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Writers' Beliefs in Academic Writing

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Abstract

It is safe to say that writers have love-hate relationships with writing. Some began by liking but they get disheartened with low marks. Some liked and are motivated to write better with good marks. The love-hate relationship that writers have towards writing can be depicted in the form of a writing prophecy. This study investigates how writing prophecies influence writers' own self-imposed belief and how this belief is affected by other imposed expectation and finally these impacted the results of the writing activity. This quantitative study is done using a survey with 5 likert scale. The categories in the survey are (a) Planning, (b) Translating and (c) Reviewing stages of writing. The independent variables like Type A writer, Type B writers and Type C writers are added in the survey. Type A refers to the perceived belief that the writer who has self-imposed negative perception will have a negative writing belief. Next, type B is when the writers have self-imposed perception, but they received negative other imposed expectation. This can still lead to positive beliefs as the writer is motivated. Type C refers to writers who have positive self-imposed perception and received positive other imposed expectation. This can lead to positive writing belief. Data is analysed using SPSS version to reveal frequency of responses and presented in mean scores.

Keywords: Academic Writing, Writing Prophecy, Planning, Translating, Reviewing

Introduction

There have been several studies to look into why writers fear writing. Cheng (2004) conceptualizes writing fear as being three -dimensional. The first one is (a) somatic anxiety which refers to the anxiety that is related to the emotionality of the writer. The second type is (b) cognitive anxiety and this refers to the worry factor of the writer. The last one is (c) avoidance behavior. Some writers attend to their writing fear by avoiding participating in writing-related activities.

- The fear of writing can stem from or turn into writers claiming to face perceived difficulties. This perceived is caused by the (b) writer's own thought or past writing experiences. It can also come from (b) the environment that the writer is in during the writing process. Writers' perception on writing difficulties can turn into an emotional cycle that the writer maintains when it comes to writing. This writing emotion cycle can lead to the writer constantly staying in the cycle and fulfilling his/her prophecy

that writing is difficult (and it continues being so as long as the writer stays in the cycle. One category of writers begins any writing assignment with their self-imposed negative belief about writing. This causes negative expectation and hence, negative outcomes. Next, some writers began a writing course with self-imposed positive belief about writing. Perhaps, they had positive writing experience previously which is not very often. Then one writing activity ended with them getting negative “other imposed expectation”-perhaps low grades. This can lead to a negative or positive outcome depending on how the expectation was presented to them. The last type of writers has had good self-imposed positive belief. This snowballs into being happy with other imposed positive expectations and thus, positive outcome. This study is done to investigate how different types of writers respond to the different stage in the writing process. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following research question;

- (a) How do different types of writers respond to the planning stage?
- (b) How do different types of writers respond to the translating stage?
- (c) How do the different types of writers respond to the reviewing stage?

Literature Review

Processing Writing

Writing is a process that writers need to go through. This is especially true for academic writing. Academic writing is not commonly done at one sitting. Whether they(the writers) want to actually identify the processes or ignore the stages, generally writers do go through three stages and the stages are (a) planning, (b) translating and (c) reviewing.

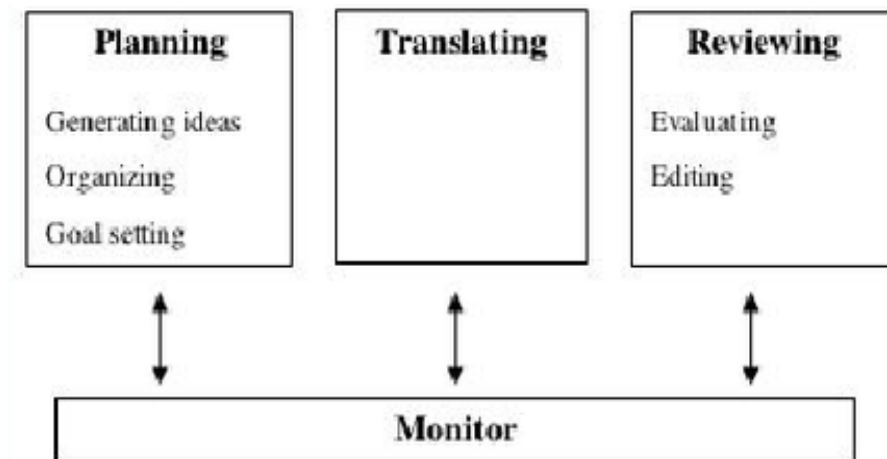


Figure 1- Three Stages of the Writing Process (Flower and Hayes, 1981)

Figure 1 shows the three stages in the writing process (Flower and Hayes,1981). Writing begins with the writer making plans. Although some claim they hardly make plans , but planning can also include retrieving information from the long-term memory and making decisions as to where the information retrieved can be useful. This is when the writer generates ideas, organizes what he/she wants to include in the essay. The last “springboard” stage before the draft stage is the goal-setting stage where the writer makes careful planning as to what he/she wants the direction of the writing to be. The translating stage is when the

writer converts his/her oral thoughts into written thought. Monitoring is either done by the writing teacher or the peer. The last stage is the evaluating and editing stage.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

We all are influenced by our preconceived belief of ourselves. What we believe in ourselves, we will act upon that belief.



Figure 2- Merton (1948)

Figure 1 depicts the self-fulfilling prophecy that we impose on ourselves. It begins with our beliefs about ourselves. This belief is a powerful thought as it can influence many things. With this belief, we give impacts to how others believe about us. This will then cause the actions of others toward us. The reaction of other then reinforces our beliefs we kept about ourselves. Interestingly, if we began with a positive belief about ourself, the cycle will move around carrying positive vibes.

Writing Beliefs

The theory of self-fulfilling prophecy can be conceptualized onto writers' beliefs about their writing abilities (figure 3).

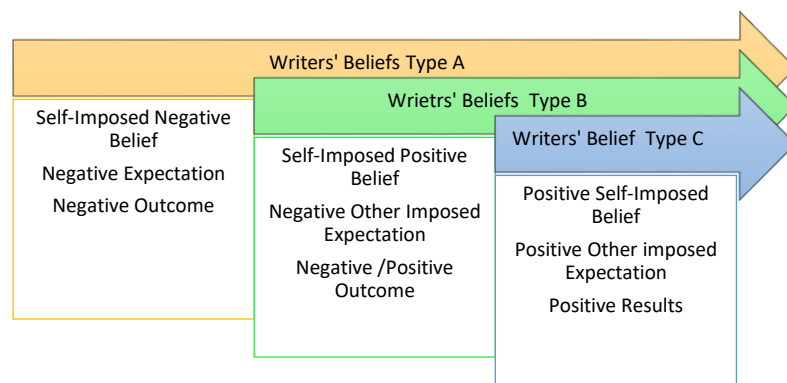


Figure 3-Writers Beliefs about Writing
 Source: Rahmat (2021)

According to Rahmat (2021), when it comes to writing beliefs, three types of writers are apparent. The first type (A) has negative self-imposed beliefs on themselves-perhaps they

had had bad writing experiences in the past. This belief leads to a negative expectation and then lead to negative outcome. The second type (B), began with a positive self-imposed belief on themselves. They used to like writing. However, this feeling is short-lived when they are exposed to an environment that do not appreciate their work. This can lead to either a negative or positive outcome depending on the environment they are constantly exposed to. The last type is C where the writer began with positive self-imposed belief on themselves. They are lucky to be surrounded by an environment that appreciates their ability. This leads to a positive other imposed expectations and would lead to appositve results

Past Studies

Perhaps one reason why learners had negative self-imposed beliefs when it comes to writing is because they see writing as difficult. The study by Fadda (2012) investigated the difficulties King Saud University students faced when learning academic writing. 50 postgraduate students participated in this qualitative study. Analysis of the data showed that English as a second language (ESL) students face many difficulties and stresses in their academic writing, such as difficulty distinguishing between spoken and written English. They found that making an outline before writing a draft was also difficult.

Next, students writing abilities are influenced by their attitudes. Parker and Erarslan (2015) explored the attitudes of EFL students towards the writing course at a university.. The participants were 782 students from various departments in the pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate levels in a preparatory program. The data were collected through questionnaires before and after the student took the writing course. The students were asked to reflect their attitudes towards the writing course as pre- and post-tests. In addition, their writing scores in the proficiency exam were assessed, and the relationship between students' average attitude scores and their overall writing proficiency was compared and contrasted. Findings revealed that there was a slight decrease in their attitudes towards writing in the post test, which was not statistically significant. On the other hand, the overall writing proficiency results revealed that the students' attitude towards writing skill had a positive effect on their proficiency in writing.

Another study by Setyowati & Sukmawan (2016) also looked at the influence of students' attitude towards writing. 57 participants participated in this study. Data was taken from a questionnaire, interview, and documentation of self-reflection essay. The result shows that none of the students has low attitude in writing, while fifty eight percent of them has moderate attitude to writing. The rest of them have positive attitude to writing. The result from the interview also reveals that although the students have moderate attitude to writing, they view writing as difficult, and stressful. Those who have high attitude, mostly view writing as interesting and challenging. The finding also reveals several efforts the students do to improve their writing skill, among others are practice writing, reading a lot for knowledge and ideas, and using diary writing. The implication of the finding is discussed.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

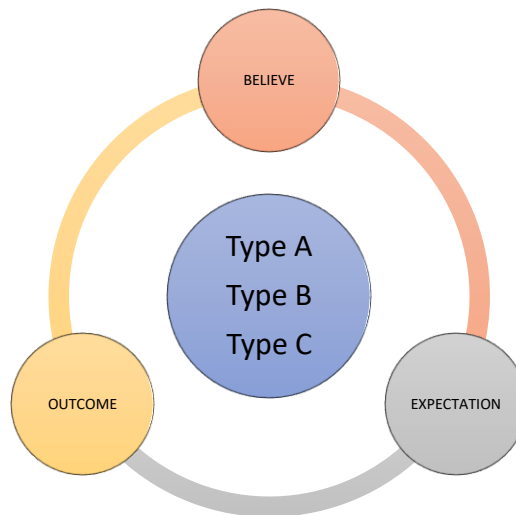


Figure 4- Conceptual Framework of the Study-Self-Belief about Writing
Figure 4 presents the conceptual framework of the study.

Methodology

62 respondents participated in this quantitative research using a survey using 5 Likert scale. There are 24 items in the survey; 8 items on planning , 8 items on Translating and 8 items on reviewing. SPSS analysed revealed that the instrument has Cronbach alpha of .791 thus revealing that the instrument is reliable (table 1).

Reliability Statistics

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|------------------|------------|
| .791 | 23 |

Table 1-Reliability Statistics of Instrument

Findings

Findings for Planning

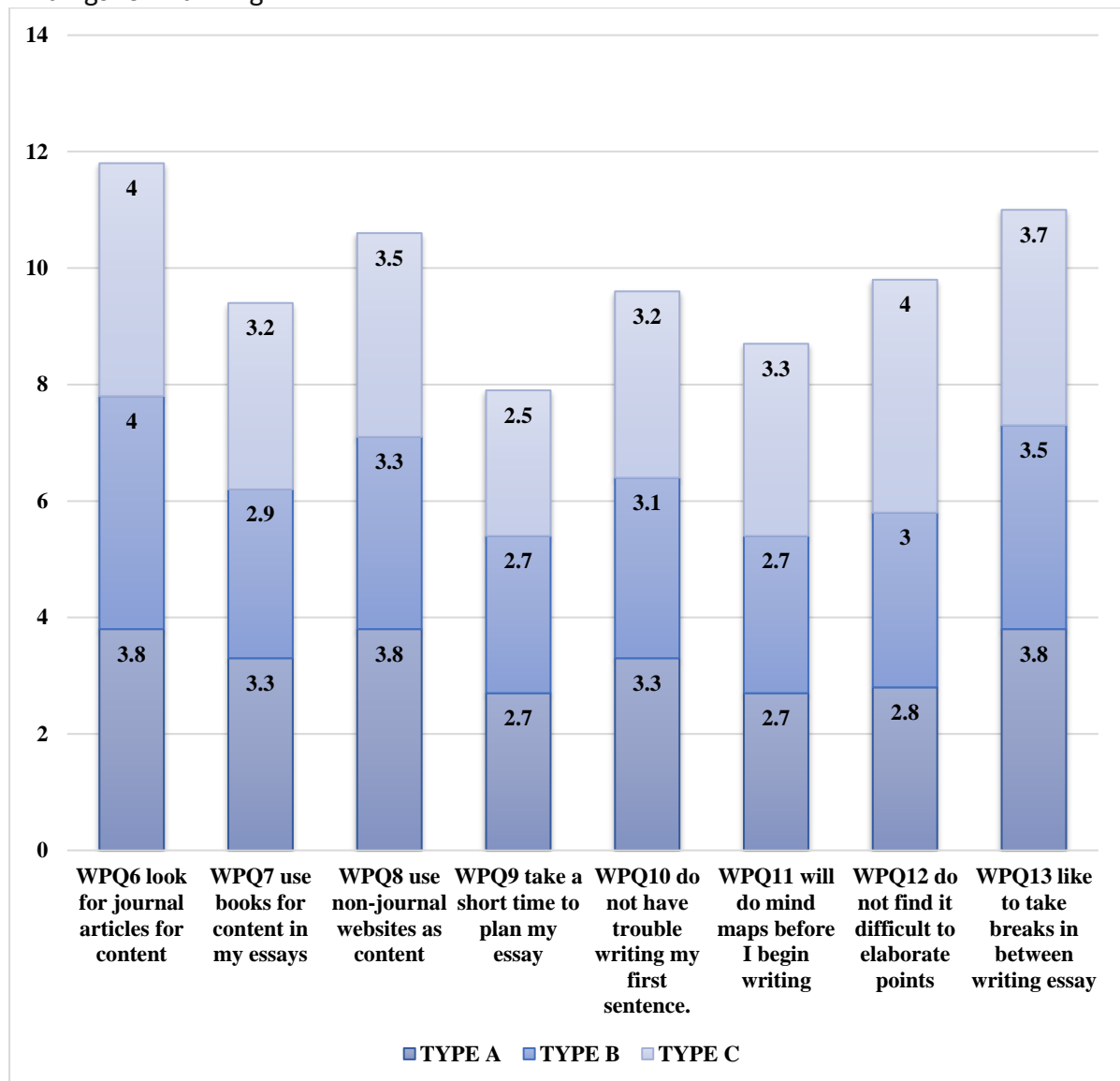


Figure 5- Mean for Planning

The writers in Type A have negative self-imposed belief of writing activity. They have negative expectations and therefore ends with a negative writing result. Figure 5 shows writers from Type A had low mean score when it comes to “planning their essay” and also “doing mind maps”(2.7). Writers in Type A values highly searching for “journal articles for content” (3.8), and also “non-journal articles”(3.8) for content, as well as took “breaks in between writing.

Writers in Type B have positive self-imposed belief about writing activity. Unfortunately, they get negative other imposed expectations. The result can be both positive and negative-depending on the situation. They also had low mean score when it comes to “planning” (2.7) and making “mind maps” (2.7). Their highest mean is for using “journal articles for content” (4).

Writers in Type C have positive self-imposed belief about writing activity. They also get positive other imposed expectations. The result is positive. They value most looking “for

journal articles” (4) and “taking breaks”(3.7). They also do not find it difficult to “elaborate points”(4).

Translation

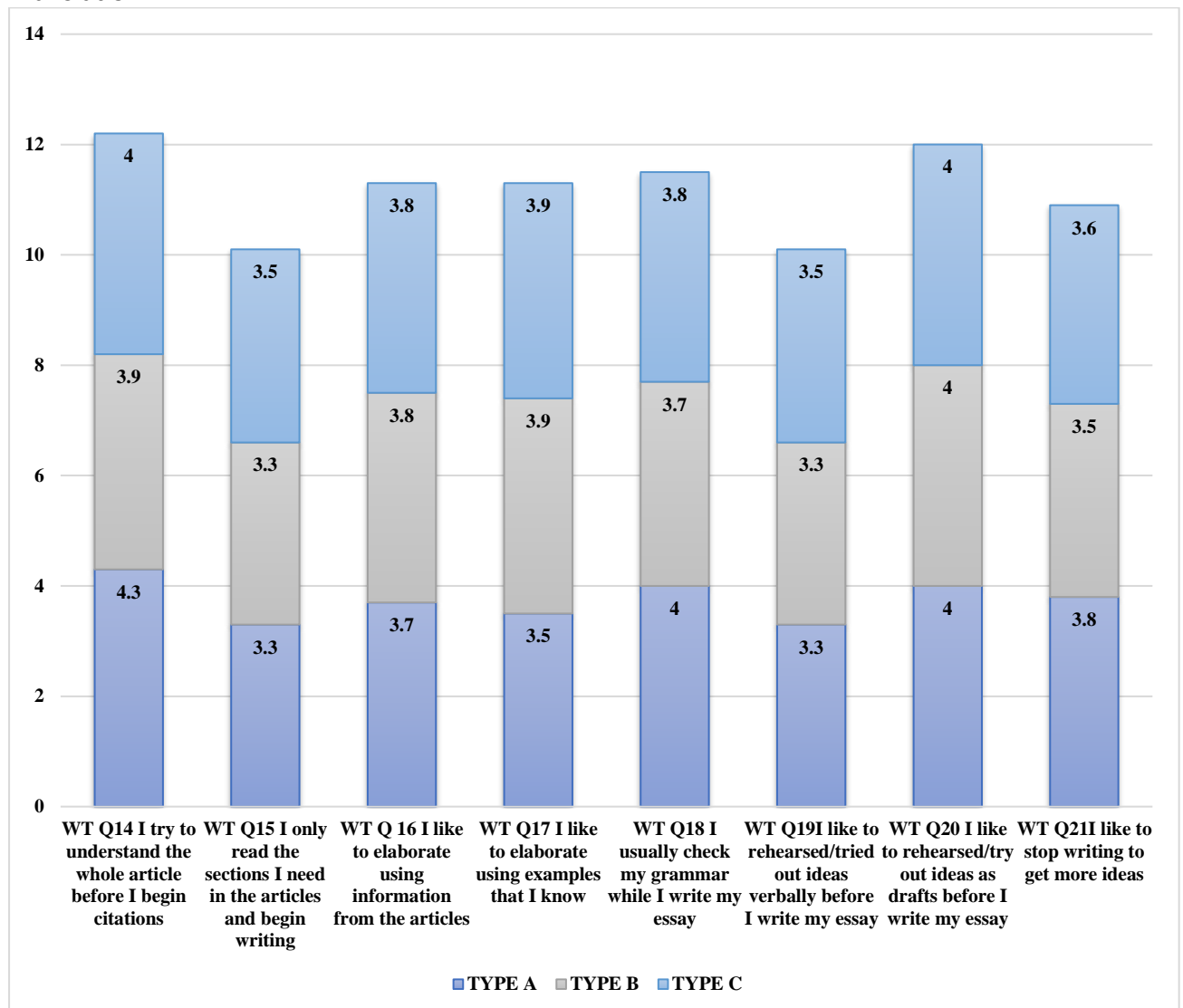


Figure 6-Mean for Translation

Figure 6 shows the mean for translation. According to Flower and Hayes (1981), this is the stage where the writers translate their oral thoughts into written thoughts. For many writers, this is the first draft. Writers in Type A have negative self-imposed belief of writing activity. They have negative expectations and therefore ends with a negative writing result. Writers in this category value most understanding “the whole article before citations” (4.3). Next, the value rehearsing “ideas as drafts before writing” (4) and they also “checked their grammar while writing”(4).

Writers in Type B have positive self-imposed belief about writing activity. Unfortunately, they get negative other imposed expectations. The result can be both positive and negative-depending on the situation. On the other hand, Writers in Type C have positive self-imposed belief about writing activity and they get positive result. Type B and C value most the same things in writing. Type B and Type C writers value most “rehearsing ideas” (4), “understanding the whole article” (3.9) and also “elaborating using example” (3.9).

REVIEWING

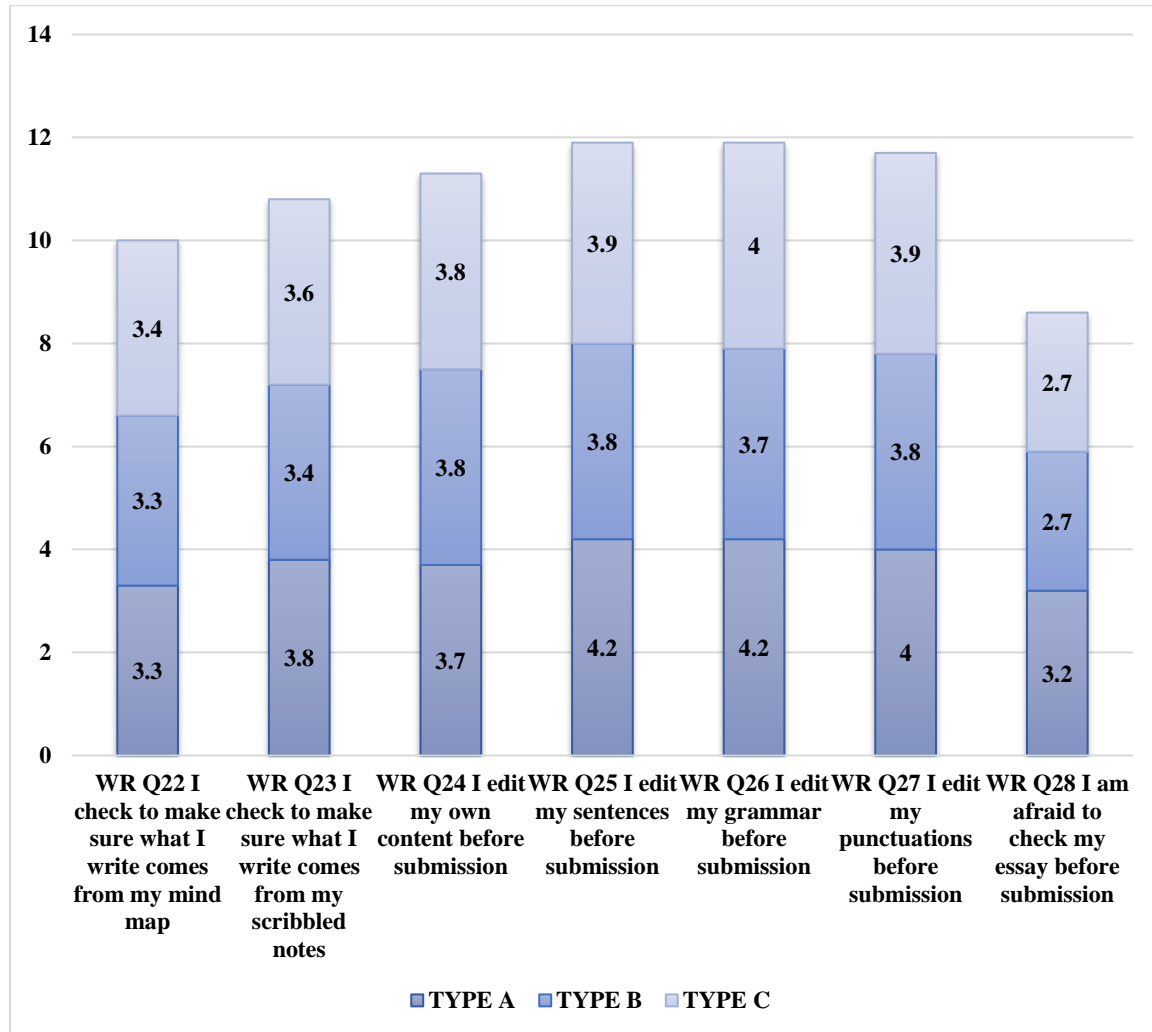


Figure 7- Mean for Reviewing

According to Flower and Hayes (1981), the last stage is the reviewing stage where writers evaluate the draft and edit to make the draft better. With reference to figure 7 above, Type A writers have negative self-imposed belief of writing activity. They have negative expectations and therefore ends with a negative writing result. Type A writers value most “editing sentences” (4.2), “editing grammar”(4.2) and “editing punctuations” (4).

Writers in Type B have positive self-imposed belief about writing activity. Unfortunately, they get negative other imposed expectations. The result can be both positive and negative-depending on the situation. Writers in Type C have positive self-imposed belief about writing activity. They also get positive other imposed expectations. The result is positive. Both types B and C writers value the same aspects in writing when it comes to reviewing. They edit grammar” (Type d-3.7 and Type C-4). They both “edit punctuations” (Type B-3.8 and Type C-3.9). They also both “ edit sentences “ (Type B-3.8 and Type C-3.9). Finally, they both “edit content” (Type B and C – 3.8)

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

Type A began writing activities with a negative attitude. They perceive further negative outcomes. This encouraged them to avoid the activity by taking breaks. Type B is

easily influenced by the surrounding. Writers in Type C have positive self-imposed belief about writing activity.

For many writers, the translation stage is the first draft. Writers in Type A have negative self-imposed belief of writing activity. They have negative expectations and therefore ends with a negative writing result. The study by Parker and Erarslan (2015) also revealed that writers attitude affects the way the answer is formed.

Writers in Type B have positive self-imposed belief about writing activity. Unfortunately, they get negative other imposed expectations. The result can be both positive and negative depending on the situation.

According to Flower and Hayes (1981), the last stage is the reviewing stage where writers evaluate the draft and edit to make the draft better. Type A writers stayed negative by focusing on language details and this can be exhausting and demotivating for writers. The study by Fadda (2012) reported that the perception of the writing process influence the way writers attend to the activity.

Writers in Type B have positive self-imposed belief about writing activity. Unfortunately, they get negative other imposed expectations. The result can be both positive and negative depending on the situation. Writers in Type C have positive self-imposed belief about writing activity. They also get positive other imposed expectations.

Implications of the Study and Suggestion for Future Research

The findings of this study have revealed an interesting finding. –on the teaching and learning of academic writing. Teachers need to create a positive writing environment for learners to enjoy writing. Activities that involve positive interaction among learners can create positive beliefs towards learner's abilities in academic writing. The beliefs will lead to positive expectations and then to positive outcome of the academic writing product. It is suggested future research look in depth at how the causes that lead to negative beliefs. Qualitative studies can be done to collect data on what learners actually feel at each stage of the writing belief- belief, expectation and outcome.

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