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Factors Influencing Student Nurses' Perceptions of Success and Failure in Second Language Writing - A Classroom-based Study

Hung-Cheng TAI

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Hung-Cheng TAI[1]

Abstract

This article applies attribution theory to identify the factors that influence nursing students' perceptions of success and failure in learning English writing skills. The study took place in a language classroom in southern Taiwan involving fifty-one female nursing students, a writing teacher, and the researcher. Teaching activities included five writing cycles based on an online writing platform, process approach, and multiple revisions. Evidence data has been collected from learners' questionnaires and interviews, teacher's interviews, classroom observations, teaching materials, and researcher's diaries. The data has been analysed quantitatively using SPSS and qualitatively with the aid of QSR NVivo software. Results reveal the major factors given by learners involve the amount writing practice given and their perceptions of their competence in vocabulary and with grammar. The work is supported by observations made by the language teacher and the researcher on issues which have emerged on the students' writing skills, psychology, language competence, and learning context. This article concludes with the implications for teaching.

Keywords: *perceptions of success and failure, attributions, attribution theory*

[1] Chang-Gang University of Science and Technology; E-mail: alextai@gw.cgust.edu.tw

Introduction

Language researchers have recently started to apply some techniques suggested by the fields of educational and clinical psychology into alternative ways of instruction, for example, self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), learning styles (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990), metacognitive knowledge (Schoonen & Gelderen, 2003), self-concept beliefs (Pajares & Miller, 1994), self-esteem (Lawrence, 1988), and learned helplessness (Fincham & Cain, 1986), etc. The development of attribution theory as a constructivist approach to managing teaching and learning in language classrooms has been one of these (e.g. Williams & Burden, 1997). According to Weiner's attribution theory, learners' causal attributions for success and failure have a significant impact on motivation, emotions, and academic achievement (Weiner, 1985, 1995). Based on this assumption, reattribution training (RT) has been developed as a remedial intervention to assist learners by enhancing their internal, unstable, and controllable attributions for poor performance or maladaptive perceptions (Perry, Hechter, Menec, & Weinberg, 1993; Perry & Penner, 1990). This technique has been consistently piling literature in academic motivation and performance in university students in the fields of psychology and educational psychology (Hall et al., 2007). In the recent years, focuses have been shifted to the assessment of RT methods and the identification of student risk factors since the both issues may moderate the effectiveness of RT (Hall et al., 2007; Perry, Hall, & Ruthig, 2005).

Although the exploration is still going on, however, RT application to English language teaching and learning is quite limited, most of them focus on the motivational traits and English language learning in general (e.g. Tse, 2000; Williams, Burden, & Al-Baharna, 2001; Williams, Burden, Poulet, & Maun, 2004). So far, specific language skills such as writing and by learners with a nursing background have not yet been explored. This article thus aims to investigate the factors that may probably affect the establishment and change of nursing learners' perceptions of their success and failure based on the framework of attribution theory.

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Literature Review

Attribution theory for language teaching and learning

For language teachers, to maximize their help to their students they must first have an awareness of the learners' attributions. Individual perceptions of success and failure appear to be formed by a complex interplay among internal feelings, developmental stages, external influences, and social context (Driscoll, 2005). It is important to understand the way in which individuals make sense of external influences to shape internal attributions, and such external influences may include the way teachers teach, a teacher's aims, and their beliefs about learning (Woolfolk, 2007). The messages that teachers convey in their classrooms, both explicitly and implicitly, about their beliefs towards successful learning will affect their learners' attitudes of developing their notions of themselves as learners as well as their progress in learning a language (Williams & Burden, 1999). By knowing these many perceptions of success and failure and the factors that may influence them, language teachers may apply appropriate teaching strategies to enhance their teaching. Therefore, a potentially useful application of attribution theory in the language classroom has been 'reattribution training' (e.g. Hastings, 1994; Weiner, 1992; Williams & Burden, 1997). This approach enables learners to think and act in positive ways instead of viewing learning as a stable and uncontrollable activity (Slavin, 2006).

Research in attribution theory suggests that people's understanding of success and failure may significantly influence their behaviour as well as their achievement. Rooting from this assumption, many researchers suggest that to alter an individual's perceptions can affect their behaviour and achievement effectively (Gill & Martin, 2008; Slavin, 2006; Sternberg & Williams, 2002). Following the theoretical framework, a number of professionals and practitioners have attempted to develop various kind of remedial interventions such as 'reattribution training' (e.g. Hastings, 1994; Weiner, 2000), 'attributional testimony' (e.g. Van Overwalle, Segebarth, & Goldchstein, 1989), 'attributional therapy' (e.g. Layden, 1982), or 'attributional retraining' (Hall, Jackson Gradt, Goetz, & Musu-Gillette, 2011) to better assist their learners or clients. In some previous studies in the educational psychology, RT has been widely used for helping those students with the syndrome of 'learned helplessness' (Gill

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& Martin, 2008), who begin tasks half-heartedly and simply give up when they encounter difficulties (Slavin, 2006).

However, RT has gradually drawn attention from scholars who are concerned with teaching and learning outside the context of special education dealing with 'learned helplessness'. For instance, Van Overwalle and De Metsenaere (1990) conducted an attribution-based intervention with strategy training to instruct 'normal' college freshmen to learn Economics. Hughes and Martray (1991) implemented RT to promote the learning motivation of regular elementary pupils in general. Perry, Schonwetter, Magnusson, and Struthers (1994) compared the effects of three attributional styles including efforts, abilities, and task difficulties that affected the motivation and academic achievement of a few mainstream university students. Wu (1995) also carried out research utilising RT for a group of elementary children in Taiwan. Nevertheless, less literature seems to discuss the application of RT technique in English writing skills teaching and learning.

Principally, RT involves shifting learners' attributions of their failure from 'lack of ability' into a remediable zone of 'insufficient effort' (e.g. Brophy, 1996; Deiser & Voight, 1998; Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox, & Gillham, 1995). In a typical case, RT exposes students to a planned series of experiences so that they are expected to form up a positive learning cycle in order to improve their performance through changing their expectancy of future success (Woolfolk, 2007). The core concept behind conducting RT is the shifting of learners' perceptions and expectations of success and failure from negative to positive – to assist them to establish a positive learning cycle. Knowing the students' understanding and awareness of their own learning and the factors that may influence their attributions is pivotal for teachers when guiding a set of skills such as writing.

Factors influencing learners writing perceptions of success and failure

In our previous study, student nurses with positive perceptions about their writing abilities mainly attributed their successes to three factors – their 'grammar ability', 'vocabulary ability', and their capability of drafting 'adequate content'. Whilst learners with negative perceptions attributed their failures to three similar causes out of a 35 given

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categories – their 'lack of vocabulary ability', 'lack of grammar ability', and 'lack of creativity/ imagination/ inspiration' (Tai & Pan, 2009). Through realizing these learners' perceptions of success and failure (or *attributions*), it then generates another prominent issue that by which or what factors that may influence the learners' perceptions and attributions in learning writing skills (or *causalities*).

In the language classrooms, an amount of literatures suggest that the interactions between teachers and learners strongly influence the learners' perceptions of success and failure. Bar-Tal (1979) extended the Weiner's (1974) model and applied it specifically to the classroom situation, where it is used to analyse the perceptions and behaviour in interactions between pupils and teachers (also see Tse, 2000). In the traditional classroom situations, (language) teachers usually dominate the interactions with the pupils in different ways. For instance, verbal and non-verbal behaviour between them provides much information regarding academic and non-academic content in the classroom (Bar-Tal, 1982; Tse, 2000). This information determines learners' reactions such as attitudes, self-perception, or causal perception of success and failure. In terms of learners' causal perception, teachers may sometimes communicate the causes directly with the learners, and sometimes learners infer teachers' behaviours indirectly (Driscoll, 2005; Sternberg & Williams, 2002). Researchers suggested five categories of teacher behaviour which influence pupils' perceptions and attributions: (a) verbal appeals; (b) instructions; (c) reinforcements; (d) verbal feedback; and (e) direct references to causality (e.g. Bar-Tal, 1982).

Research in the second-language writing suggests some factors that may influence the second-language writing learners' perceptions and beliefs. Schoonen & Gelderen (2003) group the source of the factors into three categories: linguistic knowledge, metacognitive knowledge (knowledge and awareness of one's own cognitive processes), and fluency. The first factor in L2 writing involves vocabulary, grammar, and spelling, which can be seen as knowledge that constitutes the language. The second factor may include task schema (Hayes, 1996), rhetorical knowledge (Wang & Wen, 2002), composing competence (Raimes, 1985), and writing expertise (Sasaki, 2000). Fluency, the third factor, refers to the efficiency with which the writers can access words and grammatical structures during writing (Schoonen & Gelderen, 2003). Among these three, research conducted in an EFL context in Asian countries such as

Japan and China (Sasaki, 2000; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996; Wang & Wen, 2002) tends to conclude that linguistic knowledge is the most problematic area for student writing. They suggest that learners in different levels of English proficiency may have different major difficulties; whist for novice writers, their performance would be greatly constrained by linguistic knowledge.

Environmental factors, advocated by a number of social learning theorists and constructivists, are also critical in forming up learners' attributions and causalities. For example, Bandura (1994, 1997) proposes a concept of reciprocal determinism. He claims that three key elements: *personal factors*, which are in the form of cognition, affect, and biological events, *behaviour*, and *environmental influences*, create interactions that result in a 3-way reciprocity. This is how individuals sense and interpret their interactions between their personal factors and their environment around them through their behaviour and performance (Pajares, 2002). Constructivists as well weighted the contextual factors as the cognitive development for an individual in the process of learning and building up their personalities, perceptions, and identities (e.g. Williams & Burden, 1997).

However, although some previous studies seem to have provided hints about learners' learning difficulties and factors that may help establish their writing perceptions, none of them systematically investigated the factors (causalities) that may influence student nurses' perceptions of success and failure (attributions) in learning writing. When applying attribution theory to an event such as why one failed in studying a subject, for example, Weiner (1992) suggests that there are three questions attribution theorists tend to ask. First, what are the perceived causes of this event? The perceived causes can be, for example, inadequate effort, too difficult of the exams, or adoption of inappropriate learning strategies. Second, what information influenced this causal inference? The information can be that the observation of the students who put more effort into extracurricular activities are easily failed in learning well, or the observation that students who do not pay attention to lectures are likely to fail in performing well. Third, what are the consequences of the causal ascription? The consequences could be: deserved punishment from the parents, re-sit of the examinations, or re-take the subject for the second time and so on.

Based on Weiner's model, this study concentrates on the second

issue which tries to examine the factors that may influence the perceptions of nursing students to their success and failure in learning English writing. Three research questions to be explored are:

1. Do the nursing students change their perceptions and attributions in writing after a semester's teaching and learning?

2. From the learners' perspective, what are the factors that influence the learners' perceptions of success and failure?

3. From the teacher's and researcher's perspectives, what are the factors that influence the learners' perceptions of success and failure?

Research Method

Participants

This classroom research involved 51 female learners, their English course instructor (also the researcher), and a writing teacher. The students were in their first year of two years vocational training in a nursing university of science and technology in southern Taiwan. They were aged from 20 to 23 years-old graduated from five years of study at junior colleges where they had majored in nursing, too. The students had been selected for entry into nursing college by the Entrance Examination for Technological and Vocational Education, and their English proficiency could be categorised at a similar level. Nevertheless, these students did not receive intense English-language training like other senior high school graduates so that their general English proficiency could not compete with those top-ranking university students. Their learning attitude and motivation, however, reached the teachers' expectations and most recognized the importance of English in their academic studies and for their future careers.

The writing teacher was a part-time lecturer who had more than twenty-five years of English language teaching experience - five years of which was in this nursing institute. His role was to facilitate in instructing writing skills for three sessions (6 hours) in the classroom, and give feedback, track progress, and share model compositions, etc. on an

online platform. The course instructor (also the researcher) specialise in teaching at the GEPT elementary level, which requires four language skills including listening, reading, speaking, and writing, for over seven years. The English-language course instructed by him was a compulsory module counted two credits with a session of two-hour lecture per week, and it lasted for a year with two 18-week semesters. If the students did not pass the test in their first year they had to take another compulsory course with zero credit but two hours lectures per week in their second year before graduation. Many students therefore were extrinsically motivated to pass the examination in their first year.

Implementation procedures

In the first week before the commencement of this experiment, an introductory session was organised: the course teacher (also the researcher) informed the participants about the goal, design, implementation procedure, rights and obligation of the research aimed at seeking the learners' consent in participation – to comply with the ethical issue. The students were randomly assigned into 14 tables (groups) with 3 to 4 peers each in the language laboratory which was also the classroom where most of the language teaching activities had happened. In each group, a leader was elected by the members, and was responsible for coordinating matters intra-group and bridging issues with their writing teacher. An English composition test, the pretest, contained 3 comic pictures for the students to describe a simple daily event within 50 to 80 words was held to investigate the learners' initial writing competence. After finishing the examination, the students started answering the attribution questionnaire which surveyed the students' initial perceptions of success and failure about English writing.

In the second week, the U2 (also named as K12 or AJET) online learning platform was introduced by the course instructor to the students for an hour (see appendix A). Main functions of this writing platform including group forums discussion, online teaching materials reading, group bulletin board posting, writing assignments uploading and submission, naming rules of posts, online editing, deleting, querying, and interactive e-mailing, etc. The teacher as well guided and assisted the students to open their personal online accounts, and then allowed them to get familiar with the interface and learning environment. The second hour was the writing skills lecture which paid attention to the way of

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producing a qualified composition that might pass the GEPT elementary level, and it was taught by the writing teacher. This lecture showed a brief guideline regarding some principles of writing a short composition; most frequent topics and genres appeared on the examinations; assessors' marking criteria; sample writings sharing and so on. After this, the writing teacher delivered another 3 lectures which lasted for an hour each soon after completing the first 3 round of practices as a group feedback and skills teaching. Besides these lectures, most of the teaching and learning of writing went on the Internet during the training period.

In the third week, peer review technique training was conducted for all learners for two hours by the course instructor. The purpose, attitude, implementation procedures, schedule, feedback form, and samples of peer review were integrated into this training session. A document of guiding principles was also designed and posted on the writing platform for the learners' reference. Learners were informed about the detail steps of peer review, content and meanings of the feedback form, and were given a sample writing and empty feedback form to practice in the end of this session. An important concept to be conveyed to the learners was to let them be aware of giving constructive feedback for their peers in any circumstances. The peer review feedback form designed by the researcher contained 33 items which followed the GEPT criteria – the content, organisation, grammar, mechanics, and styles. These items were sequenced in order judged by the researcher's past marking experiences. Students needed to simply click 'yes' or 'no' which was easier for their decision making in front of each item on that feedback form; and then gave comments or reasons in the corresponding blanks should they clicked 'yes'. They were encouraged to find out as many errors/ mistakes as possible, and tried to extend their language learning through searching answers based on this checklist. Each student had to review 2 to 3 group writings during a writing cycle. Therefore, this feedback form was utilised as both a communication tool between peers and self-learning teaching materials simultaneously. On the 18th week, at the end of the semester, after completing the final examinations, another writing questionnaire survey was conducted as the posttest.

Process writing approach was adopted for this research as a main pedagogy. This approach, which beholds writing as a recursive operation of thinking, reflecting, and discovering, is quite a modern development in the field of writing teaching and learning (Hyland, 2002). Writing

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researchers claim that it does not work in a simple, single direction, and sequential order but involves complicated activities such as setting goals, generating ideas, organising information, selecting appropriate language, making a draft, reading and reviewing it, and then revising and editing it (Hedge, 2000; Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992). This classroom research designed a number of writing activities to comply with the process approach, and can be seen as a part of RT treatment. Multiple revisions teaching strategy (Hyland, 2003; Paulus, 1999), a feature usually accompanying with the process writing approach, was also applicable for the writing class: each group of learners needed to write at least 3 versions from their initial drafts, second revisions, and then the final revisions before submitting for assessment. Once the first drafts were completed, the process of peer review was continued so that every student would receive 2 to 3 feedback and comments from their group peers. Following to the revision activities concluded by the learners based on peers' feedback, subsequent comments were offered from the writing teacher so that every individual might be able to produce more accurate writing products.

Totally five writing cycles, including two compositions before midterm examinations and three tasks after that (see appendix B), were installed in the process for the learners to exercise. Of the first three tasks, it took three weeks to complete each cycle, and reduced to two weeks for the last two rounds for the sake of the participants became more familiar with the procedures. Every topic had its educational focus in terms of styles and mechanical features: the first was a descriptive article using present tense; the second and third applied narrative style using past tense and present tense respectively; the fourth practiced story telling with either present or past tense; and the fifth taught how to write a letter to friends concerning with things that will happen in the future. These five themes were carefully chosen from mock tests, and they have been testified in the past GEPT examinations so that the proficiency level could be seen as consistent, reliable and valid.

Data collection

The data collection process lasted for a semester from September 2010 to January 2011. A questionnaire was designed to investigate the learners' perceptions of success and failure before and after the writing training. This instrument was adopted and modified from the attribution

questionnaire designed and tested by Williams et al. (2004) who investigated 285 UK students between the ages of 11 and 16 studying French, German and Spanish language in five secondary schools in the South West of England. The rationale of this instrument opted for open-ended statements so that the data would not be influenced by pre-determined categories. This questionnaire provides a simple form for both students, who may answer it quickly, and teachers, who may easily collect the data in their classrooms. The researcher revised it to meet the purpose of probing the learners' perceptions about their writing skills. This questionnaire consisting of 3 open-ended questions – the learner's perceptions of success and failure about their English writing ability, labelled as '**attributions**'; and then requested the learners to offer reasons that they attributed to their success or failure, coded as **'causalities'**.

A pilot survey had been conducted on 18th May 2007 with 42 participants in a language classroom in a senior high school in Taichung city, before applying the questionnaire into the research context. Results of this pilot run seemed to have provided a sound validity of accessing the learners' attributions and causalities in learning writing skills (Tai & Pan, 2009). After the writing training, three more questions which asked nurse students about their opinions to the factors that might have influenced their perceptions of success and failure in writing were added to the initial version as the post-writing questionnaire. In these 3 questions, we did not ask the learners directly about the research question – factors that influenced the attributions; instead, we asked about their perceptions regarding the learning progresses, and their causalities to this. In order to increase the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, especially the Chinese version which was used to collect the data from the learners, the process of expert validity was conducted. Three experts being able to read Chinese characters, consisting of a professor specialised in educational psychology, an expert in social science research method, and a nursing college teacher in the same context, were consulted. They agreed that the design of this questionnaire could meet the purpose of this research question.

Since all the participants' perceptions and interpretations in the language classroom are important for understanding what is 'actually happening' (Woods, 1996), the strategy of triangulation from three different angles of the participants' perspectives is adopted in order to

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increase the validity of the qualitative data (Stake, 1995). The first angle was from the learners, who held their perceptions and insights of what was occurring in the classroom; the second angle was directly from the observer (researcher); and the third angle from the writing teacher, who also played a central role in the context. These opinions have been collected through various forms and have been documented. Table 1 shows a list of these relevant records. Three of them were from the writing teacher, and the other three were from the researcher.

Table 1

A List of Documents Analysed by QSR NVivo

No.	Documentation	Source	Purpose
1	Teacher Interviews	Writing Teacher	To investigate the writing teacher's opinions about the writing process.
2	How to draft a good GEPT composition	Writing Teacher	To review the textbook and teaching material used for writing course.
3	Writing teacher's group feedback	Writing Teacher	To collect the group feedback given by the writing teacher after each writing cycle.
4	How to give feedback to your peers	Researcher	To collect the teaching material that was designed by the research for peer review training.
5	Classroom observations	Researcher	To observe the teaching and learning activities happened in the writing classes.
6	Researcher's diary	Researcher	To investigate the researcher's opinions through his reflective journal.

The first document is the record after interviewing the writing teacher, and the second is the content of the writing textbook adopted by the teacher for the writing classes. The third archive is the group feedback given by the writing teacher after each writing cycle, and the fourth paper was prepared by the course instructor to let the learners know how to give feedback to their peers. The fifth document is of classroom observation notes kept by the researcher, and the sixth is the researcher's diary written down during the period of fieldwork study. The researcher was the one who participated and handled the whole research process, and he could be seen as a data collection instrument as well (Yin, 2003). His reflective thinking about this research in different times supplied valuable data for answering the research questions.

Data analysis

In accordance with the three research questions, three parts of data analyses were managed: learners' change of perceptions of their success and failure (or attributions), learners' causalities, and the teacher's and researcher's opinions. The first part compares the learners' pre and post scores of their attributions quantitatively through paired-t test using SPSS (Version 17.0) software. To quantify the answers from attribution questionnaire, the learners' perceptions of success or failure were converted to 4 points Likert-scale as: 'I usually do well' scored 4 points, 'I sometimes do well' got 3, 'I seldom do well' was 2, and 'I never do well' weighted 1.

The second part - learners' statements (or causalities) responded on the questionnaire - was analysed adopting a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Three coders, including a trained nursing student learning in the same university but different academic (four years vocational) system, the writing teacher, and the researcher, started to interpret the meanings that the learners intended to tell, and to allow categories to emerge from the data. The coders attempted not to perceive pre-determined categories from the theory, although it is inevitably subject to the researchers' interpretations by their learning or teaching experiences. They checked the emerging categories independently, and labels were assigned once agreement was reached.

The third part – the writing teacher's and the researcher's opinions – was processed by QSR NVivo, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software. Since 'node' is named by QSR NVivo, this term and the other one - code - are used interchangeably in this paper. Two stages of data analyses were conducted: the first stage, document coding, follows the Grounded Theory approach, and the nodes used to code the documents emerged from the data. We then had a moderation meeting after the coding processing in order to achieve agreement. At the second stage, major dimensions belonged to the tree nodes were grouped by the method of 'Constant Comparative Analysis'(Glaser & Strauss, 1968), and the results were integrated into the NVivo software to draw a systematic tree map.

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Results and Discussions

Change of learners' perceptions from failure to success

Most of the student nurses in this research increased their writing perceptions from failure to success after receiving a semester's training activities. Before the commencement of teaching and learning, students held negative perceptions about their writing ability. Table 2 shows that 75% (N=38) of the students believed they were not doing well in writing English composition, whilst only 25% (N=13) of the students answered positively. In the category of success, all (N=25) replied they 'sometimes do well' and none said they 'usually do well' in English writing. 67% (N=34) of the students in the failure category believed that they 'do not often do well', and 8% (N=4) responded as 'never do well' in English writing.

Table 2

Students' Perceptions about Their Writing Ability (N=51)

Survey Time	Perceptions	N	%	Success/ Failure	N	%
Pre training	Usually do well	0	0%	Success	13	25%
	Sometimes do well	13	25%			
	Do not often do well	34	67%	Failure	38	75%
	Never do well	4	8%			
Post training	Usually do well	4	8%	Success	37	73%
	Sometimes do well	33	65%			
	Do not often do well	13	25%	Failure	14	27%
	Never do well	1	2%			

Concerning with the category of success, not many students reported that they 'sometimes do well' in English writing, and none replied as 'usual do well'. As a second language learner, writing is one of the most difficult skills to learn. By this stage, most of the students have not learnt English writing at all, except some participants who might have learnt a few lessons from the private language schools or some other personal learning resources. When the students were asked this question before writing training, it is understandable to see rare students answered as 'sometimes successful'. Whilst after a semester's writing training, the situation had been reversed. The same attribution questionnaire was applied to investigate the learners' post-training attributions. 73% (N=37) students believed they sometimes do well in

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writing English compositions, whilst only 27% (N=14) students answered negatively.

Statistically, the *paired-t* test shown on Table 3 demonstrates that learners had significant difference between their post and pre training perceptions about their writing abilities. From the descriptive statistics section, the mean score of post writing training is 2.78 (SD = 0.61), which is much higher than the pre-test of 2.18 (SD = 0.56). As to the paired samples *t* test, the mean score between the paired samples of pre and post training groups is 0.608 (SD = 0.777) and the t value is 5.589 which reached the significance (p < .001). That is, the same group of learners had improved their attributions about their writing competence after receiving the writing teaching and learning for a semester. This result further confirms the initial comparison result shown on Table 2 using percentages.

Table 3

Paired Samples *T* Test of Students' Perceptions between Pre and Post Writing Training (N=51)

	Mean	N	SD	Paired Samples *t* Test (Post-pre)				
				Mean	SD	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Post	2.78	51	.610					
Pre	2.18	51	.555	.608	.777	5.589	50	.000

Furthermore, the result of post-training questionnaire survey shows that most learners believed they had made a slight improvement about their writing ability. Table 4 demonstrates the learners' beliefs about their own learning progress. 40 students (79%) answered they had made 'slight improvement', and 4 students (7%) perceived that they had achieved 'significant improvement' in doing writing. On the other hand, only 7 participants (14%) did not feel any improvement in their writing competence, and none of them responded to the option of 'fall back'. Generally speaking, the majority of the pupils (86%) agreed that they had improved their writing competence after the training activity. This result is supportive to the outcome mentioned earlier by pair-t test, which showed that most of the students change their perceptions in writing after the training period.

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Table 4

Learners' Perceptions about Their Learning Progress in Writing

Perceptions about progress	No. of students	%
Significant improvement	4	7%
Slight improvement	40	79%
No obvious improvement	7	14%
Fall back	0	0%
Total	51	100%

This result is sensible since writing instruction had been offered, and students had practiced a few times on the writing platforms for 5 times with feedback and corrections from their peers and writing teacher. At this stage, learners should know better about English writing and feel more confident with doing it. This is certainly a positive result that was desired by the teacher and the researcher. It may be claimed that this writing teaching intervention was effective due to it has been successful increasing the learners' both levels in terms of their confidence and competence in writing.

From the above results, the trend of enhancement of learners' perceptions or attributions from failure to success has some teaching implications in writing. According to attribution research, people's perceptions and attribution in success and failure can influence their behaviour as well as their achievement. Current research findings reveal that students' perceptions are related to, and help mediate the impact of other motivation constructs on academic achievement (Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Williams & Burden, 1997). One with a positive perception about oneself is more confident with one's capabilities and approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided. In contrast, one with negative perception impede one's accomplishments and learning activities (e.g. Bandura, 1994, 1997; Pajares & Schunk, 2001). As a consequence, language teachers' awareness of their learners' perceptions of success and failure is crucial at first, and then they could perceive a more constructive perspective to develop the syllabus in order to help students promote their attributions from negative to positive through teaching and learning activities. Knowing

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factors that may result in this change during the process thus become another prominent issue.

Factors influencing learners' perceptions of success and failure

Learners' perspective

Table 5 summaries the 17 causalities coded from the statements provided by the 51 students regarding the factors that may influence their perceptions and attributions in writing. The most frequent causalities cited by the learners were 'practice in writing' (N=28; 54%), 'competence in vocabulary' (N=23; 46%), 'competence in grammar' (N=18; 36%), and 'effort in learning English' (N=13; 25%). The major factor, 'practice in writing', appeared on the students' feedback more than 28 times out of the 51 participants. These causalities correspond to the previous research regarding nursing students' causalities in learning writing (Tai & Pan, 2009).

Table 5

Learners' Causalities to Their Learning Progress in Writing (N=51)

No.	Causalities to learning progress	N (%)	Student's comments
1	practice in writing	28 (54%)	I have more opportunities to practice the writing skills. (S#5, 8, 24, 38, 42, 51)
			I have more practice opportunities in the nursing college years. (S# 2, 13, 26, 50)
			I've learnt how to write after a few times practice. (S#1, 21, 35, 36)
			I've learnt to organize a composition by practicing more. (S#9, 40)
			I have more chances to practice English writing. (S#43, 48)
			I've practiced more and found others to correct my mistakes. (S# 22)
			I've practiced more. (S# 37)
			I practice writing every fortnightly. (S#7)
			I practice more in writing. (S#6)
			The private language school gives me regular tests to practice writing. (S# 15)
			I take extra classes in a private language school. (S#45)
			I have more opportunities to write compositions. (S#33)
			I often practice writing. (S#17)
2	competence in vocabulary	23 (46%)	I've learnt to use words more accurate. (S#2, 6, 17, 31, 45, 21, 40, 49, 51)
			I have remembered more vocabulary. (S#7, 15, 22, 30, 41, 36)
			I've learnt more vocabulary to make sentences to express my ideas. (S#38, 47,)
			I've learnt more vocabulary. (S#16, 32,)
			I've learnt the use of vocabulary. (S#11)

No.	Causalities to learning progress	N (%)	Student's comments
3	competence in grammar	18 (36%)	I can use the words that I've learnt. (S#25) I am diligent in learning vocabulary, idioms, phrases, and grammars. (S#28) I've learnt much more vocabulary than in the junior high school. (S#37) I've learnt to use more advanced grammars. (S#5, 25, 35, 38, 31) I've become more careful in using grammar when doing writing. (S#17, 48, 50) I've learnt to use more grammar rules. (S#2, 13, 36) I do not make tense errors any more. (S#21, 41) I've improved in using grammar. (S#28) I've made less grammar errors. (S# 40) I've learnt many sentence structures. (S#45) I am diligent in learning vocabulary, idioms, phrases, and grammars. (S#49) I've learnt new grammar rules. (S#29)
4	effort in learning English	13 (25%)	I look up the dictionary when meeting new words. (S#11, 36, 40, 45, 47) I force myself to learn English. (S#15, 27, 33) I study the Ivy League English magazine every day. (S#42) I look up dictionary quite often. (S#3) I've been continued learning English without stop. (S#30) I make study plans. (S#6) I repeatedly check those mistakes to increase the language accuracy. (S#35)
5	competence in idioms and phrases	9 (18%)	I've learnt more idioms and phrases from the lessons. (S#7, 15, 17, 21, 25) I've learnt more idioms. (S#30, 36) I've learnt more phrases. (S#46, 48)
6	competence in reading	7 (14%)	I've read more articles. (S#6, 15, 19, 22) My reading comprehension has improved. (S#24, 37) I've learnt how to read in English better than before. (S#40)
7	competence in discourse	7 (14%)	I've learnt how to construct a composition in English. (S#18, 22, 30, 31) I am capable of drafting a fluent and meaningful composition. (S#5, 7, 11)
8	learning from model sentences and compositions	3 (6%)	I've learnt a lot from the model sentences and compositions that the teacher gave and taught. (S#13, 15) From observing the peers' compositions, I know how to write. (S# 35)
9	appropriateness of instruction	3 (6%)	The teacher taught well. (S#13) The teacher implemented a good learning course (S# 23) The teacher has helped a lot with my writing learning. (S#32)
10	confidence in English ability	2 (4%)	I feel more confident with my English ability. (S#11, 33)
11	school policy	2 (4%)	It is because the school has a set up a compulsory regulation so that we have to do. (S#37, 39)
12	varieties of topics and interests	1 (2%)	It depends on what kind of topics and whether I am interested in doing it. (S#27)
13	competence in proofread	1 (2%)	I usually proofread the composition carefully. (S#32)
14	speed in drafting compositions	1 (2%)	I am able to draft a composition in a short time (S#34)

No.	Causalities to learning progress	N (%)	Student's comments
15	interest in learning English	1 (2%)	I am interested in learning English. (S#40)
16	competence in content construction	1 (2%)	I am able to draft a proper composition corresponding to the topics. (S#5)
17	performance in exams	1 (2%)	I did well in the examinations. (S#6)

Note: s# refers to the statements offered by the student whose seat no is #

In this case, since the most important 4 causalities - 'practice in writing', 'competence in vocabulary', 'competence in grammar', and 'effort in learning English' – were recognised by the majority of the learners to their learning progress, it seems that they have provided clues about 'how' they changed their causalities in a positive direction. Although the students knew that they had some way to go in making the grade in writing, they understood they had gained some progress through more effort. The result shows a way of shifting the learners' causalities from lack of ability to insufficient effort, which is the way of conducting RT.

Deriving from the learners' cognition, it would be easy to make an intuitive judgement that to provide more writing practice opportunities, to cram students more vocabulary and grammar rules should successfully enhance the learners' attributions and causalities. However, behind the learners' perspective, there may lay issues to be taken into account before teaching based on this analysis if we look further about the student writers' learning process and the environment around them. Since the student nurses received only limited and traditional writing training, their perceptions and causalities were most likely to have been restricted by the common teaching practices in Taiwan. Teachers, their peers, and information surrounded them tend to impart that individual effort to acquire vocabulary, grammar rules, and drill practice with more compositions is the only way that enables them to perform well in the GEPT and other writing tests.

But according to the statistics figure, learners in Taiwan did not perform writing satisfactorily in the GEPT. The author's personal teaching experience also tells that nursing students had the weakest performance in doing writing when taking every kind of language proficiency tests. The literature in writing reminds us that there are far

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more issues than linguistic skills when teaching writing (e.g. Hedge, 2000; Reid, 2001); and quite a number of teaching approaches proposed by the researchers are ready for helping students learn writing. For example, Byrne (1997) claims five pedagogical purposes in the early stages of writing training. Reid (2001) suggests techniques and methods that have proved successful in English L2 writing in the classroom. Simply increasing the amount of time spent on writing might be a way forward, too. When the students see the need for extra effort, the language teacher may provide them with writing support outside the classroom. These are all useful strategies for teaching writing but not merely focused on grammar and/ or vocabulary teaching, which has been overemphasized in the teaching and learning context in Taiwan for a long time.

The other causalities also include: 'competence in idioms and phrases' (N=9; 18%), 'competence in reading' (N=7; 14%), 'competence in discourse' (N=7; 14%), 'learning from model sentences and compositions' (N=3; 6%), 'appropriateness of instruction' (N=3; 6%), 'confidence in English ability' (N=2; 4%), 'school policy' (N=2), 'varieties of topics and interests' (N=1; 2%), 'competence in proofread' (N=1; 2%), 'speed in drafting compositions' (N=1; 2%), 'interest in learning English' (N=1; 2%), 'competence in content construction' (N=1; 2%), and 'performance in exams' (N=1; 2%). These causalities answered by not so many students, although not in common patterns, still offer a few valuable teaching strategies. For instance, some learners may need training in the use of English idioms and phrases since they might feel they are efficient in expressing their ideas in just a few words. It is also good to supply more reading materials for the students because they can learn how to write by imitating or observing the writing of others. To help improve the learners' discourse competence can be considered as well. A few students had realised that discourse ability is crucial for their writing fluency so that they would like to learn more skills to improve their discourse competence. In addition, to teach more model sentences and compositions is worth doing since several pupils believed that model sentences and compositions are useful for them to imitate before building up their own writing styles.

Nonetheless, despite the learners that provided some suggestions for the language learning and teaching from their causalities, the language teacher still needs to trade-off different teaching strategies. The

causalities ranked by the numbers of respondents have been sorted out in this study, and the ranking seems to afford an initial perspective about the proportion of these teaching strategies that can be designed into the syllabus. The teacher may not be able to adopt every strategy to help each individual (though he/she may favour to utilise as many as possible) but he/she may choose the most effective teaching strategies based on the learners' causalities. This awareness supplies an entry point for the writing teachers to consider prior to the implementation of writing training courses.

Apart from the learners' perspective, which proffer nothing but an angle of the whole process of teaching and learning, the writing teacher's and the researcher's opinions were investigated and considered to supply complementary perspectives in order to draw a fuller picture of this issue.

Teacher's and researcher's perspectives

Table 6 demonstrates the analysis result formed by all of the nodes coded from the documents listed in Table 1, and the relational model is referred in Appendix C. Four main dimensions including 'writing skills training factors', 'psychological factors', 'contextual factors', and 'language competence training factors' are concluded from the analysis.

Table 6

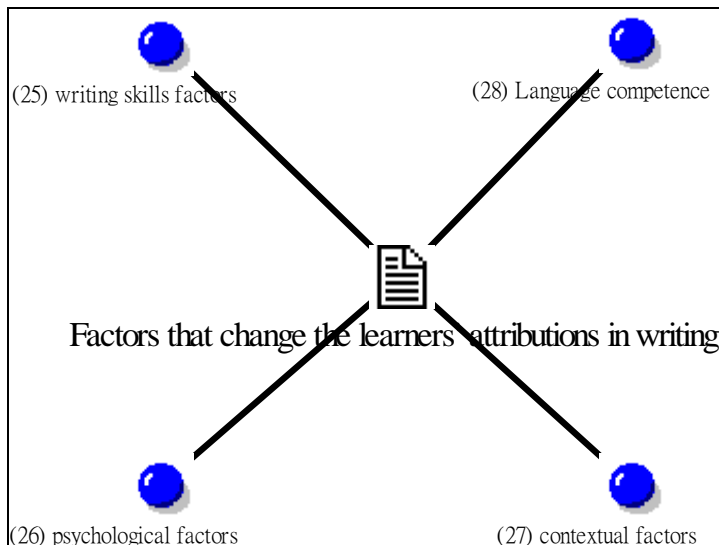**Teacher's and researcher's opinions about factors influencing learners' attributions**

Dimension	Sub-level	Nodes	
writing skills factors	writing strategies training	pre-writing preparing defining a word or a term giving reasons expressing an opinion explaining a process discussing cause and effect practicing paragraph writing	telling a story clustering listing and grouping making a comparison outlining writing summary revising resubmitting

Dimension	Sub-level	Nodes	
		drafting topic sentences	
	discourse writing training	cohesive devices descriptive genre narrative genre	cause and effect genre comparison and contrast genre argumentative genre
	peer review activities	brain storming group discussion	collaborative learning peer feedback
psychological factors	individual differences	individual differences	gender differences
	perceptions and attributions	learners' success attributions learners' failure attributions	learners' causalities teacher's attributions
	teacher's feedback and comments	encouragement teacher's feedback	remind/ criticism
	teacher-learners interactions	evaluation criteria	learning progress
	learners interactions	exchange quiz papers	peer review activities
contextual factors	parents and family members factors	parents opinions	other family members opinions
	examination system	GEPT	other language tests
	Bushiban	previous learning experience	recently learning experiences
language competence factors	grammar training	grammatical rules	model sentences and compositions
	vocabulary training	pre-fix and suffix teaching	vocabulary quiz
	idiom/ phrase training	idioms teaching	phrases teaching
	web resources	online writing platform	web-concordancers
		web-dictionaries	Google search
	textbook selection	English textbook selection	writing textbook selection

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Figure 1 shows the relationships between the four main dimensions in our relational model. In the model, two dimensions: 'writing skills factors' and 'language competence' dimensions can be seen as 'linguistic factors' in a general sense (e.g. Schoonen & Gelderen, Sasaki, Wang & Wen, etc.). Since there are quite a number of codes emerged from the data, we separate it into two parts in order to discuss them individually in detail. The 'writing skills factors' indicate the teaching and learning activities which directly link to the writing skills training; and the 'language competence factors' are related to those training activities that may enhance the learners' general language-competence. The 'contextual factors' represents those environmental factors which were not decided by the participants in this classroom, and the importance of environmental factors has been discussed in the literature (e.g. Bandura and Pajares). The 'psychological factors' refers to those behavioural interactions between the participants in this classroom which might influence their perceptions and attributions through a broad perspective of teaching and learning (e.g. Bar-Tel and Weiner).

Figure 1

Four Dimensions Influencing Learners' Change of Causality's

(25) writing skills factors

(28) Language competence

Factors that change the learners attributions in writing

(26) psychological factors

(27) contextual factors

Regarding the writing skills factors, a paragraph coded to this node

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from the researcher's diary is quoted as below. In this paragraph, data is not necessarily coded to one node only; instead, some other nodes may also link to the text in whole or a part of this passage. For example, nodes like 'drafting topic sentences', 'cohesive devices', 'practicing paragraph writing', 'grammatical rules', 'idioms teaching', 'phrases teaching' can be coded from this paragraph.

> *In terms of the writing skills related to causalities, four of them can be changed through more writing training as has been discussed for the vocabulary, grammar, practice, and idioms/phrases teaching … Since these students are novice writers, they can be taught some useful discourse instruments such as cohesive devices, topic sentences, organizations of a composition, and 'topical development' (e.g. Shen, 2004) etc. These teaching strategies can improve their writing ability on the discourse level.*
>
> *(from 'Researcher's diary - December 2010', paragraph 13)*

From the researcher's diary, he mentioned about the writing skills training as a dimension to influence the learners' causalities. Vocabulary, grammar, idioms and phrases, more writing practice, and discourse training are all included in the scenario. Some teaching strategies such as cohesive devices and topic development are also suggested to influence the learners' causalities. Tracking deeper into the tree nodes of this writing training dimension, three sublevels construct it: 'writing strategies training', 'discourse writing training', and 'peer review activities'. 16 nodes were coded to form up the sublevel of 'writing strategies training', 6 nodes for 'discourse writing training', and 4 nodes for 'peer review activities' (see Table 6).

The second dimension is psychological factors, including five sublevels - 'individual differences', 'perceptions and attributions', 'the teacher's feedback and comments', 'teacher-learners interactions', and 'learners interactions'. As to the sublevel of 'the teacher's feedback and comments', for example, three nodes – 'teacher's feedback', 'encouragement' and 'remind/ criticism' were found. Texts coded to these nodes are as follows:

(1) 'Teacher's feedback':

> *When the teacher returns the compositions to the students, he also writes down some common errors that he found on the*

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compositions. Four major errors are summarized by the teacher; that is, tense errors, the use of namely, the importance of addressing the main points at the beginning and then giving fully explanations of that main point, and the wrong use of conjunctions.

(from 'Classroom Observation', paragraph 16)

(2) 'Encouragement':

The teacher encourages another student, whose name is Lin, Pei-Yi, who got 5 points for her excellent work which performs much better than her current ability.

(from 'Classroom Observation', paragraph 18)

(3) 'Remind/criticism':

He investigates how many learners who did not submit the work, and then gives them an oral warning that their scores will be influenced without submitting writing tasks.

(from 'Classroom Observation', paragraph 11)

In the educational research field, the psychological effect on the learners' establishment of perceptions and causalities caused by the teacher's feedback and comments as well as their encouragement and punishment has been well recognised (e.g. Bar-Tal, 1982; Lawrence, 1996, 1999; Staines, 1958; Tse, 2000; Williams & Burden, 1999).

The third dimension, 'contextual factors', represents those environmental elements which have been decided outside the classroom. In the literature in Taiwan, some contextual factors such as the social environment of English learning (e.g. discussion about the 'English fever' by Krashen, 2003), the general educational system (see for example: Ho, 1994; Hsu, Hsieh, Hou, Jien, & Wang, 2001; Peng, 2002; Shih, 1998), English language teaching policy (Chang, 2003; Huang, 2003; Yiu, 2004), the university and college entrance examination system (Chen, 2003), the new English language teaching curriculum at the secondary levels (Chyu & Smith, 1991), and English language teaching pedagogy (Peng, 2002) have all been discussed recently. These factors can be considered as 'contextual factors' that may influence the learners' perceptions in learning writing.

5 contextual factors were identified and coded from the collected

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documents. Three sublevels - 'parents and family members factors', 'examination system', and 'Bushiban' (or private language schools, or cram schools) are classified into this category. Take the sublevel of 'examination system' for example; an interview with the language teacher reveals the node of 'GEPT'.

> *Q:How about the GEPT examination system for these learners (class 104)? Do they care passing the GEPT test?*
> *Teacher: Yes, you can say that for this class, most of the students are willing to learn writing well and to pass the GEPT. They know it is a bit difficult but the reward is worthy. The school's policy is that once they pass the examination, they can claim back their registration fee, can get a formal award on their moral profile, can obtain an official license, and to exclude from the compulsory English course in the second year.*
>
> *(from 'Teacher interviews', paragraph 319-320)*

The fourth dimension, 'language competence factors', is related to those training activities that may enhance the learners' general language-competence. The students in this classroom could be seen as novice learners before receiving their initial writing training. Even after one semester's learning, students still attributed many linguistic factors to their writing competence, and this seems partly to be because not sufficient writing training is provided. There are 5 sublevels in this dimension containing 'grammar training', 'vocabulary training', 'idiom/ phrase training', 'Web resources', and 'textbook selection' with total 12 nodes among this scope.

Based on these four dimensions, a potential teaching implication of conducting 'reattribution training' (RT) (e.g. Hastings, 1994; Weiner, 1992; Williams & Burden, 1997) from a multidimensional and comprehensive perspective may be proposed. A number of teaching strategies emerged from the findings should be taken into consideration for writing training, and the ultimate goal of this approach is to let the learners create a positive learning cycle to improve their writing confidence as well as their competence. Take this classroom research as an example, when conducting RT, the teacher should bear in mind the four dimensions in order to create an achievable teaching and learning context that can expose the students to a planned series of writing

learning experiences. As Brophy (1996) advised that typical RT exposes learners within an achievement context, in which *inform*, *persuade*, *model*, and *self-instruct* techniques are used to help them improve in three aspects: *from uncontrollable to controllable*, *from stable to unstable*, and *from external to internal*. The teacher can apply these general principles and techniques to a classroom teaching, a group of students' guidance, and even to an individual's extra tutorial to cater for the issue of individual differences in the classroom.

Following the suggestions, three aspects are further discussed for the explanation of RT implementation. First, in order to help the students improve their self-beliefs and attributions *from uncontrollable to controllable*, the teacher may adapt techniques such as inform, persuade, model and self-instruct to influence the learners from the four dimensions. For example, in terms of the **writing skills dimension**, the teacher can *inform* the learners regarding the other people's responses when facing the similar situations in learning writing skills. The main purpose is to make the learners feel relaxed and not to attribute their failure to some unnecessary and/or unrealistic reasons – 'general inform' (Brophy, 1996). As to the 'specific inform', the teacher can help an individual to review and examine those specific attributions which may cause their failure.

Modelling, another skill which lets an individual observe and imitate the others, especially those whom they recognise or have respect for, watching how they behave in a similar context, we may take the student # 2 as an example. She perceived a negative attribution that she was not good at doing writing before training. She attributed her failure to three causalities – 'incompetence in vocabulary', 'incompetence in grammar', and 'incompetence in drafting adequate content' - which were lack of abilities. Whilst after the training period, she had ameliorated her attribution from negative to positive – 'I sometimes do well in writing'. Her causalities to the success became: feeling more confident with her vocabulary, grammar, and writing abilities, and feeling interested in learning writing. This RT teaching context seemed to have provided a positive learning environment for this student. Successful writing training seemed to have happened to her and thus uplifted her attributions in a positive direction, and this learner had shown us a good learning model. Her success can be a model to be illustrated for the other students, and to encourage the peers in this classroom.

In addition, teachers may adopt process writing approach to design writing training activities including setting goals, generating ideas, organising information, selecting appropriate language, making a draft, reading and reviewing it, and then revising and editing it according to the learners' capabilities; and then increase the level of difficulties for the learners to improve their writing competence. This process writing teaching approach may help the students feel their learning to become more controllable. Other writing teaching strategies and classroom practice emerged from the research findings such as the use of web-concordancers, peer review, discourse writing training, discourse markers, topic sentences drafting, model sentences and composition teaching, group activities, group discussion, brain storming, etc. are all feasible approaches that can be integrated into writing skills training.

Regarding the **language competence dimension**, language teachers may be advised to ponder some language teaching strategies to meet the students' needs, and the ultimate goal is to enable the learners to feel that their English learning is controllable and achievable. There are already lots of English teaching pedagogy and methodologies available for the language teachers, for example, the 'communicative approach' (Littlemore, 2003), which gives students opportunities to use the language system successfully through the process of interaction and communication in the context, can be used to help support the development of the students' linguistic competence. Even the traditional 'product teaching approach' (Grabowski, 1996; Jones & Tetroe, 1987; Storch, 2005) which focuses the students' attention on the features of texts, and is mainly concerned with developing their ability to produce those features accurately can be referred to sometimes. What the teacher should do here is to find a suitable, comprehensible, and practical way for general English teaching which can be applied to help the learners change their perceptions and attributions about English learning *from uncontrollable* to *controllable*. In other words, specific strategies can be taught to manage the problems of dealing with producing writing in the exam so that the learners can feel more confident about their writing.

From the **psychological dimension**, writing teachers may attempt to pay more attention to the participants' behavioural interactions in the classroom practice. These behavioural interactions should include the teacher's modelling, his/ her interactions with the students, and the peer interactions between the learners. As a pivotal role in the classroom, the

teacher can develop a strong influence on his/ her students' psychological formations. Once the teacher realises the role as a reattribution trainer, he/ she can benefit the students' perceptions and attributions from uncontrollable to controllable through different kinds of behavioural interactions and psychological techniques.

The **contextual dimension** cannot be ignored during the RT process: for language teachers, some of the contextual factors may be controllable, whilst some may not. For those uncontrollable contextual factors such as the examination-oriented system, teachers should not emphasise the negative effects of that system; instead, they can create a positive learning environment in the classroom for the learners to feel that their performance under the examination system is controllable. If the students want to learn and improve their writing competence, they can succeed in the examinations. On the other hand, for those controllable contextual elements such as the parental factors, teachers can try to benefit the learners through their facilitation. For instance, writing teachers may seek for the assistance from the parents whose students have failure attributions in writing. By communicating with those parents, some of them may become helpful facilitators for their children at home. Teachers can also try to provide additional opportunities to give the students a chance to further practice their writing skills to get around the problem of the lack of time made available for writing in the curriculum. In order to make the course attractive, writing teachers might utilise Internet instruments like blogs and wikis which might encourage learners to be more accurate in their writing.

Second, RT focuses on the shift of learners' perceptions and attributions *from stable to unstable*. In order to create this change, language teachers may teach learners to cope with failures by retracing their steps to find their mistakes or by analysing the problems to find another approach. This is to help the learners who had established stable negative attributions and causalities change their perceptions about their writing abilities to become unstable. During this RT process, teachers can provide the four dimensions – writing training, language competence, psychological, and contextual – as reference for the learners to think and explore.

Third, learners may be taught to attribute their failure in learning writing *from external to internal*. The four dimensions – writing training,

language competence, psychological, and contextual – contain both external and internal factors that may influence the learners' perceptions and attributions. The teacher can apply the RT techniques — inform, persuade, model, and self-instruct — to motivate the learners to attribute their failure in learning writing from external to internal. Learners can be instructed to understand that their unsatisfactory writing competence may result from insufficient effort, lack of persistence, or use of ineffective strategies rather than to the environment, teachers, parents, or bad luck. They should concentrate on devoting more effort, being more persistent, and learning proper strategies when studying writing. The students should realise that concentration on their internal effort can lead to a better competence and performance when learning writing.

Finally, during the process of conducting RT, language teachers should reflect back to the attribution theory to examine whether they have adopted an appropriate teaching strategy to establish the learners' positive attributions. At the same time, the teachers may also need to adjust their way of writing instruction in accordance to the observation of individual differences. Since the classroom atmosphere and the participants' interactions are dynamic, a reciprocal correlation between the three major elements can be identifies. Through this awareness, teachers have to realise that they need to continue optimising their teaching resources during the training process in order to find the best way for helping the learners individually, practically, and effectively.

By means of learners' causalities, four dimensions, and some appropriate teaching activities, students are ultimately expected to manage their expectancy of future success from a lower degree to a higher possibility; and thus form up a positive learning cycle to improve their performance. Attribution theory can be seen as a diagnosis instrument to get insight of the learners' perceptions and attributions when doing writing, and there is no fixed strategy or universal methodology to help the learners in different contexts. Writing teaching and learning should not be looked as merely a language skill but a holistic multi-dimensional and comprehensive process.

Conclusion

This study examines the factors that may influence the learners' causalities in writing in the classroom context of a nursing college in Taiwan. Results demonstrate that nurse students had significantly

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enhanced their perceptions of success and failure from negative to positive after a semester's writing training.3 perspectives may help explain this shift: from the learners' viewpoints, 'more practice', 'competence in vocabulary', and 'competence in grammar', are the most important elements that may alter their perceptions and causalities. Whilst from the language teacher and the researchers' opinions, a much broader perspective regarding this issue, including writing skills, psychological, contextual, and language competence dimensions, can be identified.

In Taiwan, the examination system has become the most important factor for all of the relevant education parties, including the authorities, schools, teachers, students, parents, and even the whole society in the evaluation of language learning and teaching achievements. The learners' learning outcomes and the teachers' teaching performance depend largely upon the examination scores. Under this quantified system, education has become a game in gaining high marks for everyone. Although this system has been modified to some extent after the educational reform which started around ten years ago, the traditional cognitive and psychometric concept is still deeply rooted in the public and it is difficult to change in a short time.

Nevertheless, through applying the attribution theory and RT, the teachers may develop a different view of their learners by taking care of their learning perceptions as the key factor in bringing about improvement. This means teachers and learners can still utilise the examination as a learning goal to achieve together, an external factor we must recognise; but during the process, the teacher can pay more attention to their pupils' subjective perceptions instead of focusing only on their examination scores.

Finally, it is worth noting that this is a qualitative research which does not have as its aim 'generalisation' to all the language classrooms in Taiwan. Instead, the ideas expressed here may be 'transferable' to some similar teaching contexts, which may have similar characteristics in terms of learners, teachers, teaching pedagogy, school policy, parents expectations, etc.

Acknowledgment

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their contributions in helping conduct writing training, data collection, results coding, and expertise consultation during the research.

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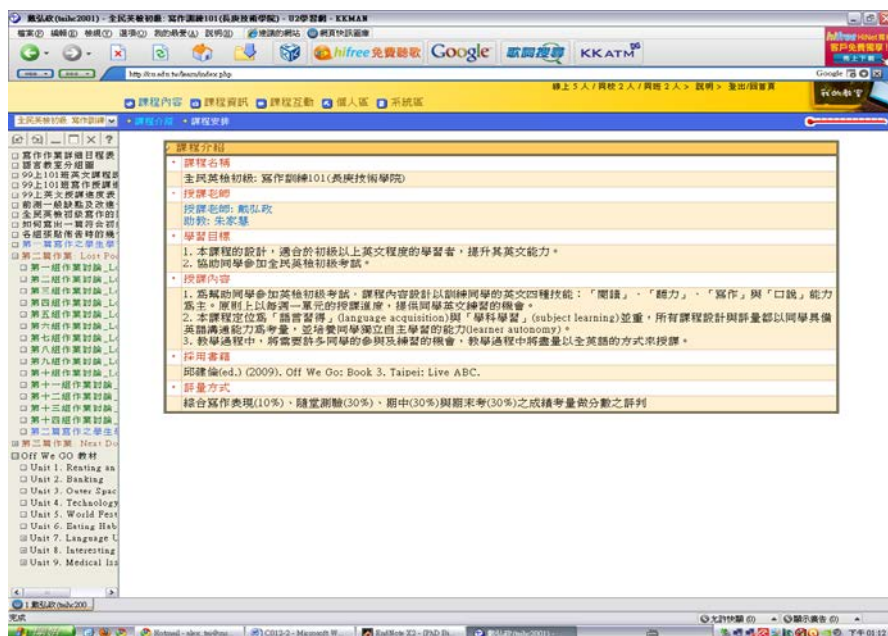Classroom-based Study, Postmodern Openings, Volume 4, Issue 2, June 2013, pp: 75-114

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APPENDIX A

Writing Teaching Platform – U2 Learning Network

APPENDIX B

Writing Teaching Schedule and Tasks

Weeks	Writing tasks	Topics
1	Introductory session to English writing (genres, paragraph, topic sentence, development, concluding sentence, etc.).	
2	Introductory session to GEPT writing: (assessment criteria, sample compositions, common errors, etc.).	

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3	**Task 1：descriptive genre (present tense)**	**Brian's Home**
4		
5		
6	**Task 2：narrative genre (past tense)**	**Lost Wallet**
7		
8		
9	Mid-term exam.	
10		
11	**Task 3：narrative genre (present tense)**	**Next Door Uncle**
12		
13		
14	**Task 4：Story telling (either present or past tense)**	**Tortoise and Hare**
15		
16	**Task 5：Writing letter (future tense)**	**Winter Vacation**
17		
18	Final exam.	

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APPENDIX C

A Relational Model of the Coding Nodes