

CHINESE EFL TEACHERS' CONCEPTIONS OF WRITING

Yunjun Kong *, Edit Katalin Molnár **

** Doctoral School of Education, University of Szeged*

*** Institute of Education, University of Szeged*

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Subject matter knowledge is the prerequisite component of the teacher knowledge base. In the field of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), prior research has focused primarily on vocabulary, syntax and pragmatics. In comparison, however, EFL skill areas seem to be neglected to some extent. This study therefore aims to survey what EFL teachers' conceptions of writing are in the Chinese context. The research questions were: (1) Do teachers consider writing as a multi-faceted construct? (2) Do Chinese teachers favour the exam-oriented function of writing over others? (3) What do teachers see as contributing to the development of writing? And (4) How do teachers view the contribution of linguistic features to good texts? A questionnaire comprising the nature, functions, and development of writing, and text features of good writing was developed to collect data online; items carried 5-point Likert scales (26 items). Demographic information was also included. 486 (male 23.7% and female 76.3%) participants were involved in the sample. Among them, 88.3% are currently teaching. (1) A correlation analysis found that the linguistic, cognitive, social, and cultural characters of writing are strongly related to one another. Still, paired samples T-tests found that these characters significantly differed from each other, except for the linguistic and cultural nature of writing. (2) Paired samples T-tests showed that Chinese EFL teachers favoured writing as a tool for communication, thinking, and creation significantly more, and writing for specific audiences significantly less, than writing for exams and career. (3) The majority (96.1%) thought engagement in reading improves writing, followed by writing activities themselves (93%) and the effect of writing instruction (92.2%). Also, 88.1% accepted the transfer effect of speaking activities. (4) A composite index of the linguistic features was created and then used as the dependent variable in a regression model with these linguistic features of texts as independent variables. With the enter method, the independent variables explained 6-9% of the variance each, contributing mostly equally. However, with the stepwise method, four items explained 90.2% of the variance (text structure, spelling, style, and punctuation). This study gives a rare insight into Chinese EFL teachers' thinking about writing. It seems that they give smaller weight to the social aspects of writing, but they acknowledge its cultural and cognitive ones. When evaluating texts, they do not seem to focus on linguistic features more relevant to foreign language learning (e.g. vocabulary, grammar). These findings may be of interest for in-service teacher trainers.

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