view their own writing ability. The majority of the students found their writing lacking. Even several students said that their writing is moderate, they still emphasize the need for further guidance on their writing. Only a very small number of students perceived their writing skills as good. These students' perceptions appeared to be strongly related to their confidence in tackling their writing issues, namely grammatical issues, writing styles, lack of vocabulary, and reliance on a translator tool.

Secondly, the result showed that all students perceived the application of the process writing approach in the classroom as positive. The students considered that the stages provided in the process of writing helped them to produce better writing. Even though generally they found the approach to be helpful, a strong emphasis was given to how the four stages of the process writing approach, namely: prewriting, drafting, reviewing, and revising, and how they influenced their writing production. Editing and submission appeared to be less described in their reflection.

This research calls for further research on the application of the process writing approach in the classroom in different learning settings and materials. The findings implied that the students were not familiar with the editing process, which made self-editing difficult for many beginners, especially students. Thus, having more practical research on the self-editing procedure in writing is considered necessary. Furthermore, as the study was limited to two groups with similar learning experiences, the findings of the study may be quite exclusive to these populations and/or populations with similar characteristics. Generalization of the findings may be quite difficult to undertake.

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