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The Topic Choice Effect on L2 College Learners' Writing Performance

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Students' performance in a test can be very different depending on topics and test methods, when the limited time is assigned in particular. This research aimed to investigate the effect of topic choice on Korean EFL learners' writing by employing a computational analysis. 32 college students participated in the study and were asked to write two essays in two different conditions, one imposed topic vs. several topic choices conditions. A variety of linguistic features in the students' writing were analyzed with Range32, and a web-based automatic lexical and syntactic complexity analyzer. The results have shown that topic choice has an impact on the vocabulary use in the written products. Lexical sophistication and lexical variation were revealed to be statistically significant between the conditions. The number of vocabulary included in the General Service List (GSL) and Academic Word List (AWL) increased in the condition of topic choice. In the comparison of the mean values, the fluency in topic choice was significantly higher than in the imposed topic in the number of words, while other measures of fluency did not demonstrate significant difference. The syntactic complexity was not shown to be significantly different between the two conditions.

[EFL learners' writing/topic choice/lexical complexity/syntactic complexity/fluency]

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I. INTRODUCTION

Writing topic is one of the essential task variables that determine the quality of writing (Kim, 2007; Lindermann and Anderson, 2001; Ruth and Murphy, 1988). Research conducted by Skehan (1998; 2001) also addressed the importance of topic as one task condition and its impact on learner's performance in terms of complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Considering topic as a task-variable, a number of research have paid attention to the degree of topical knowledge that a writer possesses and its effect on learners' reading, listening, speaking or writing ability, the ways to foster topic knowledge, and the relationship between the learners' topic interest and the outcome in their literacy skills.

Numerous studies have stressed on the importance of topical knowledge in language learning and acquisition, and the documentation on the positive effect of the learners' background knowledge in certain domains on the language learners' literacy ability has been firmly established (Carrell, 1983; Clapham, 1996; Kobyashi, 2009; Kim and Ryoo, 2011; Hinkel, 2008; Messick, 1989; Tedick, 1990). The research focus ranges from the effect of topical knowledge on the learners' reading comprehension (Carrell, 1983; Clapham, 1996; Kobayashi, 2009), vocabulary knowledge (Kim and Ryoo, 2011), to writing ability (Hinkel, 2008; Messick, 1989; Tedick, 1990).

However, compared to the quantity of studies on the impact of topic knowledge or topic familiarity on the learners' language ability, relatively less attention has been paid on the study of topic choice and its effect on the learners' writing ability, particularly in L2 context. A further research on the effect of topic choice becomes significant in that it could throw some insight into the development of fair testing items. Bachman and Palmer (1996) once argued that "all instances of language use involve topical knowledge" (p. 112). Their argument is very suggestive to the writing test developers in that if the pervasive influence of topical knowledge was acknowledged, the teaching practitioners or test developers should keep interrogating how the writing prompts should be provided to the test-takers, and in what condition they should be given. In the same vein, the task condition of whether or not the topic was imposed or several choices were offered to the task takers becomes an important question.

Therefore, the current study attempted to fill this gap by investigating if there are any differences in L2 learners' writing performance with different topic choice condition during the performance of their writing task. To be more specific, the main concern in this study was to examine the linguistic features in L2 learners' writing- syntactic complexity, lexical complexity, and fluency.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior to the discussion of the studies of topic choice and its effect on the learners' writing performance, it is necessary to review the research on how topical knowledge is related to the learners' writing performance. This inquiry is important, in particular, since the topic choice condition as a variable in performing a writing task is closely related to the question of topical knowledge that L2 learners are equipped with, if not directly related to it. Given the choices of topic in a test setting, learners can choose a more familiar topic to them, partly because it is easier for them to handle the writing task at hand within a limited time, and thus there is more possibility that they can develop a better quality writing in the content development (McCarthy Young & Leinhardt, 1998), and/or in language use (Hinkel, 2008).

A great number of previous studies investigated the relationship between topic knowledge and language learners' reading comprehension ability in both L1 and L2 contexts (Baldwin et. al, 1985; Carrell, 1983; Cho & Je, 2013; Kobayashi, 2009; Pornour, 2014) For instance, in a study on the effect of the prior knowledge on the topic of two controversial texts and its effect on their reading comprehension of the texts with EFL college students, Kobayashi reported that students who possessed more knowledge on the given topic showed higher comprehension on the inter-textual relationship between two texts dealing with a controversial issue. Many other studies have focused on the relationship between topic knowledge and the learners' writing ability (Ackerman, 1991; Hinkel, 2008; Kellogg, 1987; Winfield & Barnes-Felfeli, 1982). For instance, some research inquired into the effect of cultural knowledge involved in writing topic and participants' writing performance. Winfield and Barnes-Felfeli (1982), for instance, examined the test-takers' writing performance with the participants who were given familiar cultural topic and those with unfamiliar cultural topic. They found that the subjects with familiar cultural topic choice demonstrated better performance in their writing. They claimed that "easing the cognitive processing load by having writers deal with contextually familiar material tends to increase fluency, grammaticality, and complexity" (p. 374). More recently, Hinkel (2008) explored the effect of topic or prompt words on the frequencies of modal verbs in L2 writers' essays. In his analysis of 718 essays written by L2 students with different language backgrounds based on the five essay prompts, he found that the frequency rate in certain topic choices was significantly higher in the use of obligation and necessity modal verbs in certain groups of students, in particular, those with Asian cultural background. He particularly contended that the findings demonstrated evidence that some topics affect L2 learners' pragmatic aspect of language use, which suggested, in turn, culture-bound aspect of language use in their writing. He continued to call for the development of writing topics that can gain wider

accessibility to most of today's youngsters to reduce the possibility of cultural bias in the question items. In a similar vein, He and Shi's study (2012) also addressed the importance of developing appropriate writing test prompts. In the study with the participants who were 50 ESL students in a City College in Canada with two different writing prompts, one asking general knowledge and the other demanding field-specific knowledge such as knowledge on federal politics, they reported that participants showed significantly better performance for the prompts with general knowledge than the one asking domain specific knowledge.

Given the research findings on the effect of topical knowledge on the learners' writing performance, it seems imperative to consider providing topic choices for students to create a fair test setting. It is because there is more possibility that learners can have the opportunity to encounter the writing task with more familiar topic to them than when given an imposed and unfamiliar topic. As Graves (1983) reported, students tend to write on the topic they know best. If they are provided with more topic choices, a different test result will be yielded from the condition with only one topic. Furthermore, many studies have reported that giving choice to students can lead to positive results in learning. Offering choice can enhance self-regulation (Kamii, 1991), improve motivation and effort (Cordova & Lepper, 1996; Flowerday & Schraw, 2000), and increase efficiency in learning (Cordova & Lepper, 1996; Reynolds & Symons, 2001) as well.

Despite many educational psychologists' assertion on the positive influence when giving choice to the learners, the conceptualization of topic choice in the research on topic choices in writing differed from context to context, and thus, the results on the choice effect were also contradictory. Gabrielson, Gordon, and Engelhard (1995), for instance, explored how offering the topic choice can affect the writing quality of 11th graders. They divided the subjects into two groups, one with imposed writing topic, and the other with two topic choices, asking them to write an argumentative essay. The result for the choice group, however, did not show significant difference in their writing quality. In their study, however, the number of topic choice was only two and the research design of their study suggests a further research on the effect with more topic choices. Juliebo and Edwards (1988)'s study also illustrates different concept of choice and negative results in students' writing. In their study with L1 elementary school students, they attempted to compare the quality of narrative writings with "directed writing task" and "non-directed writing task". Although there were not much significant differences in students' writing performance between two writing conditions, students demonstrated far better in the use of discourse features in the "directed writing task," which means in the task that the teacher imposed, not in the one students chose. They pointed out that although students' interview results indicated that students preferred to write on the topic of their choice, their performance were not as good as expected. The discrepancy,

according to them, may have resulted from the fact that students had had more exposure to the knowledge of vocabulary or content about the directed writing topic through the classroom discussion. In a more recent context, the participants in Sullivan's (2007) study showed more engagement and stronger sense of purpose with the topic of their choice, but their writing quality decreased with the topic of their choice.

A few other studies demonstrated advantageous results in language learning context (Bleck, 2013; Gee, 1987; Gradwohl & Schumacher, 1989; McCutchen, 1986). Gee conducted a research with 12th graders in an English composition test to measure the correlation between topic and score by asking students to choose one topic among six. In the examination of the relationship between their holistic essay scores and topic, there was significant correlation between topic and students' essay score. Jennings, Fox, Graves, and Shohamy (1999) administered two conditions, no choice of topic or choice among five topics. ESL university participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions to determine the potential topic effect for the Canadian Academic English Language Assessment (CAEL). Even though the scores for the choice groups were usually higher than the scores for the no-choice groups, there was no statistical difference between two conditions.

Given that the scope of the research on the topic choice has been largely limited to the research on the relationship between students' perceptions on giving choice on their own and their writing performance or the comparison between field specific topic choice and general topic choice, there is still further need to study on offering general topic choices with one general imposed topic choice in the EFL context. Furthermore, a more thorough analysis of linguistic features in two different conditions is also rarely found. Therefore, as a complement to the previous studies, this study will determine whether the choice of topic causes differences in Korean EFL students' writing performance. The research questions for present study are as follows:

1. What differences appeared in EFL college students' writing performance, in particular, in lexical complexity between one imposed topic condition and many topic choices condition?
2. What differences appeared in EFL college students' writing performance in terms of syntactic complexity and fluency between one imposed topic condition and many topic choices condition?

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Participants

Thirty-two college students participated in the present study. They took an academic writing course, *English Writing I*, in a university located in Seoul, Korea during the fall semester in the year 2013. The course was offered as an elective course in General Education Program and open for all undergraduate students, and the first author was the researcher-teacher in this study. The participants' academic background was, therefore, diverse and students' profile self-reported at the beginning of the semester indicated that most of them were in the high intermediate or advanced level with the average TOEIC score 850. In addition, according to their report, approximately 50 % of students taking that class had once stayed in a foreign country before from 6 months to 10 years, attending any international schools or schools in English speaking countries. Out of 32 students, male students were 18 and 14 were female with the age ranging 19 to 28.

2. Procedure

The participants were asked to write two argumentative essays, one with an imposed topic first; the other with 4 topic choices later (See Appendix). The writing tests were administered during the class hour with 30 minutes' time limit for each test. A 10-minute break was given to them between two tests. The topics were selected from the standardized test items such as the TOEFL test with the intention not to affect the participants' writing by their cultural background or specific field knowledge. Furthermore, to minimize the timing effect (Kroll, 1990; Powers & Fowles, 1996), participants had to write two essays within the same 30 minutes for each test.

3. Analysis

The essays were collected and converted into the text files for the analysis. Lexical and syntactic complexity and fluency were measured on a web-based syntactic and lexical complexity analyzer (Ai and Lu, 2010; Lu, 2010). The tool, developed by Lu (2010), is a computerized device for measuring L2 learners' syntactic complexity. To make a closer examination of the lexical usage in this study, Range 32 program was utilized for the analysis of vocabulary range. Range 32 is an online program developed by Heatley and Nation (2002) to examine language learners' vocabulary range and frequency in the vocabulary profile. For the statistical analysis, SPSS 22 was run for independent samples t-tests to compare the mean score of lexical complexity, lexical range, syntactic complexity, and fluency in two different writing conditions.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Lexical Complexity

In the measurement of lexical complexity, three categories of measure were analyzed following Ai and Lu (2010) and Lu (2011; 2012): Lexical Density (LD), Lexical Sophistication (LS), and Lexical Variation (LV). Lu (2011; 2012) also mentioned that these three categories of measurement can be good indices for estimating lexical richness. In this study, Lexical Density, Lexical Sophistication 1 and 2 (LS1 and LS2), Verb Sophistication 1 (VS1), Verb Sophistication 2 (VS2), Corrected VS 1 (CVS1) and the Number of Different Words (NDW), Type and Token Ratio (TTR), and Lexical Word Diversity (LV) were estimated as the sub-measures.

TABLE 1

The Results of Lexical Complexity

Measure	Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	*t*	Sig. (2-tailed)
LD	Imposed	32	.549	.0464	1.504	.138
	Choice	32	.533	.0397		
LS1	Imposed	32	.296	.0625	9.609	.000
	Choice	32	.166	.0435		
LS2	Imposed	32	.198	.0400	3.597	.001
	Choice	32	.165	.0340		
VS1	Imposed	32	.165	.070	5.064	.000
	Choice	32	.087	.050		
VS2	Imposed	32	.700	.501	3.431	.001
	Choice	32	.326	.358		
CVS1	Imposed	32	.551	.202	3.833	.000
	Choice	32	.351	.216		
NDW	Imposed	32	100.34	26.222	-1.940	.057
	Choice	32	113.63	28.495		
TTR	Imposed	32	.509	.0605	4.048	.000
	Choice	32	.449	.0580		
LV	Imposed	32	.635	.0755	2.675	.010
	Choice	32	.585	.0767		

* Independent samples t-test was conducted ($p<.05$).

The Lexical Density refers to “the ratio of the number of lexical words to the total number of words in a text” (Lu, 2012). As presented in Table 1, there was no statistically significant difference between imposed topic condition and choice-given context (t= 1.504; p=.138). However, all the measures of Lexical Sophistication, ″the proportion of relatively unusual or advanced words in the learner’s text” (Read, 2000, p. 203), were identified to be statistically meaningful: LS1 (t= 9.609; p= .000), LS2 (t=3.597; p=.001); VS1 (t=5.064; p=.000); VS2 (t= 3.431; p=.001); and CVS1 (t= 3.833; p=.000) at the .05 significance level (p<.05). This suggests that learners were able to use more sophisticated vocabularies in the topic choice condition. In other words, they could use more rare words, which were beyond the “2000” word profile list (Laufer and Nation, 1995), when allowed to choose topics. The NDW, the number of different words per essay, showed non-significant result, but the mean score in the choice condition was higher than in the writing task with only one topic. The TTR score was statistically significant in the mean difference between two different writing conditions (t= 4.048; p=.000). This implies that the learners could use more diverse type of vocabularies when they were writing several topic choices. It is possible to conjecture that allowing students to write with more topic choices enabled them to have more opportunities to select a topic of their own interest or a topic of more familiarity to them, which in turn, might have helped them to retrieve more vocabularies from their linguistic knowledge resources. Another significant difference was found in Lexical Variation, which means the diversity in the learners’ use of words and one of the sub-measures under the larger category of Lexical Variation (LV) with t value 2.675 and .010 in the p value (p<.05). Therefore, it can be mentioned that the range of vocabulary use became significantly wider in the learners’ writing with more topic choices.

2. Vocabulary Range t-Test Results

To further investigate the learners’ use of vocabulary range and frequency, current study also examined the range of vocabulary in their writings of both imposed topic and choice of topic condition using Range 32 program, a web-based vocabulary range and frequency program, was used. The range of vocabulary has been specified in various standardized assessments such as Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB), as one important index to assess the test-taker’s language ability (Lu, 2012). The characteristics of vocabulary include 1) the total number of tokens, types, and families used in each essay, 2) the number of tokens, types, and families included in the General Service List (GSL), 3) the number of tokens, types, and families included in the Academic Word List (AWL), and 4) the number of tokens and types not included in the

lists. The GSL refers to approximately a 2,000- word list for most frequently used general words by L1 language users. Knowing this is important since if an L2 learner knows most of GSL, it means he or she can cover about 90-95% of colloquial language and about 80-85 % of word range in written language. Therefore, it is a good indicator for an EFL learner's range of vocabulary knowledge. AWL, developed by Coxhead (2000), is a list of very frequently used words for academic purposes, except for the 2,000 words in GSL.

As seen in Table 2, there were significant differences in the total number of tokens (t=-3.434, p=.001) and types (t=-2.090, p=.041) at the level of significance .05. Also, the number of tokens included in GSL was shown to be statistically significant between the two writing conditions (t=-3.121, p=.003). Compared to the topic imposed condition, all the mean values of the topic choice were found to be higher. That is, on average learners use wider varieties of vocabulary in writing when they are allowed to choose the topic. Even though the results have shown that there was no significant difference in terms of the number of tokens, types, and families in the AWL, the mean values of all the factors considering the AWL were higher in the condition of topic choice than the other. Therefore, vocabulary used by learners or test takers can be affected by the condition in writing, and there may be more possibilities to reduce learners' cognitive burdens (Park, 2011; Winfield and Barnes-Felfeli, 1982; Zamel, 1983) in writing by providing the opportunity to choose the topic in writing.

TABLE 2

The Differences in Vocabulary Range

Measure		Topic	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Total	Tokens	Imposed	32	200.250	62.948	-3.434	.001
		Choice	32	256.062	67.026		
	Type	Imposed	32	109.562	29.086	-2.090	.041
		Choice	32	125.500	31.869		
	Family	Imposed	32	87.750	21.406	-1.561	.124
		Choice	32	97.531	28.247		
GSL	Tokens	Imposed	32	179.500	56.314	-3.121	.003
		Choice	32	230.218	72.677		
	Type	Imposed	32	94.250	24.358	-1.774	.081
		Choice	32	107.156	33.159		

	Family	Imposed	32	82.125	20.357	-1.595	.116
		Choice	32	91.500	26.287		
AWL	Tokens	Imposed	32	7.781	4.810	-.752	.455
		Choice	32	8.906	6.957		
	Type	Imposed	32	6.281	3.537	-.167	.868
		Choice	32	6.437	3.953		
	Family	Imposed	32	5.531	2.951	-.558	.579
		Choice	32	6.000	3.724		
Not in the List	Tokens	Imposed	32	13.000	7.770	-.605	.547
		Choice	32	16.937	35.965		
	Type	Imposed	32	9.187	4.980	-.759	.450
		Choice	32	12.062	20.826		

* Independent samples t-test was administered ($p<.05$).

3. Syntactic Complexity

In order to have a closer look at the differences of syntactic complexity in Korean EFL learners' writing depending on the way of presenting the topics, 11 syntactic complexity measures were calculated and analyzed with the L2 Syntactic Complexity Analyzer. The 11 syntactic complexity measures 1) Clauses per sentence (C/S), 2) Clauses per T-unit (C/T), 3) Complex T-units per T-unit (CT/T), 4) Dependent clauses per clause (DC/C), 5) Dependent clauses per T-unit (DC/T), 6) Coordinate phrases per clause (CP/C), 7) Coordinate phrases per T-unit (CP/T), 8) T-units per sentence (T/S), 9) Verb phrases per T-unit (VP/C), 10) Complex nominals per clause (CN/C): number of complex nominals divided by number of clauses, and 11) Complex nominals per T-unit (CN/T). Although in Lu's (2010) category of measures, Mean Length of Sentences (MLS), Mean Length of T-unit (MLT), and Mean Length of Clause (MLC) were included among 14 syntactic complexity categories, these three measured were excluded from the analysis since these three categories have also been used to estimate fluency (Lu, 2012; Wolfe-Quintero et al., 1998). They were used to examine the fluency in this study.

Table 3 presents the results of the syntactic complexity conducted through an independent samples t-test of 11 measures between the two writing conditions, no choice of topic and choice of topic.

TABLE 3

The Mean Differences in Syntactic Complexity

Measure	Topic	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	*T*	Sig. (2-tailed)
C/S	Imposed	32	1.753	.417	.035	.972
	Choice	32	1.749	.420		
VP/T	Imposed	32	2.073	.389	-.060	.952
	Choice	32	2.079	.386		
C/T	Imposed	32	1.612	.322	.046	.963
	Choice	32	1.609	.324		
DC/C	Imposed	32	.356	.129	.022	.982
	Choice	32	.355	.129		
DC/T	Imposed	32	.613	.323	.028	.978
	Choice	32	.610	.324		
T/S	Imposed	32	1.083	.091	.000	1.000
	Choice	32	1.083	.091		
CT/T	Imposed	32	.467	.205	.101	.920
	Choice	32	.461	.206		
CP/T	Imposed	32	.202	.138	-.046	.964
	Choice	32	.203	.138		
CP/C	Imposed	32	.135	.103	-.057	.954
	Choice	32	.136	.103		
CN/T	Imposed	32	1.834	.444	.027	.979
	Choice	32	1.831	.443		
CN/C	Imposed	32	1.155	.260	-.022	.982
	Choice	32	1.157	.261		

* Independent samples t-test was conducted ($p<.05$).

The results in the mean values of 11 syntactic complexity measures did not show the differences between the two conditions to be statistically significant. It means there was no significant improvement when students were given topic choices in the syntactic complexity. This may be because L2 syntactic complexity is more likely to be relevant to learners' proficiency levels rather than the other factors such as the condition of topic presented in writing. In other words, the choice of topic does not have an impact on the syntactic complexity detected in the Korean EFL learners' writing.

4. Differences in Fluency

Fluency is an index of writing development usually estimated by its length. The variables for testing fluency examined in this study were Total Number of Words (TNW), Mean Length of Sentences (MLS), Mean Length of T-units (MLT), and Mean Length of Clauses (MLC). Although in Lu's study (2010), MLS, MLT, and MLC were also included in the categories of syntactic complexity, these four categories were found to be good indices to estimate fluency (Lu, 2012; Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki, & Kim, 1998).

TABLE 4

The Difference in Fluency

Measure	Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	*T*	Sig. (2-tailed)
TNW	imposed	32	193.250	56.607	-3.438	.001
	choice	32	250.594	75.471		
MLS	imposed	32	14.682	2.643	-1.227	.225
	choice	32	15.542	2.958		
MLT	imposed	32	13.532	1.998	-1.158	.252
	choice	32	14.262	2.952		
MLC	imposed	32	8.563	1.312	-1.562	.123
	choice	32	9.073	1.299		

* Independent samples t-test was conducted ($p<.05$).

As shown in Table 4, the mean difference in the total number of words (TNW) was statistically significant ($t= -3.438$; $p= .001$) at the level of significance .05. However, in the comparison of MLS, MLT, and MLC, there were no significant differences in two conditions. Nevertheless, what should be noted in the results is that the mean differences in these measures were slightly higher in the topic choice condition. Therefore, it can be argued that participants could write longer essays, meaning with higher fluency when they were able to choose the topic from several choices.

V. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER SUGGESTION

The current study was designed to investigate the effect of topic choice on the EFL Korean college students' argumentative essays using a variety of web-based measuring

tools to examine the quality of their writing. The fluency of their writing, vocabulary range, lexical complexity and the syntactic complexity were analyzed to see if there was any difference in the 32 students' essays between when writing the argumentative essay with only one topic and when writing with the four topic selections. In the measurement of fluency of their writing, the results have shown that students' essay length was longer with a more diverse use of word types. In addition, students were also able to use more various types of vocabularies, and more sophisticated level of words when they were given different topic choices in GSL in the range of vocabulary. However, in the syntactic complexity analysis the results showed no significant difference in the comparison.

Giving students a choice is something that many teachers believe helps and encourages students (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000). While providing a choice of topics seems to have a reported positive effect on interest and motivation from test-takers and students, it does not appear to have an effect on the quality of the writing (Flowerday, Schraw & Stevens, 2004; Jennings et al., 1999). In the past studies, the quality of the writing was measured holistically and when considering that holistic marking scales tend to have low inter-rater reliability (Polio, 1997), this study was intended to draw on a more objective, reliable measures such as complexity and fluency and assumed that it could have yielded different results.

The effect of topic choice condition in our investigation shows a moderate degree of statistical significance in certain criteria on students' writing quality. In not showing statistically significant results from all measurement criteria in our experiment, there may be a number of reasons for this. In other words, it could be the limitation in our research. First, it may simply be a chance: the sample size is not nearly large enough to draw any clear conclusions. A similar study which seeks to discover the effect of topic choice on accuracy, complexity and fluency of writing would be assisted by an increased number of participants.

Next, since the participants were working in the same room one another, they may have noticed another participant finish and decide to wrap up their own paper as well, which possibly was influencing their writing time unconsciously. The research did not control this variable during the writing time. The future research needs to design a more careful writing condition to minimize this kind of possibility.

Another possibility is that topic choice had an effect on writing time, specifically lengthening the process: either taking the time to choose the topic or perhaps giving more thought to the topic as they wrote. This implies that if time was an issue for a writing assessment, an imposed topic would actually be more beneficial. A study looking at time spent on writing tasks is also needed: does having topic choice always increase

writing time? This is an important consideration as giving a choice of topics, despite the teachers′ good intentions, may be doing more harm than good under timed conditions. Further research would need to be undertaken to assess whether this effect truly exists or not.

Furthermore, the students' English proficiency level might have influenced, limiting our results. Since most of the participants in our study are advanced in their level, there might have been different results with different levels of students in their proficiency, and thus, research with different subjects with different proficiency level of English is also necessary.

Finally, controlling for topic familiarity was not accounted for in the present study. There are some studies which look at how topics are chosen (Gradwohl & Schumacher, 1989), but further research into why topics are chosen by participants could help give understanding into motivation and task-interest. The future researchers need to clarify what topic needs to be given in the imposed condition and what are to be provided as selections from what criteria.

In the field of language education, it has been constantly discussed whether giving a choice to students is effective for motivating them and improving their performance. From this research, we have found that the choice of topic in writing has a positive effect on Korean EFL learners' writing, in particular in terms of fluency and diversity and sophistication in vocabulary use. In other words, it will be much more helpful for learners of English to be given a choice when they perform a writing task in class or in a test setting. Furthermore, it is suggested that English teachers can uphold students' motivation by providing choices in class activities.

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APPENDIX

Imposed topic **(**Time: 30 mins)

There are movements all over the world to prohibit smoking from buildings such as: restaurants, bars, clubs, offices and all other indoor spaces. People argue second hand smoke is dangerous and that such laws protect public health. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Topic with Choice **(**Time: 30 mins)

1. Children should begin learning a foreign language as early as possible. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Support your position using specific reasons and examples.
2. Modern technology is creating a single world culture. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Support your position using specific reasons and examples.
3. Traveling with a tour guide is the best way to travel. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Support your position using specific reasons and examples.
4. Some people claim that young people are more creative than older people in business or in the workplace. Do you agree or disagree with this?

Examples in : English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Higher Education

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