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**INVESTIGATING AUTONOMY
IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' APPROACHES
TO UNIVERSITY WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

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(MA in TESOL)

This thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Research

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis entitled “Investigating autonomy in international students’ approaches to university writing assignments” is my own work. It has not been submitted for, or as part of, any degree at any other university or institution.

To the best of my knowledge, I declare that this thesis contains no material published or written by another author except where due reference is made.

This thesis was granted approval by Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee on 04 May 2018, reference number: 5201800242, and conducted in accordance with the guidelines stipulated.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'B. Nguyen', with a horizontal line underneath.

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Date: 28th October, 2018

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ABSTRACT

Learner autonomy is believed to be an important construct for both language and content learning. In universities, students are expected to demonstrate a certain level of autonomy to successfully complete their assignments, especially in a new international context of education. This study aimed to: (1) investigate how international EAL students approach a university writing assignment for a specific course; (2) explore the difficulties these students faced when preparing their first major writing assignment; and (3) examine how students exercise learner autonomy while preparing and completing the assignment. Based on these three aims, a qualitative multiple case study was designed. Seven participants selected for this project were international EAL undergraduate students who were studying in their first year at Macquarie University in different majors. Data were collected through a three-stage procedure comprising one questionnaire, one post-submission interview and one post-feedback interview. The findings of this study show that international EAL students followed five main steps: considering the requirement of the essay; searching relevant materials and reading for stimulating main ideas; brainstorming the outline; writing; and revising for the final draft. Good students may have also applied peer correction and teacher correction during the process. The study also indicates that lack of academic language use, the language barrier, cultural differences, and limitation in technology use, were common factors causing challenges for these students. Finally, learner autonomy behaviours exercised by successful students were explored, which leads to a conclusion that there is a correspondence between autonomy behaviours and students' success in writing assignments.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	III
ABSTRACT	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	V
LIST OF TABLES	VIII
LIST OF FIGURES.....	IX
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	X
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY	1
1.2 PURPOSES AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH	2
1.3. ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS	3
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	4
2.1. UNIVERSITY WRITING ASSIGNMENTS.....	4
2.1.1. <i>Definition of writing assignment</i>	4
2.1.2. <i>Process of doing a university writing assignment</i>	5
2.1.3. <i>Students' challenges in doing a university writing assignment in a new educational setting.</i>	6
2.1.4. <i>The role of learner autonomy in doing university writing assignment</i>	7
2.2. LEARNER AUTONOMY	8
2.2.1. <i>Definition of language learner autonomy</i>	8
2.2.2. <i>Autonomous learners</i>	11
2.2.3. <i>Learner autonomy by cultures</i>	12
2.2.4. <i>Learner autonomy behaviours</i>	13
2.3. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON LANGUAGE LEARNER AUTONOMY AND WRITING	14
2.4. CONCLUSION	15
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	17
3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN	17
3.1.1. <i>Methodological approach</i>	17
3.1.2. <i>Research context</i>	18
3.1.3. <i>Research procedure</i>	18
3.2. DATA COLLECTION	20
3.2.1. <i>Participant recruitment</i>	20
3.2.2. <i>Participant descriptions</i>	21
3.2.3. <i>Instruments</i>	23
3.2.3.1. Questionnaires	23
3.2.3.2. Post-submission interview	23
3.2.3.3. Post-feedback interview.....	24
3.3. DATA ANALYSIS	24
3.3.1. <i>Questionnaire analysis</i>	24
3.3.2. <i>Interview analysis</i>	24
3.3.2.1 Preparation phase	25
3.3.2.2 Organization phase.....	25

Table 3.4 Data analysis mapped on to the research questions.....	31
3.3.2.3 Reporting findings	32
3.4. SUMMARY	33
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS.....	34
4.1. DESCRIPTIVE FINDINGS FOR EACH CASE.....	34
4.1.1. <i>Ariel</i>	34
4.1.1.1 The writing process that participant used to approach the university writing assignment.	34
4.1.1.2. Challenges faced by participant during the writing process, and the solutions	35
4.1.1.3. Assignment result and learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process.....	36
4.1.2. <i>Elsa</i>	37
4.1.2.1. The writing process that participant used to approach the university writing assignment.	37
4.1.2.2. Challenges faced by participant during the writing process and the solutions.	38
4.1.2.3. Assignment result and learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process.....	39
4.1.3. <i>Anna</i>	40
4.1.3.1. The writing process that participant used to approach the university writing assignment.	40
4.1.3.2. Challenges faced by participant during the writing process and the solutions.	41
4.1.3.3. Assignment result and learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process.....	42
4.1.4. <i>Cinderella</i>	43
4.1.4.1. The writing process that participant used to approach the university writing assignment.	43
4.1.4.2. Challenges faced by participant during the writing process and the solutions.	44
4.1.4.3. Assignment result and learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process.....	44
4.1.5. <i>Rapunzel</i>	45
4.1.5.1. The writing process that participant used to approach the university writing assignment.	45
4.1.5.2. Challenges faced by participant during the writing process and the solutions.	46
4.1.5.3. Assignment result and learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process.....	47
4.1.6. <i>Carol</i>	48
4.1.6.1. The writing process that participant used to approach the university writing assignment.	48
4.1.6.2. Challenges faced by participant during the writing process and the solutions.	49
4.1.6.3. Assignment result and learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process.....	50
4.1.7. <i>Pinocchio</i>	51
4.1.7.1. The writing process that participant used to approach the university writing assignment.	51
4.1.7.2. Challenges faced by participant during the writing process and the solutions.	52
4.1.7.3. Assignment result and learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process.....	53
4.2. CROSS-CASE COMPARISON.....	54
4.2.1. <i>The writing process that international EAL first-year students used to approach the university writing assignment</i>	54
4.2.2. <i>Challenges faced by international EAL students during the writing process and the solutions.</i>	56
4.2.3. <i>Impact of learner autonomy behaviours on students' study success</i>	58
4.3. CONCLUSION	62
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	63
5.1. DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY RESULTS.	63
5.1.1. <i>How do international EAL first-year students approach a writing university assignment?</i>	63
5.1.2. <i>What challenges do these students have to overcome in a new education setting?</i>	65
5.1.3. <i>What impact do different autonomous behaviors have on students' success?</i>	65
5.2. CONTRIBUTIONS.....	66
5.3. LIMITATIONS.....	66
5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	67
REFERENCES.....	68

APPENDICES..... 74

APPENDIX 1 74

APPENDIX 2 77

APPENDIX 3 78

APPENDIX 4 79

APPENDIX 5 82

APPENDIX 6 84

APPENDIX 7 86

APPENDIX 8 87

APPENDIX 9 89

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 3.1: RESEARCH PROCEDURE	20
TABLE 3.2. PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTION.....	22
TABLE 3.3. STEPS OF DATA ANALYSIS.....	31
TABLE 3.4. FINDING REPORT STRUCTURE.....	33
TABLE 4.1. ASSIGNMENT RESULTS	58
TABLE 4.2. PARTICIPANTS' LEARNER AUTONOMY BEHAVIOURS DURING THE WRITING PROCESS.	59

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 2.1: WHAT IS A “CAPACITY”?	10
FIGURE 2.2: CONTROLLING WHAT?	10
FIGURE 3.1. THE STRUCTURE OF THEMATIC NETWORK	26
FIGURE 5.1. WRITING PROCESS OF APPROACHING UNIVERSITY WRITING ASSIGNMENT	64

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA	: The American Psychological Association
EAL	: English as an Additional Language
EFL	: English as a Foreign Language
ESL	: English as a Second Language
EMI	: English as medium of instruction
L1	: First Language
L2	: Second Language
LA	: Learner autonomy
MQ	: Macquarie University
PICF	: Participant information consent form

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

In recent years, the number of international students who study abroad has dramatically increased, with the top three destinations being the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia (Andrade, 2006). Besides the achievement gained from the advanced education system, international students have to encounter a variety of problems and challenges during their overseas study. In fact, a majority of research conducted on this issue has explored different types of obstacles that overseas students face in foreign countries. Wenhua and Zhe (2013) identify five major problems, comprising personal psychological issues, academic issues, sociocultural issues, general living issues, and language proficiency, that international students face when studying in a foreign country. Moreover, many university students, especially international students in a new setting, find it challenging to complete writing assignments. Many studies reveal that undergraduate and graduate students confront obstacles while writing tasks that involve content classes (Braine, 2002; Braxley, 2005). For instance, Braxley (2005) confirms that international students lack abilities to familiarize themselves with conventions of academic writing. Chou (2011) also claims that students encounter many obstacles in the process of writing assignments, due to the fact that these learners might be from different cultural backgrounds where teachers play a central role in the teaching and learning process.

In addition, a considerable number of studies on learner autonomy (LA) show that, the more autonomous learners are, the higher results they obtain. Firstly, Risenberg and Zimmerman (1992) explored whether students achieved high academic scores when they had a high degree of LA and vice versa. Similarly, Dam (2000) shows that language learners and users become more proficient when they are autonomous. Meanwhile, Dafei's (2007) study reveal that the positive relationship between LA and English proficiency exists. In addition, Smith (2008) agrees that effective and independent learners are in high awareness of autonomy. Moreover, Benson (2011) states that a learner-centered method is paid much attention because independent learners can easily access multimedia sources beyond the

classroom. From these studies, it can be concluded that LA plays a key role in the learning process.

Finally, the researcher for the present study has been an English lecturer teaching at a university in a non-English-speaking country. One of her duties is being responsible for writing skills teaching and English teaching methodology training programs for English major undergraduate students who will become English teachers at primary or secondary schools after graduation. Therefore, with the above theoretical considerations, the researcher has an interest in an investigation on how undergraduate students from non-English speaking countries conduct a writing assignment in a university where English is used as the first language, in order to explore what challenges these students may face when doing writing assignments there and the ways in which they solve these problems. Another issue of concern is whether LA plays a role in assisting these students to reach success in their writing process. As a result, the present study is conducted from an expectation that the explored findings may assist students from non-English-speaking countries to receive better and more effective language teaching and training to be able to use English fluently in the globalized world of today.

1.2 Purposes and significance of the research

Basing on the rationale of carrying out the present study mentioned in Section 1.1, the research aims to reach three goals:

first, the study aims to examine how international EAL (English as an additional language) first-year undergraduate students approach a writing university assignment in a new education setting;

second, it was purposely conducted to explore these students' challenges faced during their process of doing a writing assignment in a new learning environment;

third, it was carried out to investigate what different LA behaviours impact these students' success in their university writing assignment.

The findings from the present study could provide concrete understanding on the writing process applied by non-native international undergraduate students and on struggles

occurring when they are doing their writing assignment. Another outcome from the study is determining the categories of LA behaviours exercised by successful students which may explain the key role of LA in the language learning process, especially in writing skill enhancement.

1.3. Organization of the thesis

The thesis is organized into five chapters: (1) Introduction, (2) Literature Review, (3) Research Methodology, (4) Results, and (5) Discussion and Conclusion.

Chapter One indicates the background to the study. The research aims are also introduced, and the organization of the research is outlined in the last section of the chapter.

Chapter Two presents an extensive review of the literature in the areas of university writing assignment, international students' challenges when studying abroad, and LA in language learning, especially in writing skills enhancement.

Chapter Three describes the research method used in the study, consisting of methodological approach, research context, and research procedure. A detailed description of the instruments for the data collection, followed by an explanation of how the data are analyzed, are also included in this chapter.

Chapter Four describes the findings explored from the data collected in answering the three research questions, to indicate whether the study achieves the three research purposes.

Chapter Five discusses the major findings of the study in relation to the reviewed points and the research questions. It also discusses the contributions of the study, the limitations of the research, and recommendations for future research, and well as presenting the thesis conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins in Section 2.1 which a focus on university writing assignments, including relevant sub-headings on: the definition of writing assignment; process and challenges of doing a university writing assignment; and role of LA in doing a writing assignments. Section 2.2 of the chapter presents the theoretical framework of LA which relates to some concepts of LA, including: the definition of LA; autonomous learners; history of LA; LA by cultures; LA and language learner; and LA behaviors. Section 2.3 mentions some relevant studies on LA and language learning. The chapter ends with the research gap and research questions of the present study.

2.1. University writing assignments

2.1.1. Definition of writing assignment

Written assignments are one type of formative assessment which is less formal than traditional testing (Alderson & Banerjee, 2001). These involve, over a period of time, requiring students to integrate input from a variety of written sources, and plan their ideas, draft, edit, revise and redraft before submitting the assignments. This type of assessment is effective not only for native students' development in their first language writing (Hamp – Lyons & Condon, 1993), but also for EAL students in their foreign language writing assessment (Hamp-Lyons, 1996).

Most undergraduate programs designed by both domestic and international universities show that the most common written task is a persuasive argument essay, followed by reports, reflections, and portfolios. The context of this study is not an exception. The kind of language expected in these written assignments is academic writing. Besides the need for cohesion and clarification of the ideas, advanced proficiency in word choice and coherence in structure, referencing the works of other authors is particularly important in academic persuasion texts (Liardét & Black, 2016). Moreover, students at university are also required to develop knowledge in their major, their ability in data analysis, and the ability to involve their own voice in analyzing materials when composing the writing assignment, to demonstrate their knowledge at the field (Murray, 1972, p.9). To prepare such assignments, students follow a

variety of processes to plan their writing, organize text structure, and refine their language expression.

2.1.2. Process of doing a university writing assignment

Flower and Hayes (1981) describe the process of writing as “a set of distinctive thinking process which writers organize during the act of composing. These processes are highly hierarchical and embedded in organization including planning, retrieving information from long-term memory, composing and revising” (p. 366). Similarly, Seow (2002, p.325) also defines the writing process as “a private activity that may be broadly seen as comprising four main stages: planning, drafting, revising and editing”. He also argues that, for learners of good writing, these stages are non-linear during the process. Therefore, the best way to practice the writing process is to study a good writer in action (Hyland, 2011, p. 18). Previously, Stallard (1974, p. 210) identified eight behaviors of good students while writing: planning, revision, rate of writing, audience awareness, consideration of purpose, stylistic concerns, attitudes towards writing, and the practice of stopping to read at intervals. These behaviors are demonstrated randomly during the process of pre, during and after the completion of the first draft.

Although these stages are basically the same when students compose a writing assignment, there are two concepts that are strongly relevant to the writing learning process of language learners. These are “learning to write”, which is defined as “the manner in which second and foreign users learn to express themselves in writing”, and “writing to learn”, which is considered as “the way in which the engagement with second language (L2) writing tasks and activities can contribute to development in areas other than writing itself” (Manchón, 2011, p. 3). These two phrases strongly relate to learners’ purposes for studying, stages of the learning process, and the context where the studying happens (Graves & White, 2016, p.297). For English as first language (L1) learners, when learning to write in either the L1 or an additional language, instructions focus on grammar, spelling, mechanics and the like. Learners who use English as an additional language, in fact, spend much more time learning how to write to be able to express their ideas in English. Therefore, in most universities in EFL countries, their undergraduate curricula illustrate that their undergraduate language students are required to focus more on learning how to write in English rather than writing to demonstrate knowledge

on a subject. However, when these students have already mastered English writing skills, normally in their third or fourth academic years of the program, they are required to do written assignments for some courses where they are required to use their writing skills to demonstrate their discipline knowledge via the writing assignments, because writing is considered “a tool for language learning” (Manchón, 2011, p.61). In addition, for learners who study their majors in English as medium of instruction (EMI) contexts (i.e. EMI universities; EMI countries), the English writing skills which they learnt from language classes is considered as an instruments for the learning of “disciplinary subject-matter” in the content areas, mainly in “second” instructional settings (Hirvela, Hyland & Manchón, 2016, p. 45).

In summary, undergraduate students’ writing process is very complicated, with many variations in practice depending on discipline, level of study, and educational setting (Nesi & Gardner, 2006). The present study focuses on the writing process of international EAL students, who have just started their study in an EMI country.

2.1.3. Students’ challenges in doing a university writing assignment in a new educational setting.

Firstly, many international students experience cultural and linguistic challenges different to those of domestic students. Krause (2001, p. 150) indicates that it is not easy to learn a foreign language and it is more difficult to use that language to learn in a new studying context where “the essay is a common form of assessment at university”. Hence, international students may have additional challenges in writing their assignments. They often have trouble with academic language in English when learning the content and conceptual structures of various graduate level disciplines (Lin & Yi, 1997). Moreover, differences in writing style, logical thinking, and appropriate formulating of thought into writing structures, may become the most challenging aspects of academic writing for international students.

Secondly, language issues have been the major area of most challenges facing international students. Students have acknowledged that their lack of English language proficiency in the classroom, which is exacerbated by cultural barriers, is a principal source of learning difficulties (Wong, 2004). For more evidence, Robertson et al. (2000) found that the students manifesting a lack of confidence with English have difficulties in understanding lecturers’ spoken English, and feel unhappy with their own oral performance. In addition,

research on Australian universities by Bretag et al. (2002) explored that overseas students from a non-English speaking background were unable to contribute effectively, as required, in tutorial discussion; and that this was due to poor grammar. Their written works were often hard to read and to assess. The study concludes that many international students had difficulties with writing skills whereas most courses at university required students to do writing assignments for assessment.

In brief, studies have explore kinds of challenges normally faced by international students. The present study would also investigate in detail how international EAL students solve their own problems appeared during a specific writing assignment process.

2.1.4. The role of learner autonomy in doing university writing assignment

Over the past few decades, autonomous learning has been considered crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it assists students to become more effective and independent (Smith, 2008). Secondly, language education is changing toward a learner-centered approach (Benson, 2011), especially when there is easy access to multimedia resources to help learners learn independently outside the classroom. Thirdly, autonomy is considered a fundamental human need that can enhance learners' intrinsic motivation (Little, 2007). In addition, Ryan and Deci (2000a) consider that, to foster intrinsic motivation, the basic needs to feel related, competent and autonomous must be supported.

It is a fact that writing is a skill needing more practice beyond the classroom. This requires language learners to have a high level of autonomy. Moreover, a writing assignment is a process of studying that happens outside the classroom and requires learners to be autonomous to achieve a good result. They need to be able to “monitor the performance process because not only the end-product is important, but also the process by which it was obtained” (Fahimi & Rahimi, 2015: 731). For example, before writing students have to gather ideas and develop a writing plan; during writing they have to monitor the writing process, revise and use feedback to improve their writing; after writing, they reflect on their performance and perhaps set goals for further improvement.

In conclusion, the above crucial benefits of LA in learning process, especially in writing skill encourage an investigation on how language learners exercise their LA behaviours in the

writing process and whether these LA behaviours plays important role in students' writing success when studying overseas.

2.2. Learner autonomy

2.2.1. Definition of language learner autonomy

In language learning, LA is evaluated to be a problematic and slippery concept, because it is widely confused with self-instruction and notoriously difficult to define precisely (Little, 2003, p1). In fact, this term has had a variety of definitions from different researchers over the past three decades.

Holec (1981, p3) originally defines learner autonomy as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning”. In his argument, this ability is not in-born or innate but is formed by a systematic or deliberate learning process in which an autonomous learner will have the responsibility for all decisions concerning all aspects of learning including determining the objectives; defining the contents and progressions; selecting methods and techniques to be used; monitoring the procedure of acquisition; and properly speaking and evaluating what has been acquired. This definition strongly features the “freedom” in learning. It means that with or without teachers’ help, these types of learners are still good in their study. Later, the concepts of individualisation (Allwright, 1988), learning strategies (Wenden, 1991a), learner training (Dickinson, 1992), independence and interdependence (Little, 1991) entered the field of LA. This explains the variety of terms used by different researchers to define the concept.

In the late 20th century and early 21st century, the focus on LA was accelerated by several landmark studies. Gremmo and Riley (1995) explored that there is a very fast development of interest in LA which characterizes the 1990s and 2000s. For example, Little (1991) argued that autonomy “can take numerous different forms and manifest itself in very different ways” (p.4). He strongly argued that LA does not mean learning without a teacher; by contrast, it needs the combination of collaboration and interdependence - learners need to work with their peers and with teachers’ help. Then, he conceptualized autonomy as “a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action” (Little, 1991, p.4), and since then, LA has been understood as “the responsibility for their own learning”. While Holec (1981) emphasized what an autonomous learner can do during the learning process,

Little (1991) focused on how to recognize LA within a learner via the way they learn and how they use what they have learned in wider contexts.

Benson (2007, p.21) has a different perspective on learner autonomy, when he claims that autonomy in learning means that learners take control over their learning in classrooms, and that autonomy in language learning is where learners take more control over the purposes for which they learn languages and the ways in which they learn them. In summary, to him, LA is defined as “a capacity to control one’s own learning” (Benson, 2011, p.58). However, he then found a problem in his own definition, in that it does not explain in detail what autonomy involves in learning. This is the reason why Benson (2013, pp. 3-5) forms a very clear conception of learner autonomy, via clarifying the two concepts, “capacity” and “control”.

As can be seen in Figure 2.1, the three main components of capacity to control learning are ability, desire and freedom; among which: ability refers to study skills and knowledge of the target language; desire refers to the wish of learning a language; and freedom here represents the degree to which learners are permitted to control their learning. Figure 2.1 shows that autonomy can be most developed when the three circles (ability, desire, and freedom) are overlapped. Similarly, in Figure 2.2, the overlapped part of the three circles, which represent learning management, cognitive processing, and the learning content, is the space where autonomy develops most, when learners can control the three crucial dimensions of learning process. This description helps LA to be more visible. However, he then concludes that LA can also be described as learners’ capacity to take charge of, responsibility for, or control over, their own learning, because “...different definitions of autonomy often turn out to be different descriptions of autonomy, in which particular ways of being autonomous take over the definition of broader concept” (2013, p. 3). Therefore, it is significant to ensure a strong found additional definition Benson. In brief, The conceptualisation presented in Figures 2.1 and 2.2, provides a deep understanding of learner autonomy.

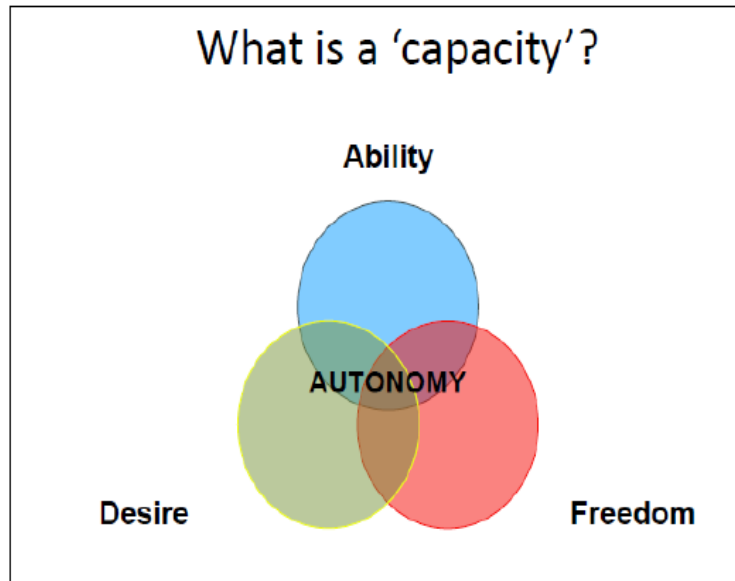


Figure 2.1: What is a “capacity”?

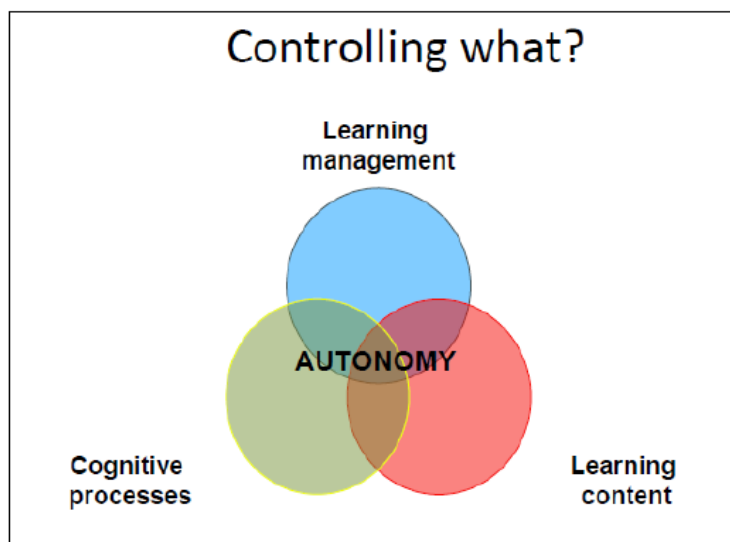


Figure 2.2: Controlling what?

Today, it is believed that learners' awareness of their learning strategies and the required strategies for students to develop autonomy have become central in helping them to take greater control over their own learning. However, individuals' differences in learning habits, interests, needs, and motivation, which generate varying degrees of independence, are issues of concern in learners' autonomy (Blidi, 2017, p.3).

In the present study, learner autonomy is defined as learners' ability to control over their own process of approaching their university writing assignment so that they could achieve good result for the assignment.

2.2.2. Autonomous learners

Theoretically, autonomous learners are described differently by different researchers. Little (1991, p.4) proposed that autonomous learners not only demonstrate learner autonomy proficiency for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action, but also know how to transfer what has been learned to broader contexts. Littlewood (1996, p.428) further defines autonomous learners as “those who have an independent capacity to make and carry out the choices which govern his or her actions”. This capacity depends on two main components: ability and willingness. Furthermore, *ability* depends on the knowledge with which learners can independently make a good decision and the essential skills by which learners can conduct what has been decided; while *willingness* depends on learners' possessing both motivation and confidence to take responsibility for the choices required. These two components should be combined to form an autonomous learner, because it is believed that, in some circumstances, a learner may have the ability to make independent choices but does not have willingness to do. Conversely, a person may have determination to carry out independent choices, but he cannot do because of his limited ability (Littlewood, 1996, p.428).

Since the relationship between autonomy and language learning technologies was broadly mentioned in the field of learner autonomy, autonomous learners have had added one more aspect, as “independent language users capable of online problem solving and decision making” (Illes, 2012, p.509). This perception allows learners to have control over the learning process, which involves finding materials, reading references, or searching a problem in grammar or lexis, for completing a verbal or written assignment, depending on each learners' particular purpose (Illes, 2012).

Oxford (2015) introduces two more perspectives on autonomous learners. On the one hand, in the psychological perspective, autonomous learners are expected to be self-regulating, emotionally intelligent, resilient, psychologically engaged, self-determined, existentially free, and effective. On the other hand, the sociocultural perspective on autonomous learners involves

learners who are “mediated, cognitively apprenticed, socioculturally strategic, invested and resistant, sociopolitically free, and self-efficacious” (Oxford, 2015, p.63).

In this study, students are considered to be autonomous learners if they have the capacity to control their writing process for the assignments on any relevant aspects, including capacity for problem solving and decision making (i.e., using technology to search for information on the internet), being self-regulated and self-determined, and undertaking independent actions and critical reflections.

2.2.3. Learner autonomy by cultures

Different definitions of LA in different cultures and countries have been explored in recent years. Benson (2011) indicates that every person has a right to author and control their own life, which seems to be more respective in Western than in non-Western cultures. He also claims that practicing the concept of autonomy, which has grown up in European institutions, may be inappropriate in other places in the world. In fact, in those countries where traditions of independence, or self-assessment, are not paid much attention, students rarely have a right to decide much in their learning; as such, a definition of LA here must be narrowed according to the culture. For example, in Hong Kong, autonomy is operationally defined as “a construct comprising three components: sense of responsibility, engagement in learning activities, and perceived ability” (Liu, 2015, p.1165). Furthermore, in some remote regions in Cambodia, the autonomous level of the students is found to be “zero”, because there is no freedom for students to choose what they want to learn. Every activity in class follows the teachers’ lead (Jones, 1995, p.230). In China, for example, students are often uncomfortable with the construct of LA (Ho & Crookall, 1995). Similarly, studies have explored Vietnamese students’ demonstrated low levels of LA because of the curriculum of educational programs in Vietnam in which LA behaviours are created from the learners’ effort made by regular activities directed by the teachers; not from the effort made by the direction of regular activities and the activities themselves (Blidi, 2017).

From what has been discussed, it is concluded that learners should be provided good conditions to develop their autonomy so that they can achieve their studying success. Therefore, we need more research on how EAL students exercise their LA behaviours when they study in a university where learner autonomy is always encouraged.

2.2.4. Learner autonomy behaviours

Due to the important role of LA in language learning, language teachers are encouraged to provide good conditions for students to enhance their LA. However, whether it is possible to measure students' autonomy or how to know that one student is more autonomous than another. Benson (2011) argues that it is quite difficult to measure the autonomy of language learners; however, he indicates that, if we can define or describe what autonomy is, there should be a way to measure it. Therefore, if LA is defined as learners' ability in controlling their learning, it can be understood that LA behaviours are the level of learning control that students exercise during the learning process, including control of learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content (Benson, 2011).

Benson (2011) indicates that control over learning management consists of learners' behaviours in managing their planning, organization and evaluation of their learning, which strongly relate to learners' self-direction, learning strategies and autonomous characteristics. According to Cotterall (1995, p.196), LA behaviors can be recognized by a "particular set of beliefs" of learners regarding: (1) role of the teacher, (2) role of feedback, (3) learner independence, (4) learner confidence in their study ability, (5) experience of language learning, and (6) approach to studying. These factors are expected to be used to assess learners' readiness for autonomy. On the other hand, Wenden (1991) indicates that the two crucial attitudes towards LA are learners' willingness to take on responsibility and the confidence in their ability as learners. She believes that the autonomous learner is the one who finds that she is the only person responsible for her own learning success and always believes in her ability to learn and manage her learning. In addition, autonomous learners are also identified via language learners' social and affective strategies, which are demonstrated in the way learners deal with study troubles by asking questions for the teacher's help or clarification, cooperating with friends to solve problems, as well as controlling their anxiety, and encouraging themselves to achieve their study goal (Oxford, 1990).

In summary, these LA behaviours contributed to a variety of students' performances in learning process which will be used to examine the EAL students' level of LA behaviours during their writing process in the present study.

2.3. Previous studies on language learner autonomy and writing

A variety of studies have been conducted on LA and language learning with an expectation of increasing autonomy behaviours of language learners. However, there are only some certain kinds of study are particularly relevant to the present research topic.

First, in the EFL context, Nguyen (2008) conducted a study to explore the relationship between LA and language learning proficiency in the Vietnamese context. Two Likert-scale questionnaires were delivered to 177 participants who were first, second, third and fourth year English-majored students at a university in Vietnam. Their English proficiency was also obtained. The results show that LA appears to be linked positively to language proficiency. High achievers are more likely to be autonomous learners. The study suggests that LA had strong effects on the improvement of language proficiency; however, this research focussed on language proficiency in general, not on any specific skills in English.

Relating to writing skills, Vickers and Ene (2006) explored advanced ESL (English as a second language) learners' ability to make improvements in grammatical accuracy by autonomously noticing and correcting their own grammatical errors via comparing their own writing papers to a given text written by a native speaker. Results suggest that such a comparison task is beneficial in allowing learners to make gains in grammatical accuracy. Moreover, Chiu (2012) explored strategies for supporting independent learning at university in the Hong Kong context. The study particularly focuses on reading and writing skills development. Students were offered to participate a one-on-one or small-group conference with teachers in order to support their independent learning skills. They were allowed to choose their time slots and teachers to work with and request the type of help in various areas especially in reading and writing skills. The findings show that the development of good writing skills and extensive reading habits require self-directed learning efforts. However, they also needed the initial scaffolding from the teacher in using structures or materials, because "scaffolding strategies used by the teacher can also serve as models for students to monitor their own learning." (Chiu, 2012, p.226) As a result, without teachers' support, students may not be able to develop their writing and reading skills with their individual learning effort.

In addition, in an international study context which requires EAL learners to be more autonomous in studying, Krause (2001) has explored ways in which students experience the writing process via their reflections on doing a basic writing assignment of a specific course. 46 international first-year students were surveyed for their experiences in doing their first major writing assignment, and were interviewed in focus groups to find out their reflections on the writing process they applied for their assignment. The study found some challenges these students faced while doing the writing assignments relating to academic requirements (i.e. referencing, plagiarism, organizing and presenting information, etc.) and the effectiveness of interactions with tutors, teachers, friends for better results on the writing assignment. The study did not mention the role of LA shown during the writing process, or the impact of LA on the students' success in university writing assignments.

2.4. Conclusion

Building on what have been discussed in the three previous sections (Section 2.1, 2.2, 2.3), two crucial issues can be concluded. First, EAL students normally have difficulties in L2 writing although they have been taught and practiced writing skills quite a lot in their language classes. Second, in EAL countries, language learners do not have high level of LA behaviours because of limited environment for LA to be developed whereas LA was believed to play significant role in language learning, especially writing process. These theoretical issues comes to an interest in conducting a study focusing on investigating how international EAL students approach their university writing assignment when studying in a new education setting; which challenges they may have during the writing assignments; what they should do to overcome these difficulties; and whether they can show or develop LA in this new studying environment. As a result, in this present study, the three following research questions were designed to explore the findings for these inquiries

Research question 1: How do international EAL first-year students approach a university writing assignment? (i.e. What process do they follow?)

Research question 2: What challenges do these students have to overcome in a new education setting?

Research question 3: What impact do different autonomous behaviours have on students' success?

The research methodology to answer these questions will be described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, how the study was conducted will be outlined. The chapter will present the research design including methodological approach, research context and research procedure (3.1), the data collection with participants and research instruments (3.2), and the data analysis for exploring the findings (3.3).

3.1. Research design

3.1.1. *Methodological approach*

Qualitative multiple case study was used as the research approach for this study because it allows the researcher to examine several cases which are linked together but are in diverse settings. Each case would be studied to explore their own features such as activities, problems and strengths, which will be synthesized in the multi-case report to provide findings for the inquiry (Stake, 2006).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the processes by which international EAL students approach a university writing assignment for a specific course. This investigation aimed to explore the obstacles these students may face when starting to study in a new setting, when preparing their first major writing assignment. Specifically, this study aimed to examine how students exercise their LA during the time of completing the assignment so that they can achieve their success. Success here is considered as a high score in their writing assignment.

To achieve the expected research aims, the present study was designed as a qualitative multiple case study in which each participant was considered as one case. There are three reasons for the chosen research approach. First, qualitative design was suitable for the aim of this research, which was to explore problems of an issue via empowering individuals to share their own stories relating to the issue which the researcher would like to examine (Creswell, 2013). Second, also according to Creswell (2013, p.45), in qualitative research, data is naturally collected in the field in which the participants experience the issue themselves. The researcher is also considered as a key instrument through “examining documents, interviewing participants” based on the researcher’s own designed open-ended questions. These characteristics strongly suit the present study’s purpose which aims to investigate the process

and challenges of each participant's preparation of their university writing assignments for their own courses. Finally, since each participant had a different background and different study context (course and writing assignment's requirement), the researcher explored different writing process, different writing obstacles, or different ways of exercising autonomy, although each case study followed the same data collection procedure. In brief, qualitative multiple case study was used as a research approach for this study because it satisfied both the purpose of the study and the way in which to conduct the research in order to achieve the research aims.

3.1.2. Research context

The present study was conducted at Macquarie University (MQ), in Australia, located in the northwestern suburbs of Sydney city. At present, MQ has a variety of majors for both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees which adapt for learners' needs, especially international students. Depending on specific characteristics of each major, applicants will have different eligibility requirements. In addition, for all international students who come from non-English speaking countries, the English proficiency requirement is not lower than Band 6.5 in IELTS score or equivalent.

An academic school year at MQ includes two semesters which normally lasts 15 weeks each including 13 weeks for lecture attendance and two weeks for the midterm break. Undergraduates normally attend one lecture and two tutorials per week. They are also required to do both writing or verbal assignments and examinations for the course assessment process. Moreover, MQ uses Turnitin, a web-based plagiarism detection software, to discourage plagiarism in students' writing assignments. This partly encourages students to take more care over their writing products, especially international students who are always not confident in their academic writing.

In brief, the present research was conducted in a context where there is a large cohort of international EAL undergraduate students studying different majors, and they are assessed with writing assignment.

3.1.3. Research procedure

The present study was conducted in a four-phase procedure.

The first phase was participant recruitment and obtaining students' background information through a 10-item questionnaire. At this stage, the study recruited seven participants who international EAL students for data collection. Each participant was considered as one case of this multi-case study. Stake (2006, p.22) indicates that "the benefits of multiple case study will be limited if fewer than, say, four cases are chosen, or more than 10." Therefore, seven cases should be an ideal number for the interactivity between the cases' situations. To recruit the participants, a study advertisement was designed (see Appendix 2) to deliver the study information to international EAL undergraduate students. The advertisement was put on every noticeboard, and the library where students could easily see the information. The findings from the questionnaire led to the participant selection for the second phase. In fact, there were eight students responded to the questionnaire (seven EAL and one native English-speaking ones). Finally, seven EAL students were chosen. The native English speaker was excluded because this study only focused on the EAL students.

The second phase involved the post-submission interviews with the participants which were conducted after students had handed in a writing assignment of one of their specific courses. Each participant attended a face-to-face interview exploring how they completed the assignment (i.e. drafting, revising, etc.) one-on-one, to gather information on students' use of time, activities during the writing process, and on their experiences of exercising learner autonomy. Participants did not need to bring their assignment to the interview.

The third phase, which involved a post-feedback interview with participants, occurred when the participants received the feedback and score on the assignment from their teacher. This was referred to as the "post-feedback" stage. Similar to the second phase, the participants were interviewed (one-on-one) and asked to reflect on their experiences in preparing the assignment and how these processes prepared them for their final result. They could bring the teacher's feedback to the interview for reference. In this stage, LA is more focused through the way students reflected on what they had been done for the achieved result.

The final phase was data analysis. The questionnaire and interviews were analyzed to examine students' assignment preparation processes and how these autonomous behaviours prepare students for their success.

In summary, the study procedure could briefly be described as in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Research Procedure

Phases		Purposes	Research Instruments
1	Participant recruitment	Recruit 7 participants who are international EAL undergraduate students studying at MQ.	Advertisement
	Participants' background screening.	Select the most suitable participants for the interviews	Questionnaires
2	Post-submission stage	Explore participants' process of approaching a university writing assignment	Interviews
e	Post-feedback stage	Examine participants' reflection on the process of preparing the assignment and the feedback.	Interviews
4	Data analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Questionnaires → used to describe the participants - Interviews → to find the answer for the three research questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Gathering information ➔ NVIVO software

3.2. Data collection

3.2.1. Participant recruitment

As had been designed, the data collection process started as soon as the research project was approved by the University Ethics Committee. One hundred advertisements about the study were delivered to Macquarie students through various channels such as on student noticeboards at lecture buildings, faculties, library, cafeteria, bus stops, and uploaded on Macquarie Research Facebook groups, etc. After two weeks, students started to contact for more

information about the study. A participant information consent form (PICF) (see Appendix 4) and a questionnaire which is used for exploring participants' background (see Appendix 5) were sent to the students who had been recognized as international EAL first-year undergraduate students at MQ. Participants who agreed to participate in the study would return the completed questionnaire and the PICF with their signature as a confirmation of their participation. To compensate their time on participating the study, each participant received an AUD 60 gift card if they completed one questionnaire and two interviews. In addition, they would have chance to reflect the whole writing process to realize good and weak points from which they could improve their study.

Because the study aimed to find participants who were international EAL first-year students having one writing assignment which hadn't been submitted, or had just been submitted but had not yet received the feedback, finally there were seven students who satisfied the participant eligibility joining the study.

3.2.2. Participant descriptions

The seven international participants joining the present study were first-year students in different majors at MQ. They were from 19 to 28 years of age and came from four different non-English-speaking countries, Vietnam, Iran, Maldives, and Colombia. All of them obtained an IELTS score at Band 7.0 or more. The participants' important background information was briefly summarized in Table 3.2 with their names as pseudonyms. Detail descriptions was also presented in Appendix 8 of the project report.

Table 3.2. Participant description

Cases	Countries	Years of age	Home Language	Time studying English	English proficiency	Majors	Semester/ academic year	Study program
Ariel	Vietnam	19	Vietnamese	10 years	IELTS_ 7.0	Marketing	S1/year 1	On Campus - full time
Elsa	Vietnam	20	Vietnamese	13 years	IELTS_7.0	Psychology	S1/ Year 1	On Campus - full time
Anna	Vietnam	21	Vietnamese	14 years	IELTS_7.5	Professional Accounting	S1/ Year 2	Exchange (Year 1 in Vietnam)
Cinderella	Vietnam	19	Vietnamese	>10 years	IELTS_7.5	Professional Accounting	S1/ Year 2	Exchange (Year 1 in Vietnam)
Rapunzel	Madives	21	Dhivehi	>10 years	Cambridge O'level	Professional Accounting	S2/ Year 1	On Campus-full time
Carol	Iran	28	Farsi (Persian)	2 years	IELTS_7.0	Medical Science	S2/ Year 1	On Campus - full time
Pinocchio	Colombia	19	Spanish	2 years	IELTS_7.5	Biology	S1/ Year 3	Exchange (Years 1, 2 in Colombia)

3.2.3. Instruments

3.2.3.1. Questionnaires

Questionnaires can be used for collecting both qualitative and quantitative data in second language research, depending on its designed structures (Mackey & Gass, 2005). In the present study, to find the most appropriate subjects who are at Macquarie University, that is, international EAL undergraduate students, for data collection, a factual questionnaire was designed to collect participants' background information which supports the distinguishing of each case in the study (Dornyei & Taguchi, 2010). Moreover, the data from the questionnaires could provide important figures to distinguish the differences in each participant so that it would be more beneficial for the data analysis of the results (see Table 3.2). The description of the questionnaire was also presented specifically (see Appendix 9).

3.2.3.2. Post-submission interview

Interview types can be employed to “gather data for qualitative research” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p.173); in particular, a semi-structured interview allows researchers to elicit additional data if the answer from the participants was not specific enough (Nunan, 1992, p. 150; Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 173). Although this study instrument may involve “selective recall, self-delusion, perceptual distortions, memory loss from the respondent and subjectivity in the researchers recording and interpreting of the data” (Hall & Rist, 1999, pp. 297-298), multi-interviews also was chosen as the data collection instrument for the present study. The reason was that, besides the data collected via the set of questions, a face-to-face interview also allows the researcher to have more insights into participants' emotions relating to the answers, which could be used to examine the reliability of the data through observation during the interview (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). Moreover, the above caveats could be prevented with some solutions such as being careful in designing the interview questions (the questions should not include some expected clues for the responses; key questions should be placed in the middle of the interviews), or preparing good interview skills such as making the interviewees as comfortable as possible, being open-ended in discussion, and repeating the interviewees' responses neutrally to provide an opportunity for reflection and further input (Mackey & Gass, 2005). In addition, because the inquiry context happens beyond the classroom and each case was different in setting, observation or interview recall check with their friends cannot be applied. However, thanks to the submission and feedback dates provided in

questionnaires, participants would be contacted for an interview meeting as soon as they submitted or received the feedback. As a result, although limitations of the self-reported data are acknowledged, the collected data could also meet the reliability requirements.

This first interview (see Appendix 6 and Appendix 9 for detailed description) provided data for answering the first, second and parts of the third research question. The interview was audio-recorded by the researcher so that the collected data could easily be transcribed accurately for the coding. However, to find the full answer for research question three, another interview was conducted after the participants received the feedback on their writing assignment.

3.2.3.3. Post-feedback interview

The post-submission interview ends with two questions relating to participants' expectation via the reflection on their writing assignment. Thus, the post-feedback interview (see Appendix 7) was designed to investigate the specific result and feedback each participant received: first, to explore whether the writing process with their LA behavior led to participants' success in the assignment; and second, to examine whether there was any difference between the participants' self-reflection on the assignment before and after receiving the feedback. The detailed description was also presented in Appendix 9.)

3.3. Data analysis

3.3.1. Questionnaire analysis

Because this questionnaire aimed to explore the participants' background information, each answer from the questionnaire was read by the researcher, and gathered together to form specific information which served as the description of each participant's biography and education history(see Table 3.2 and Appendix 8), as a case of the multiple case study. Moreover, this result was based on selecting appropriate participants for the research.

3.3.2. Interview analysis

The data from the seven participants' interviews were analyzed through content analysis, which also called thematic analysis, in which the data analysis process is conducted in three phases, comprising preparation, organization, and reporting (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

3.3.2.1 Preparation phase

Each participant had two interviews, thus in total there were 14 interviews, which were transcribed verbatim into English and read carefully by the researcher for coding, and to facilitate the illustration of the findings (Mackey & Gass, 2005). As the present study had a qualitative research design, NVIVO software was chosen as an analysis tool, which was considered as an appropriate software for analyzing qualitative data and easy to start using for a small descriptive project (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

3.3.2.2 Organization phase

There are seven cases in this multiple case study. The data were first analysed case by case for the detailed description of findings via “direct interpreting” in each case (Creswell, 2013, pp. 199-200) to find out: the writing process each participant followed (Research Question 1); the challenges each participant faced during the writing process and their solutions (research question 2); and the LA behaviours each participant exercised to achieve their success (research question 3). To be able to do this, each participant’s interview transcriptions were coded into 3 main themes, equivalent to the three research questions, and sub-themes belonging to each main theme (i.e. theme 1 with 4 sub-themes; theme 2 with 4 sub-themes, and theme three with 2 sub-themes), by searching for specific “patterns and correspondences” (Stake, 1995) (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 shows the structure of thematic network including three main themes and sub-themes which were based on the conceptual framework from the literature review and emerged from the data coding.

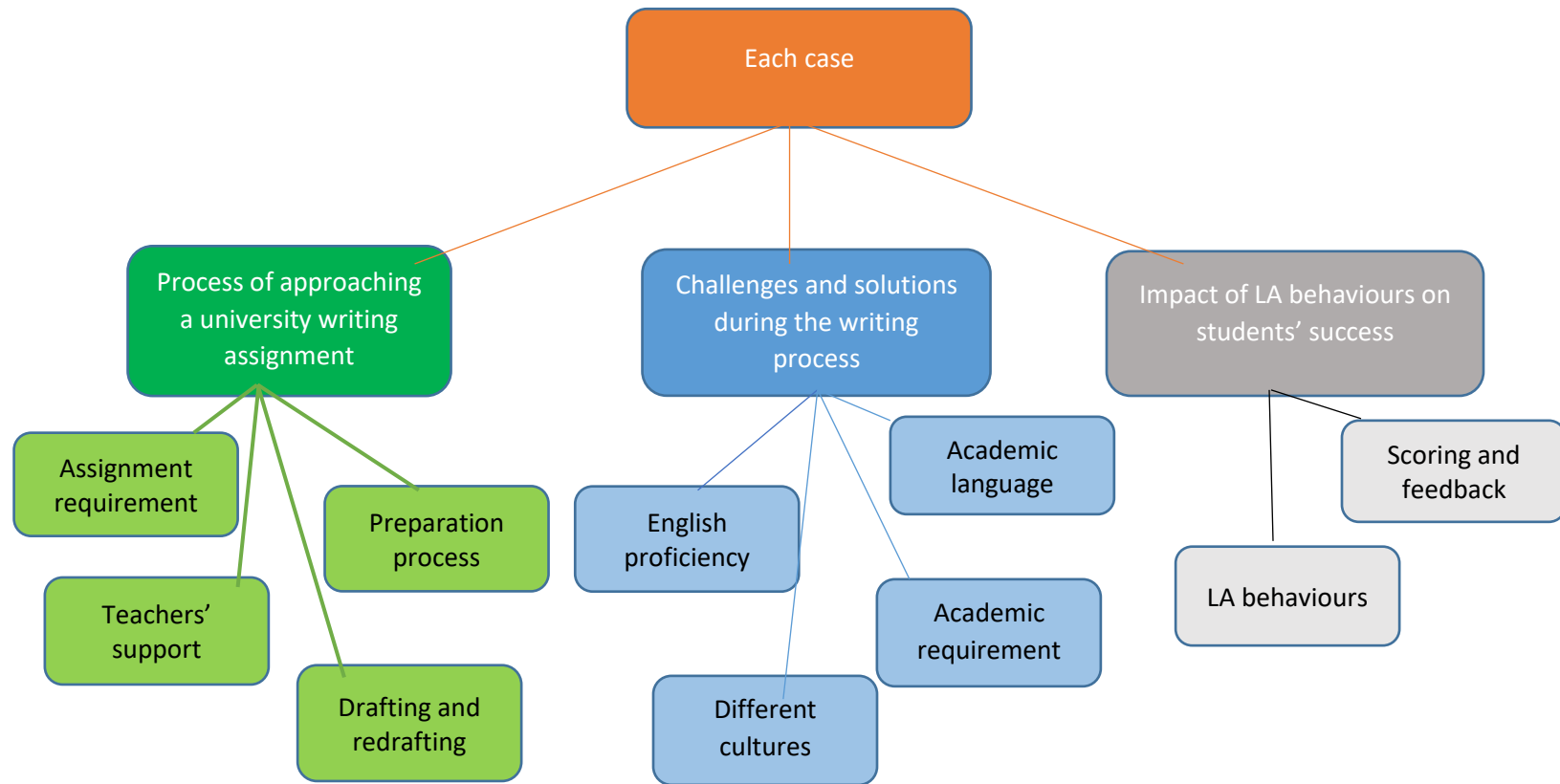


Figure 3.1. The structure of thematic network

Then, a cross-case comparison was conducted based on the findings from each case to explore interesting similarities and differences among cases (Yin, 2009), to have common specific findings for the purpose of answering the three research questions.

In general, the data analysis process was conducted within three main steps as described in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3. Steps of data analysis

Process	Descriptions	Actions based on
Step1	Create the structure of a thematic network (figure 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Three research questions - Theoretical framework mentioned in Chapter 2. Literature Review.
Step2	Code data transcriptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read data transcriptions - Extract patterns following the structure of thematic network.
Step 3	Compare cases Emphasize interesting findings in each case.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Based on themes and sub-themes

Table 3.4 Data analysis mapped on to the research questions.

Research questions	Data analysis	
1: How do international EAL first-year students approach a university writing assignment? (i.e. What process do they follow?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Code the post-submission interviews -Thematic analysis the post-submission interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distinguish each case study via analysing background information from the questionnaire

2: What challenges do these students have to overcome in a new education setting?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coding the post-submission interviews -Thematic analysis post-submission interviews 	-Cross-case comparison
3: What impact do different autonomous behaviours have on students' success?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coding the post-submission and post-feedback interviews -Thematic analysis post-submission and post-feedback interviews (Assignment grades, students' comments or progress.) 	

3.3.2.3 Reporting findings

The findings of the present study are reported and discussed in the ways that Zheng and Borg (2014) and Yu and Lee (2015) applied in their multiple case studies. Zheng and Borg (2014) conducted a three-case study to examine teachers' understandings of what task-based language learning means. They also used pre-lesson interview, post-lesson interview and classroom observation to collect data. Their study findings are reported case by case in answering the research questions. Cross-comparison is used to raised interesting findings for the discussion section. Meanwhile, Yu and Lee (2015) also conducted a multiple case study but with some differences in types of data collection and analysis. Their research investigated "two Chinese university students' motives for participating in group peer feedback activities in the EFL writing classroom" (Yu and Lee, 2015, p.572). Data were collected by video recording, semi-structured interview, stimulated recall and students' texts. The findings were presented case by case but, different to Zheng and Borg's study, these researchers presented the findings within sub-themes for each case. Then, cross comparison was conducted for the discussion. Consequently, the present study applied a combination of the methodologies of these two studies. Each case's findings collected from the two interviews are

presented according to sub-themes (See Table 3.4). Then, cases are compared to raise interesting points found from the findings to answer the three research questions.

Table 3.4. Finding report structure.

<p>Case :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The writing process that participant used to approach the university writing assignment. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Assignment descriptions b. The writing process 2. Challenges faced by participants during the writing process and their solutions. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. English proficiency b. Academic language c. Different cultures d. Academic requirement 3. Assignment results and learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Results of and feedback on the assignment b. Learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process

3.4. Summary

This chapter specifically described the methodology used to conduct the present qualitative multiple case study. The research was designed to explore the writing process of approaching a university writing assignment, challenges faced during this process, and levels of influence of LA behaviours on learner's success for international EAL undergraduate students studying at MQ, by conducting one questionnaire and two interviews with each participant who was considered as one case in the project for data collection. A qualitative data analysis approach was applied to search for the findings of study, which are presented in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of the study. It starts in Section 4.1 with the findings in each case, presenting the university writing assignment process, challenges faced during the writing process, and the role of LA behaviours in students' learning success for the seven participants (case by case). Section 4.2 presents the cross-case comparison in order to explore the answers for the three research questions. The chapter ends with the conclusion in Section 4.3.

4.1. Descriptive findings for each case

4.1.1. *Ariel*

4.1.1.1 *The writing process that participant used to approach the university writing assignment.*

a. Assignment description

This Vietnamese first-year participant shared her experiences on doing a marketing portfolio as a writing assignment in 1800 words for a course named 'Marketing Fundamentals'. The portfolio required Ariel to write about six topics which she learnt during 11 weeks of the semester. Students needed to explain what the topic was, gave authentic examples cited from marketing magazines or articles, and analyze them for clarification on the chosen topics.

In class, teacher also gave some tips, emphasized the significant parts which should be included in the portfolio, and guided students on how to give a clear explanation for each topic. One week before the due date, a discussion tutorial was organized in order to answer students' questions relating to the assignment.

b. The writing process

Ariel shared that she did remind herself every week that she had this assignment so that she could pay attention to any significant parts for the assignment emphasized during every lecture and tutorial. Outside the classroom, she found materials such as marketing cases and marketing articles on the Internet to find interesting items which could be used for the assignment. If she had difficulties in explaining the topic, normally she asked her classmates for clarification.

About two or three days before the due date, Ariel started to “gather the knowledge” which she had learnt from classes and her readings, alongside with “brainstorming” the ideas, in order to make the outline for the portfolio. Then she started to write the assignment.

4.1.1.2. Challenges faced by participant during the writing process, and the solutions

This participant said that she had four important troubles during the process in which she approached her writing assignment. The first challenge she mentioned is the English proficiency used in an English-speaking university context. Ariel shared:

“It was quite a challenge for me to express my idea in a kind of language that is not my mother tongue. For example, I have to think in English and write. Everything is in English. I am not quite good at writing, so it was a challenge to me to express what I want to say in an academic way. I don’t know many academic words and how to express them academically.”

She was much worried on this issue because it was one crucial criterion for grading the assignment. When she was asked about the way to overcome this challenge, she said:

“I read a lot of academic articles and then I learn to rephrase them and learn the way they express their ideas and the way they write. If I found an interesting academic words I think I can use in my assignment, I will add it, or remember it, so I can use it in other contexts.”

Because of her awareness of the issue of plagiarism in writing, she said she should learn how to paraphrase the words she learnt from the references.

The second obstacle Ariel faced was time management. She said she was a kind of “procrastinator”. That was why she started to write the portfolio just 2 or 3 days before the deadline. When asked what prevented her from doing the assignment earlier, Ariel answered that this was because she herself thought that it was not so hard to do this assignment. Therefore, she always prioritized other tasks instead of this one. As a result, she used almost all her time in the three final days in doing everything for the assignment, which she considered to be a big challenge.

The third difficulty came from the difference in cultures between the two countries about the academic writing requirement, especially plagiarism in writing. Ariel said that, in her own country, doing an assignment was very easy because she could copy it online. She stated: “It was not a crime to cheat there...”; whereas plagiarism is so important in Australia. Every assignment is checked by Turnitin system, so she needed to write on her own; but she was not good at using

academic language. Thus, she found difficulty in writing the assignment when studying in this international education context.

The last challenge related to the psychology issue. She said: "... I feel stressful while I did my assignment...", because "it is my first term here, and I received no recommendations or any comments from my high school teachers because this is my first time, I am not sure if I am doing it right or wrong. I have no experience or whatever in doing an assignment because it is really different from Vietnam."

4.1.1.3. Assignment result and learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process

a. Results of the assignment

The assignment received 55 out of 65 marks, but it still was not the expected score for the writer: Ariel expected it should be over 60.

She had only received oral feedback from the teacher, with a very general marking scale concluding on 4 criteria: relevant topic; clear and correct references; word choice; and good explanation. Her assignment had good feedback on word choice and relevant topic. However, the teacher said she used the wrong style in referencing and was unclear in explaining the topic definition. Thus, she decided to ask for more clarification on the feedback from her friends who had received higher scores and the teacher assistant.

b. Learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process

This section presents how the participant controlled her writing process, which was illustrated via her self-direction, problem solving and decision making, critical reflection, and motivation and confidence.

Before submitting the assignment, Ariel self-recognized that she was a procrastinator. She was aware of what she should do for the assignment such as paying attention to her lecturer and tutor in class, since she knew they would emphasize the significant parts for the portfolio; however, she did not take notes. She did not ask for the teacher's explanation, because she thought the teachers were "reluctant" in answering students' questions. Thus, she decided to find the answers on her own. However, because of procrastinating, she started the writing when she had only 3 days left. She shared:

“I was freaked out, and I had to cover 11 weeks in 3 days. It was a big challenge, and that is when I started to think like, “If I spend more time on this, I may have a better performance”, but that is something I have to deal with. I learnt all the time in two or three days. I spent most of the time I can, paying attention to my assignment.”

Ariel was quite good at problem solving and decision making. For example, she chose searching references on the Internet because there would be more “up-to-date materials there”. She asked her friends for help when she did not understand something about the topic or her unclear feedback from the marker. She did intend to meet the advisors in the library, ask for a mentor or friends who earned “high distinction” scores to help her on referencing style, and email the teaching assistant for more clarification on the feedback.

She was also a very motivated and confident student. She started the interview with the following point: “This is my first term being here and I have learnt a lot. The assignment here is quite like a struggle to me, but I still feel so good because I can be a Macquarie student, and I feel excited.” She was quite confident with what she had done for the assignment. The only thing that made her lose confidence is that she did not spend much time doing it. Otherwise, the way she reflected on her score and feedback illustrated her confidence in doing the assignment. She expected that she would get more than 60 whereas the maximum score is 65. That was why she felt confused about the feedback and needed to know the reasons. Talking about her experience and achievement with the assignment, she shared: “I would read more about the case study of the topic that I will do in the assignment because it is necessary to know in a clear way [...] I think in the future I will definitely make a better preparation for that.”

In general, her LA behaviours such as paying attention to lectures to learn for the assignment, searching materials on the Internet, asking friends and advisors for help when she had difficulties, and being confident in what she had done to expect a good result for the assignment, each partly contributed her success in the writing assignment.

4.1.2. Elsa

4.1.2.1. The writing process that participant used to approach the university writing assignment.

a. Assignment description

Elsa was required to write a short science report (600 words) about an experiment on investigating “whether people recognized different faces better than different objects” as an assignment for the

Introduction to Cognitive and Brain Sciences course belonging to the Psychology major. The basic knowledge and good references were provided by the teacher. In addition, two tutorials were organized to help students conduct the experiment and analyze the data for the report. Elsa said the two tutorials were very important because if she missed any one of the two tutorials, she would not write the report well.

b. The writing process

Being asked about the process of writing the assignment, Elsa shared that, during the tutorials in which she and her friends conducted the experiment and analysis, she always followed the assignment requirement to pay much attention to the discussion in class. Then, she tried to understand and use the given references and graphs from the teachers to prepare the content for the report. Finally, she spent 20 hours writing without her friends' or counsellors' help.

Actually, many drafts were written by the participant. Because the first two drafts were already up to the word length, she decided to reduce it by changing structures and expressing ideas with more academic phrases. However, it was more difficult to shorten the words than to write a new report, so she made a new one and reduced some content which was not required.

4.1.2.2. Challenges faced by participant during the writing process and the solutions.

“I faced four big challenges when doing this writing assignment”, said Elsa. Presenting the content of the experiment with four sections within 600 words was one of her biggest difficulties. She could not express her ideas by writing concise sentences, so she had to cut down the content. Another challenge is that Elsa was unable to read and analyze statistics graphs about Psychology, because she was a first-year student. She did not have sufficient academic language about Psychology to describe the experiment and the findings. This problem entailed the third difficulty relating to communicating with the teachers. She revealed that she could not tell her problem about not utilizing academic words appropriately with her teachers. She stated:

“My problem is not that I don't try enough or it is not that I am struggling with English language, I am struggling with academic language of that major. I can talk to everyone but I can't talk academic English in this major. But they (the teacher) did not understand that. They just asked me if I need any support from the English center in MQ. I don't need support from the English center, I need support for the academic language of this major. I said so many times but they don't understand.”

Finally, Elsa indicated how the language barrier, especially for an international student from a non-English-speaking country, prevented her from understanding lectures and discussing the lessons with friends and the teachers.

In general, although Elsa was very confident in her English-speaking ability, the factor causing the four challenges she mentioned was her lack of academic language.

4.1.2.3. Assignment result and learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process

a. Results of the assignment

Elsa received good comments directly on the Turnitin system with the score of 80 out of 100. Talking about the comments, she said: “Mostly, it is “all good” words. Everything is all good.” However, the teacher said she needed to improve two things. First, the teacher said Elsa used the wrong reference style, but she believed she was right. Thus, she emailed the teacher for more explanation. The second negative feedback was the unclear ideas expressed in the essay.

b. Learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process

In this case, the participant’s writing process was prepared largely from the lecturer and tutor (see Section 4.2.1.a). Elsa had only based on the results which already had been analysed to write the report. Therefore, Elsa did not express much autonomy during the writing process. Moreover, she herself did not value highly the assignment. Although she knew that it was important for her writing science report in the next semester, in the current semester it was only weighted as 5%, so she only used the references provided by the teachers, rather than searching for more materials, or asking any friend or the advisor for help, which she did with the other important assignment. On the one hand, Elsa was not very good in problem solving. This was illustrated through the way she revised the first two drafts. She knew the limitation of the word count but still wrote the first one with 1200 words; the second draft also was more than 600 words; and finally she decided to rewrite a new report, but the final draft was still unclear about the ideas. This shows that she did not have a good outline for the writing. On the other hand, Elsa did not find her friends to be a learning source. She was proud of her English, but said, “it is very difficult to make friends.” Her friends were just for chatting or gossiping about lifestyle topics. In addition, she was not confident in what she wrote, because she had just expected the result was around 60; whereas she got 80 with good comments. However, she did not think that she was that good. She said: “Maybe because the other students did

very bad...”, because “there was no marking rubric. She (the teacher) says it will base on the other students.”

However, Elsa’s LA behaviours appeared after she received feedback, via the way she reflected on the feedback of the assignment and gave advice to other students. Firstly, she did email the teacher to ask for more explanation on the reference style she used, because she strongly believed that she was right in this case. Secondly, after her experiences in doing this assignment, she realized that it was good to read more articles, in her majors to enhance her academic language and writing skills. She also said that she should go to the library, and had her friends read the assignment to check before she submitted it. Here is some of her sharing:

“Students should spend more time in the library because there are a lot of books in there...and start very early, with the assignment. Like at the beginning of the course. I open up the unit and see there are 5 assignments and there is the time, like it is due on week 8, this due on week ten. So I asked what was the time I prepared and I just write down and I have to stick on it.”

This extract shows that she was good at time management; and the following statements show that she did learn from the feedback of the teacher:

“The meaning is not very clear. If I have more time I just hope that I will give it to a local students and they can tell me what I will do with the sentence.”

“I should read more, the textbooks or related writing in the library or something like journals, peer review journals, in order to express myself clearer and use the words.”

Unfortunately, Elsa did not apply these things in this assignment due to the assignment’s shortness and low weighting. In short, Elsa learnt that she should spend more time in the library, and discuss with friends about her writing, from her experiences in doing this assignment. She did not express herself as an autonomous learner in this assignment.

4.1.3. Anna

4.1.3.1. The writing process that participant used to approach the university writing assignment.

a. Assignment description

Anna studied professional accounting; and she shared her experiences on approaching the reflective essay of an Accounting and Governance unit. The assignment required Anna to write an essay which was not shorter than 400 words about how her problem-solving skills developed throughout

the unit. She did not need to use references. Moreover, Anna was also required to write diaries about what she learnt from the unit as a condition for this reflective essay. Some videos about how to write a reflective essay some ideas were suggested by the tutors so that students could have basic information to write their assignment. In addition, teachers gave some specific topics for students to find out more details on the Internet.

b. The writing process

Two weeks before the deadline, Anna started to work for this assignment. At first, she watched all the videos she had about how to write a reflective essay. Then, she read the marking rubric carefully to know exactly what she should focus on in the essay. Next, Anna searched for samples of reflective essays on the Internet to see how they looked. Moreover, she asked a friend who had done this type of assignment before for help by giving her his own essays for reference and showing her what she should write, and what steps she should follow when writing a reflective essay. From his essays, Anna did learn “the templates, the patterns of the essay and some experiences on this type of writing.” Then, based on her memory about what she had learnt from the course, she started to write the essay.

Anna spent about 10 hours in total to finish the final draft to submit on Turnitin. When she finished the first draft, she herself first “double checked it, whether it had some grammar errors or some plagiarized errors or something like that.” Then, she gave it to her friend and asked him to check it for her. Then, she revised the essay according to his advice for the final draft.

4.1.3.2. Challenges faced by participant during the writing process and the solutions.

Sharing about challenges faced during doing this assignment, Anna said: “Well, first, some kind of nervous because this is the first time that I have done a reflective essay. It's quite new for me. I have no idea what it is about, how to write it, and then I have to Google and see some sample essays to know more about it.” Thus, the difficulty was the strange type of writing that she had to do. Moreover, there were so many assignments that students need to do for one unit if they would like to achieve a high score, compared to in her country, where there was just one group writing project and “the score is not that hard to achieve...”. To receive a high score in the current course, Anna had to show her good knowledge of the unit via doing the assignment. Secondly, the academic language used to express her ideas in English also caused her to struggle. Anna had to look up

words several times in the dictionary when writing the essay. This meant it took her a lot of time to finish the assignment. She said: “It was kind of time-consuming for me to do the assignment.” Moreover, plagiarism was so important at the university. The teacher could check it via the Turnitin system. Thus, she needed to be careful in the words she used. Another obstacle came from her lack of motivation in doing the assignment: that was why Anna started writing the essay just two weeks before the deadline. She explained: “Whenever I faced an essay or assignment, maybe because it's not in my native language, I'm kind of hesitant to it. I always wait until the pressure is increasing, so that I have more motivation to do it...”; and “maybe the due day is a long way to go, or because my friends are not doing it as well.” Thus, these are some kind of internal and external motivation influences. However, she said that, because she had experiences when studying IELTS, when being in a high pressure situation she could stay at the table and work as much as possible for the assignment. If she had trouble, she would ask her friends for help. Finally, Anna also had trouble in listening to Australian English and in writing skills when studying in this university. On the one hand, Anna was familiar with American English, so it was difficult for her to hear and understand the Australian accent. On the other hand, she also worried about the ways she wrote to express ideas, because of the different styles in expressing ideas between Vietnamese and Australian. She said:

“In Vietnam, people have a tendency to write long sentences and when it comes to English, me or my friends also make it longer but I think in Australia they want to have concise sentences, paragraphs. You don't have to make it long but you have to make it informative and short so that they have enough information.”

In short, these issues, such as the language in use, in the assignments were somewhat new and challenging to her when she was studying abroad at the beginning.

4.1.3.3. Assignment result and learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process

a. Results of the assignment

The score was 72 out of 100 without any comment; however, this was not as high as she expected. Anna said: “To be honest, I am quite sad about it. I am not satisfied with the result... that mark is quite low to me. I expected it was much higher but it is only 72.” Because there was no feedback, she did not know why the score was like that.

b. Learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process.

Data collected from the two interviews show that Anna exercised a few LA behaviours during the writing process. Firstly, she was a responsible student, which was illustrated by the way she searched for materials about the reflective essay so that she could write a good one. She also asked friends for help in guiding and proofreading her essay before submitting it. Moreover, she was aware of the usefulness of the assignment in her future job. She shared that, “if I had more time, I would search more about the problem-solving skill. It is necessary for my future career. I think the assignment is kind of important and useful to me.” Secondly, she also was very confident in doing the assignment, which was the reason for her disappointment when the score was lower than her expectation. However, she did not want to contact the teachers for more explanation about the score. She just accepted the results, and learnt from the experience for better results in the future. In general, Anna was a kind of autonomous learner, which was illustrated through the writing process in the way she managed things to do the assignment well, searching for materials to update knowledge about the reflective essay, and asking friends for help when it was necessary.

4.1.4. Cinderella

4.1.4.1. The writing process that participant used to approach the university writing assignment.

a. Assignment descriptions

This was a kind of final assignment for the Critical Thinking unit, in which Cinderella was required to analyse two opposing arguments of a debate provided by the lecturer and identify critical thinking fallacies appearing in the given article. The essay should be 1500-2000 words. During the lectures, the teachers introduced some examples and did the analysis as model for the students to understand how to do the assignment. Moreover, they also provided some hints that students could use to write the paper.

b. The writing process.

Since the date the lecturer introduced the debate and the articles to do this assignment, Cinderella read the articles and paid attention to lectures, to take notes on the ideas which could be used in the assignment. On the other hand, she searched for more information on the Internet about the events mentioned in the articles in order to understand deeply the debate. Then, ten days before the

deadline, she started to focus on doing the assignment. Firstly, Cinderella gathered the notes she learnt from the lectures and tried to remember all the fallacies or the rules on which she would base her analysis of the debate to make an outline for the essay. Finally, she wrote the first draft which then was reread many times to check the vocabulary and structure before submission.

4.1.4.2. Challenges faced by participant during the writing process and the solutions.

Cinderella shared that two big challenges she faced when doing assignment were the “language barrier” and the “cultures”. Regarding the language, she said that it is quite “hard to understand the lectures” because “there are some examples in the lectures that the lecturers gave us to understand the meaning and the knowledge but I did not quite understand that”: “He sometimes used some words, some slangs and I don’t understand”. The second difficulty relating to the language was using academic structure in the writing. Cinderella indicated: “I think the writing assignment at MQ is very difficult for international students because we have to use some complex structure if you want to have the high mark.” In addition, this student had difficulty in understanding the cultural events mentioned in the lessons or the articles. She stated: “the tutors sometimes talk about Australian events like the Australia Day but I don’t know...” Therefore, due to this problem, when writing the assignment, Cinderella found it hard for her to write the ideas because she was not sure whether what she wrote was right or wrong, although she did search Google to enhance her knowledge about these events.

4.1.4.3. Assignment result and learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process

a. Results of the assignment

Cinderella received the score of 70/100 and written feedback including three main points. First, she needed to analyse the argument of the debate more deeply. Second, she should write in British English instead of American English. Finally, she should give more specific recommendation for the final part of the essay. In general, in the marking rubric, Cinderella shared that, “I only get some part as distinction but some others are just credit or pass”.

b. Learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process.

The collected data show some kinds of LA behaviours that Cinderella exercised during her approach to the assignment. Firstly, Cinderella was good at self-direction, because she knew what

she should do to write a good assignment. For example, she attended workshops about writing skills and reference styles which were organized to support new students. She also focused on the lesson, and searched for more readings relating to the assignment to have a good outline for the essay. Moreover, she submitted the assignment four days before the deadline so that she could spend time for other important tasks. This could show that she was good at time management. She believed herself to be “a controversial person” because she rarely talked too much with other people. This characteristic meant that she did not have any friends to ask for help during doing the assignment. She also did not raise questions to ask for more clarification from teacher. Normally, she waited for her classmates’ questions and learnt from the given answers, even when she did not intend to ask for the teacher’s explanation for the feedback that she did not understand. However, she herself found the solutions thanks to using facilities provided from the university such as the library website or seminars. Finally, the way she reflected on the assignment before and after the feedback illustrated that she was not confident in decision making and problem solving. For instance, when being asked about the assignment, she said:

“...because I am not very good at this language, I am afraid I will make some mistakes about grammar, vocabulary and there is some knowledge about this unit that I had to apply in my final assignment. I am not very sure if I write it correctly...”;

or she did not contact the teacher for more explanation, because “I think that only person who gets a grade very different from their expected one they will ask the lecturer, but I think my grade is ok so....”. In short, she also learnt some experiences that helped her be more successful in doing her future writing assignments.

4.1.5. Rapunzel

4.1.5.1. The writing process that participant used to approach the university writing assignment.

a. Assignment description

This was a research paper assignment for the IT and Society unit. Students would choose one of the various given questions and do a research on that topic, then write an essay (around 2400 words) as a research report using the American Psychological Association (APA) or Harvard styles of referencing. One week before the due date, there would be a seminar for discussion on this assignment. Students were allowed to submit multiple final drafts on the Turnitin system for

checking of plagiarism before the due date until they were satisfied with the similarity limitation which was under 15%.

b. Student writing process.

Rapunzel had a very good plan to do this assignment. For the preparation stage, she started focusing on the instructions as soon as the teacher released the paper with different questions. Then, at home she read carefully the marking rubric to be sure about the assignment requirement, because this was a large assignment with a weighting of 30% of the course. After that, she searched for references relating to the given topics, then she chose the topic that she had most information to write on. A lot of articles, journals, e-book, newspapers were read to find more information about the chosen topic, from which she created an outline. Moreover, to make sure whether the outline was good or not, Rapunzel sent it to one of her high school teachers for more advice before composing the essay. She said that she did many drafts before it came to the perfect, final one. Specifically, after she had the first draft, she herself checked it by “reading it aloud to check whether it made sense” to her. With a section she thought was still not good, she would correct or rewrite it. When she was satisfied with the essay, she gave it to her friends for proofreading, because “the one that I wrote, I can’t understand the mistakes from that usually”. She also asked for assistance in using APA referencing style from the librarian. Finally, Rapunzel redrafted one more time so that it was ready for the discussion seminar in class. She had her essay key points discussed one more time with the lecturer to receive advice from him. Then, she revised it to make the final draft, and submitted it on Turnitin. As a result, her essay reached 0% of similarity from the Turnitin.

4.1.5.2. Challenges faced by participant during the writing process and the solutions.

As an international student, Rapunzel shared that she faced challenges in the language, assignment timing, technology use, APA reference style, and new living environment. The first and foremost challenge was the English language, because “English is not my first language. That will be the main problem for me. At first, I mean the last semester which is my first semester here, I thought that I won’t be able to catch the lecture”. In addition, Rapunzel mentioned that the grammar structures used in writing were also very difficult for her to express the ideas effectively. The second important trouble which influenced the writing process was the timing. Rapunzel had to finish the assignment with a feeling of anxiety, because,

“all the assignments of this unit are on the last spot... In the last week, we have another assignment for video. And we faced a critical situation, we lost all the videos and we have to do it on time and struggle with the timing”.

Furthermore, she herself had trouble in using the database which was provided by the library to search for articles and books. She could not use it effectively; then she decided to use Google to search for relevant newspapers. This took her more time to find the materials for the assignment. Another common difficulty for international students was using APA referencing style, and Rapunzel was not an exception. As a result, she came to see the librarian for help with this. The last obstacle she shared was that she could not stand the feeling of homesickness and the cold weather in Sydney. Rapunzel stated: “I feel a struggle due to weather as well to focus on studying because, in winter it’s very cold and I’m very sensitive to cold. I can’t focus while it’s cold since it affects my health. So, it impacts the study as well”. In short, although this student achieved success in her writing assignment, living and studying in an international context was also a struggle for her at the beginning.

4.1.5.3. Assignment result and learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process

a. Results of the assignment

Rapunzel received a distinction level for this assignment (84/100). This score was not her expectation, but she got high distinction level for the whole unit, so she was still happy with the result. However, because this assignment was treated as the final exam, there was no feedback for her writing paper.

b. Learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process.

Based on what Rapunzel shared about the way she did the assignment and her reflection on it, she is considered to be an autonomous learner, which was evidenced in several situations. Firstly, Rapunzel was good at self-direction, which was illustrated during the writing process (see Section 4.5.1.c). For example, she had good planning and she could manage the work and time quite well to follow what she intended to do. Secondly, she was good at learning strategies such as listening to the teacher’s instruction carefully, and searching articles, journals and newspapers to be used as references for her assignment. Moreover, she had excellent abilities in problem solving and decision

making. To achieve the high distinction result, Rapunzel asked for help from her high school teacher, her friends, the librarians and the lecturer. She planned everything and managed the time perfectly so that she could have the first draft before the discussion seminar to get advice from the teacher. In addition, her autonomy behaviours were also displayed in the way Rapunzel reflected on the result and her advice on doing the writing assignment. Although there was no feedback, she could guess the reason why she didn't get the high distinction. Rapunzel said: "I'm not fully satisfied with the paragraph size and all those. So, I was a little bit nervous about HD and D". Finally, she possessed a very strong motivation and confidence in her study. She had shared her experiences as follows:

"Maybe I will tell him (other new student) to have more focus and a target. Just draw a target. We need to understand where we want to go. What's our target to reach? Whether it is a pass, a credit, a distinction or a high distinction, if we know that target, we will know how much effort we need to put on that one. Since I want to achieve a high distinction, I need to spend much time compared to the one those who want a pass. So, that depends on the target that the student wants to achieve."

In brief, Rapunzel could be an example of the correlation between LA and success in doing university writing assignments.

4.1.6. Carol

4.1.6.1. The writing process that participant used to approach the university writing assignment.

a. Assignment description

Carol shared her experiences on writing a scientific report which was also treated as the final examination of a Biology and Practice unit. The assignment was a 1200 word report about an experiment relating to ants. Thus, students in the same group would have the same findings from the experiment, but they had to write their own report separately with full format of a scientific article, including abstract, introduction, methods, findings and conclusion. Students must also use Harvard style for referencing.

In addition, after releasing the assignment, the tutor guided students on how to conduct the experiment, how to collect and analyze the data, how to report the findings, and how to cite the references correctly in the paper. Moreover, the teacher also allowed students to share their first

draft with friends for help in the ideas, format, grammatical and lexical mistakes, if they wanted to, as long as they respected the plagiarism issue.

b. Student writing process.

Following the requirement of this assignment, Carol first conducted the experiment with her friends in a group to find the results for the project. When the findings were ready, she started to write the report. Firstly, she reviewed what should be written in a scientific report by searching information on the Internet, reading the references, and reviewing her note-taking about what the teacher explained in class. Next, based on what she measured from the experiment and the criteria in the marking rubric, Carol composed the first draft. Then, she herself checked it, whether it fit the criteria in the marking rubric. She also used a grammar correction program to check her writing mistakes. Finally, she had her friend proofread to see whether the writing made sense to him, because Carol thought that it was good to “write something probably and show others to read. If it is clear for others, that means it is good but if it is confusing, it is not good.” Thus, when her friend said “it is fine” or suggested some correction, she checked any of these mistakes again and submitted the paper.

4.1.6.2. Challenges faced by participant during the writing process and the solutions.

Carol was in an advantageous situation in her studying, because she gained experiences from her first university degree. Therefore, she shared that the biggest challenge she faced during her writing assignment was her writing skills, especially that she was not good at expressing her ideas academically. This was also the reason for her fear of plagiarism in her writing when she submitted it to the Turnitin webpage. In fact, she did not copy from anyone, but because each member in her group would write the report about the same findings, she was afraid that she used the same structure as her friends, and would be blamed as a plagiarist. In addition, Carol mentioned that one unit often had at least three assignments which she was not good at doing, so it was quite hard for her to approach a writing assignment in this new study context.

4.1.6.3. Assignment result and learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process

a. Results of the assignment

Carol got a very high mark for her scientific report (17/20). However, there was some feedback from the teacher which she could follow to improve her writing skills. Firstly, she should shorten her sentences and check spelling for some words. Secondly, she should use more references for her arguments; and the final feedback was on the organization of the report, with there being one part written in the wrong section. In general, she agreed with what the teacher commented on her writing, because she herself also realized these mistakes in her assignment.

b. Learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process.

This was a mature, experienced and good student, because Carol was in her second semester at Macquarie University, of her second university degree. She shared:

“I am getting all subjects with high distinction comparing to my friend...I am doing good because I listened to lectures, attended all classes, wrote all notes and everything I prepared good, I tried to understand everything. That is why I trust myself.”

Therefore, she had different autonomy behaviours compared to the other students during the writing process. She was good at independent actions because of her effectiveness in controlling her study. In every aspect, Carol would like to try her best first before finding assistance from friends or teachers. For example, she shared that she only had challenges in writing skills, not on reading, listening or acquiring the lesson, because:

“if it is not clear for me I can read the notes and the PowerPoint and I can understand, that’s fine. Sometimes teachers have accents and they talk so fast, if I missed one part I can understand because they are related together, but then I am studying them by myself, then I can understand...”>

She also said, “sometimes the teachers don’t have time to explain everything I am asking, for those I am reading but understand, normally I do it myself.” Relating to grammar correction, Carol preferred using the autocorrect program or website to asking friends for help. However, she would like to ask teachers for help whenever she could not find solutions for her difficulties. She said: “Definitely, I searched for myself, if they said ok it should be like a report, I would search what is the structure of the report and I Google it, and then if I could not find the answer I would

go to ask the teacher, tutorials teacher, get appointment with them and ask for their help. Definitely they will explain it to the students”. In addition, Carol indicated that she was a kind of person who was good at time management.

In summary, as a mature learner, Carol was calm in solving any problem herself during her writing process. She managed her study quite well to achieve her goal, which was to become an excellent student with high distinction mark for all subjects. Therefore, she was a kind of autonomous learner who could control the study quite well.

4.1.7. Pinocchio

4.1.7.1. The writing process that participant used to approach the university writing assignment.

a. Assignment description

Pinocchio, who majored in Biology, shared his experiences on doing a two-page scientific report about a small study on biodiversity as an assignment for the Evolutionary Ecology unit. Students had to conduct a project to collect data, analyze data to have the findings for discussion.

Before conducting the experiment, knowledge about biodiversity, how to do the sample collecting, how to analyze the data, how to interpret the results, and what students needed to do for the assignment, were introduced and explained carefully by the lecturers. Students had to use the findings of the experiment to answer a series of given questions. There was also a discussion tutorial between teacher and students in which students could raise any questions they were still confused about and receive explanations from the teacher. The students also shared their ideas together to fill their own gaps in doing the assignment. Then, they started to write for the report.

b. Student writing process.

The process of doing this assignment partly depended on the process by which the teacher delivered the assignment to the student. Firstly, Pinocchio spent time on reading the references about biodiversity to have a good understanding on every concept that the lecturer introduced and explained in class. Then, he conducted the experiment to collect data. He analysed the data by a computer program to have the results he needed. Finally, when the findings were ready, he started the writing. At this time, Pinocchio initially read all the questions, and brainstormed the ideas for

answering each question. If there were some concepts or ideas about which he was still in “doubt”, he looked back over the readings for some accuracy checking. When the outline was made, he wrote the first draft for the assignment. Then, he kept improving his draft by discussing the confusing things with his classmates and the teacher. Based their advice, Pinocchio revised the first draft to have the final version of the assignment.

4.1.7.2. Challenges faced by participant during the writing process and the solutions.

Pinocchio faced some difficulties when studying in Australia, especially in writing his assignment. Firstly, academic writing was one significant challenge he faced during the writing process. He said:

“...because I am not a native speaker, sometimes when I want to express the concept, I think of it in Spanish. I have written things like that in Spanish before, not in English, until now. It's kind of difficult to translate. Sometimes I just write it in Spanish, and then translate it, and then adapt it to what I mean.”

Secondly, Pinocchio was not familiar with the language used in the computer program when analyzing the data. He shared: “Well, I'm not familiar with the programming language we were using. I had to figure out how exactly to code the things I needed. I looked at the reference manual for each of the packages we were using this language”. Thus, this is also one kind of language obstacle. Another difficulty related to the kind of assessment, which was expressed as follows when he talked about his challenges:

“Here, you really have to think outside the box in many cases. They will ask you some kind of unorthodox questions. I don't know how to express it. In Colombia, we have to memorize a lot. You have to start it, kind of doing things thoroughly because you have to get it top to see throughout it. In Australia, it's kind of different. They ask you to do more research by yourself, to think about those weird questions by yourself, and you have to answer them even if you have not completely prepared”.

However, he liked this kind of challenge because it allowed him to improve himself.

4.1.7.3. Assignment result and learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process

a. Results of the assignment

Pinocchio received a very high mark for his scientific report, which was 37/38. He did not receive any comment from the teacher on his assignment, but this was fine to him because the score was so high and he could evaluate the good and bad points of the assignment he did.

b. Learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process.

Pinocchio was also an autonomous student. Although the experiment was scheduled and the lecturer also guided students on how to conduct the study, how to collect and analyze the data to answer the given research questions, Pinocchio showed his autonomy behaviours via the writing process. Firstly, he was a good student and possessed a strong intrinsic motivation from what he was doing. He shared:

“It took my interest and it was kind of making me do things much more smoothly, much more quickly. It is good to find something you like, not only you know, not only that you have to learn how to do but something that you keep engaged in the assignment that can be your guidance for doing anything else... sometimes I do get stuck because I don't want to do something anymore, but if it is really better to do it, I can do it in one second and then I have more time to revise it later, to ask more questions later, and I thought it is good to manage everything”.

Secondly, Pinocchio knew how to manage the things he should do to achieve a good result for the assignment. For example, he started reading materials as soon as the assignment was released in class. He was very careful in data analysis to have good outcomes from his research. When he had problems in understanding the questions or data analysis, he discussed with his friends to be clearer; and he tried to finish the first draft before the “helping session” happened so that he could ask for help from the teacher on what he was still confused about. As a result, he basically had sufficient revision for the writing before submission.

Thirdly, Pinocchio was very confident with what he had done to write the report. He often said “I know I did well” during the interviews, and the high score proved what he indicated; but he still expected to receive comments from the teacher so that he can learn from the feedback. He mentioned, “I would be more sure of that score if I received some kind of feedback. I supposed I

did well, but I want to be able to know what I did well, why I did that one point, where this grade came from...”.

However, when asking Pinocchio about what he would do differently if he had more time, he shared:

“There were a couple of interesting results from the data. We actually looked into for the questions they were asking. I thought they were quite interesting. I even did some more blots, some more graphs trying to understand what was happening there. I thought that was very interesting. I think, indeed, they didn't ask me to do those things. I think it would have been quite interesting to look more, to dig up...”.

However, he did not include these ideas in the assignment because there was no question for that but he found it to be exciting when exploring them. This strongly shows that he had a high level of autonomy because he enjoyed doing things he was interested in to widen his knowledge even though he was not required to do them.

In short, Pinocchio was also an example of an autonomous learner, because he was good at self-direction, critical reflection, problem solving and decision making, as well as motivation and confidence, which were explored during the process as he approached the writing assignment.

4.2. Cross-Case Comparison

This section presents the similarities and differences between cases, about the three broad analysis themes from the findings: the writing process that international EAL first-year students applied to approach a university writing assignment; the challenges these students faced during the writing process; and the impact of LAb behaviours on the students' success; which themes could be used to answer the three research questions.

4.2.1. The writing process that international EAL first-year students used to approach the university writing assignment

The seven participants shared their experiences on doing the writing assignment they needed to submit for their own subjects. Although the assignments were different in type, including portfolio (Ariel), reflective essay (Anna), scientific reports (Elsa, Carol and Pinocchio), and final assignment (student Cinderella and Rapunzel), and different in requirements and weighting, these seven international EAL students were similar in their key steps when preparing, composing and revising their writing assignments.

At the beginning, the marking rubric was considered as the most important factor that all seven students strongly focused on to understand the requirement of the assignment so that they could achieve the best result. Especially, when being asked about the reasons for their high score, they had the same answer, which was “following the criteria in the marking rubric”.

When students knew what they were required to write in the essay, the next step was paying attention to every lecture and taking notes on any ideas that they thought were significant for answering the questions. In the meantime, these students also searched for references, materials such as articles, books, journals and newspapers, to understand how to write such a kind of assignment (Elsa and Cinderella) or understand deeply the lecturers’ lessons on the issue discussed in the writing essay (Ariel, Elsa, Rapunzel, Carol, and Pinocchio). Beside the materials provided by the teachers, these students also searched for more information which supported them in the writing. These references were read carefully to serve different purposes of the students.

Brainstorming ideas to make the outline for the essay was the third step after the students considered the link between the content they learnt from the lessons and the references and the marking criteria. Then students started to write their assignment based on the main ideas sketched out in the outline.

The revision step would be conducted when the first draft was completed. All seven students ran through the essay to check grammatical structures, academic words, and ideas. If mistakes were noticed, students would correct or rewrite based on the requirement of each criterion in the marking rubric to have the best version for the submission.

The above was the common writing process that the seven international EAL students applied while doing their writing assignment. However, there were also some extra steps which were used differently among the seven cases. For example, Ariel, Anna and Pinocchio asked for their friends’ help during step two when they read materials for more understanding on the issues that they were still unclear about; whereas the others did not; but Rapunzel gave her outline to her high school teacher for ideas checking before she wrote the essay. Another difference between cases appeared in the final step, the revision. While some students (Ariel, Elsa, and Cinderella) revised the assignment themselves, the four other students had their friends proofread the papers. In addition, besides doing peer correction with friends, Rapunzel and Pinocchio also asked for

teachers' advice on their first draft in the discussion section to be able to have a better version for their assignment.

In summary, the collected data showed that the international EAL participants approached their university writing assignment in a process that started from considering the requirement of the essay, searching relevant materials and reading for stimulating main ideas, and brainstorming the outline, to writing and revising for the final draft. Then, depending on different permissible conditions, peer correction was applied when the students found confusion in their understanding of the issues, were uncertain about the first draft, or would like to have their papers double checked before submission. In some specific situations, teacher correction was involved in the process.

4.2.2. Challenges faced by international EAL students during the writing process and the solutions.

Although the seven EAL participants received high marks for their assignments, studying in a new educational setting at an overseas university where English was used as the first language brought them certain difficulties. In this study, some common challenges were shared by the participants when they approached a university writing assignment.

The most common challenge that all seven participants faced was the academic language used in the writing. They believed that their difficulties were due to them being non-native speakers. Moreover, the students were afraid of the similarity checking on Turnitin, because plagiarism is quite strict in Australia. This increased their anxiety in using academic words in the essay. However, students also had their own ways to solve the problems, such as: “paraphrasing good phrases in references” (Ariel); using Google translation and restructuring the phrases based on grammar websites (Cinderella and Pinocchio); using dictionaries (Anna); or practicing writing and writing (Carol).

Secondly, the students also had difficulties with the language barrier. Five of the seven participants failed at the beginning in understanding the lectures or communicating with teachers. Specifically, Elsa complained that her lecturers did not understand her problem when she asked for their help on how to improve her academic words in Psychology. Anna and Cinderella had the same problem, and could not understand the lesson when they were not familiar with the “Australian accent” or “slang” the teachers used. Rapunzel shared that, in her first semester, she had thought

that she could not “catch the lectures”. Carol was the same, but she shared that, whenever she lost some parts in the lessons, she often read the handouts and PowerPoint slides to be clear about the missing knowledge.

Another common challenge mentioned by most participants was the difference in cultures. However, each student experienced this in each different cultural situation. For example, plagiarism was the first aspect they all mentioned. They must be careful when citing ideas from an article or book; and must also learn different referencing styles. Sometimes, the writing style was different between the two countries. Anna realized that she had a kind of “circular expression”, whereas in Australia she should express her ideas in a straightforward way. In addition, Cinderella had difficulty in understanding what the teacher said because he was talking about an Australian event such as an Australian holiday or festival which she did not know. The weather was also a problem. Rapunzel shared that she could not stand the cold winter in Sydney because there was no winter in her country. She shared that this strongly influenced her studying in Australia. Finally, learning style was another cultural aspect causing difficulty. This issue was experienced by Pinocchio when he indicated that studying here required students to acquire knowledge to be able to use, not just simply remembering the knowledge to do the test. Therefore, it was not easy to complete an assignment here.

By contrast, because of differences in the assignments in type, topic and requirement, each participant had their own challenge during the writing process. For instance, Elsa, Carol and Pinocchio conducted a scientific report. All three said that they found difficulty in using the technological instruments to measure, read and analyse the data. Meanwhile, Rapunzel could not use the library database effectively in searching references, although she was in her second semester at Macquarie University.

In summary, lack of academic language use, language barrier, cultural differences, and limitation in technology use, were common factors causing challenges for the international EAL students during the writing process when they first came and studied abroad. However, these students overcame these obstacles to achieve good results in their assignments. The reason for this will be presented in the next section.

4.2.3. Impact of learner autonomy behaviours on students' study success

In Section 4.1, the result of each participant's assignment was described in detail to indicate the successful levels of each participant in their writing assignment. In specifics, the results are summarized in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Assignment results

Cases	Assignment	Scores	Levels
Ariel	Marketing portfolio	55/65	High Distinction
Elsa	Scientific report	80/100	Distinction
Anna	Reflective essay	72/100	Credit
Cinderella	Final assignment	70/100	Credit
Rapunzel	Final assignment	84/100	Distinction
Carol	Scientific report	17/20	High Distinction
Pinocchio	Scientific report	37/38	High Distinction

In addition, Section 4.1 also described carefully the LA behaviours that each participant exercised during the writing process in which they approached the assignment, to overcome their challenges during the process to achieve their expected results. These LA behaviours were analysed based on four main features, which were self-regulation, critical reflection, problem solving and decision making, and motivation and confidence; which were considered as the four characteristics of an autonomous learner. The description of the seven participants' autonomy behaviours is briefly presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Participants' learner autonomy behaviours during the writing process.

Autonomy learner behaviours exercised during the writing process	Cases						
	Ariel	Elsa	Anna	Cinderella	Rapunzel	Carol	Pinocchio
❖ Self-regulation							
▪ Awareness of what should be done	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
▪ Paying attention in the lectures	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
▪ Taking notes			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
▪ Being good at time management		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
▪ Trying themselves before asking for assistance from the others				✓		✓	
❖ Problem solving and decision making	Ariel	Elsa	Anna	Cinderella	Rapunzel	Carol	Pinocchio
▪ Searching more references for reading	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
▪ Asking friends for help	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
▪ Asking teacher for help					✓	✓	✓
▪ Using well the school facilities (library, seminar, advisors)	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
▪ Self-revising the draft	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

▪ Applying peer correction on revision					✓		
▪ Applying teacher correction on revision					✓	✓	✓
❖ Motivation and confidence	Ariel	Elsa	Anna	Cinderella	Rapunzel	Carol	Pinocchio
▪ High evaluation on the significance of the assignment	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
▪ High expectation of the result	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
▪ Strong belief in what has been done	✓		✓		✓		✓
▪ Setting a goal with a clear plan to achieve the goal					✓	✓	
▪ Being excellent in doing things most interested in							✓
❖ Critical reflection	Ariel	Elsa	Anna	Cinderella	Rapunzel	Carol	Pinocchio
▪ Being satisfied with the score		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
▪ Being disappointed with the score	✓		✓				
▪ Being confused with the feedback	✓	✓	✓	✓			
▪ Checking feedback with friends	✓		✓				
▪ Asking for more explanation from teacher		✓					

Whereas Table 4.1 provides the success levels of each participant's writing assignment, Table 4.2 shows each participant's autonomy behaviours exercised during the writing process. What can be seen in the two tables leads to the conclusion that there was a correspondence between levels of exercising autonomy behaviours and the students' success in their university writing assignment. Specifically, among the seven EAL participants, students who showed almost all listed autonomy behaviours during their writing process gained a very high score (Ariel, Rapunzel, Carol, and Pinocchio). These students had strong motivation in their studying. They studied the lessons, prepared for the assignments, and solved problems autonomously (see their autonomy behaviours in Section 4.1 for more details) to achieve the goal which had been set up before. These four students were also very confident. They involved with teachers quite well to be able to learn more from the teacher, except Ariel. This could be because the other three participants (Rapunzel, Carol, and Pinocchio) had more experience whereas Ariel was only in her first semester of the first academic year.

Furthermore, the collected data also showed that Anna and Cinderella also controlled their writing process quite well. They also conducted good autonomy behaviours during the writing process (see Table 4.2). However, they lacked confidence in communication with friends so that they could not use their friends as learning sources. It was good to solve the problems themselves, as they had done, but with the help from their learning environment, the study result would have been better.

Finally, Elsa was an interesting case to explore. Table 4.2 shows that she did not show more autonomy behaviours, but her assignment score was higher than Anna and Cinderella. The reason was that this assignment did not have a marking rubric to follow. Even Elsa did not believe in the result. She thought that she had got 60 but the result was 80; and she said that maybe this was because "the other students did very badly" and "the teacher said it will base on the other students" (see Section 4.1.2. for more details). Moreover, because this assignment was weighted as only 5%, Elsa did not pay much attention to doing it. This also suggests that she may have a lower level of autonomy behaviour.

In summary, several specific autonomy behaviours carried out by the international EAL students who were successful in doing a university writing assignment were explored in the study to indicate whether L2 played an important role in learners' enhancement of their writing ability.

Some of the most important ones were: being aware of what should be done and being good at time management; paying attention in the lectures and taking notes; searching more for references for reading; asking friends and teachers for help when necessary to acquire knowledge; making good use of school facilities (library, seminar, advisors); and being confident and strongly motivated in study.

4.3. Conclusion

The findings from this study explored that each participant had their own process of writing their assignment, faced different difficulties, and reacted differently in terms of LA behaviours. However, they also shared the same key steps when doing the writing assignment, concerning the assignment requirement and the marking rubric, searching materials and references for more understanding on the topic and stimulating ideas for the essay, and making an outline, drafting and redrafting to have a good final version. They also met some common challenges which related to using academic language in writing, citation and plagiarism in writing, the language barrier, cross-cultural problems in learning styles, and critical thinking. Finally, the study explored specific LA behaviours which were exercised by successful students in conducting a university writing assignment. The data showed that there was a correlation between LA and students' success in the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the result of the study in the light of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The chapter concludes with the contributions and limitations of the study, and some further suggestions for future research and conclusion.

5.1. Discussion of the study results.

5.1.1. How do international EAL first-year students approach a writing university assignment?

The study found that international EAL participants approached their university writing assignments within a five-stage process (see Figure 5.1). This process is partly the same as the process expressed by Seow (2002). Moreover, this finding strongly supports the writing process which is being applied in several English writing skills teaching and learning programs at secondary and undergraduate levels preparing students for essay writing. This process also matches the writing procedure introduced in most of the writing textbooks or methodology textbooks (Oshima & Hogue, 1999; Savage & Mayer, 2006; and Davis & Liss, 2006). In addition to these five steps, successful students who earned high scores in the assignment conducted some more extra steps such as discussing with friends and teachers for stimulating ideas; and they even called on their high school teachers from their home country for help with cohesion of ideas or using peer correction and teacher correction before submitting their papers (Figure 5.1). This process may share the same viewpoint as Stallard (1974) in his mention of eight writing behaviours of good students while writing, because these international EAL showed that they are good at planning and revising the paper. This also support Hyland's (2011) advice that, if students would like to be successful in their writing, they should follow what has been done by excellent students. In brief, besides adding more explanation for previous viewpoints on student writing assignment, the finding of this study points out writing skills guidance for students to practice and achieve their learning target.

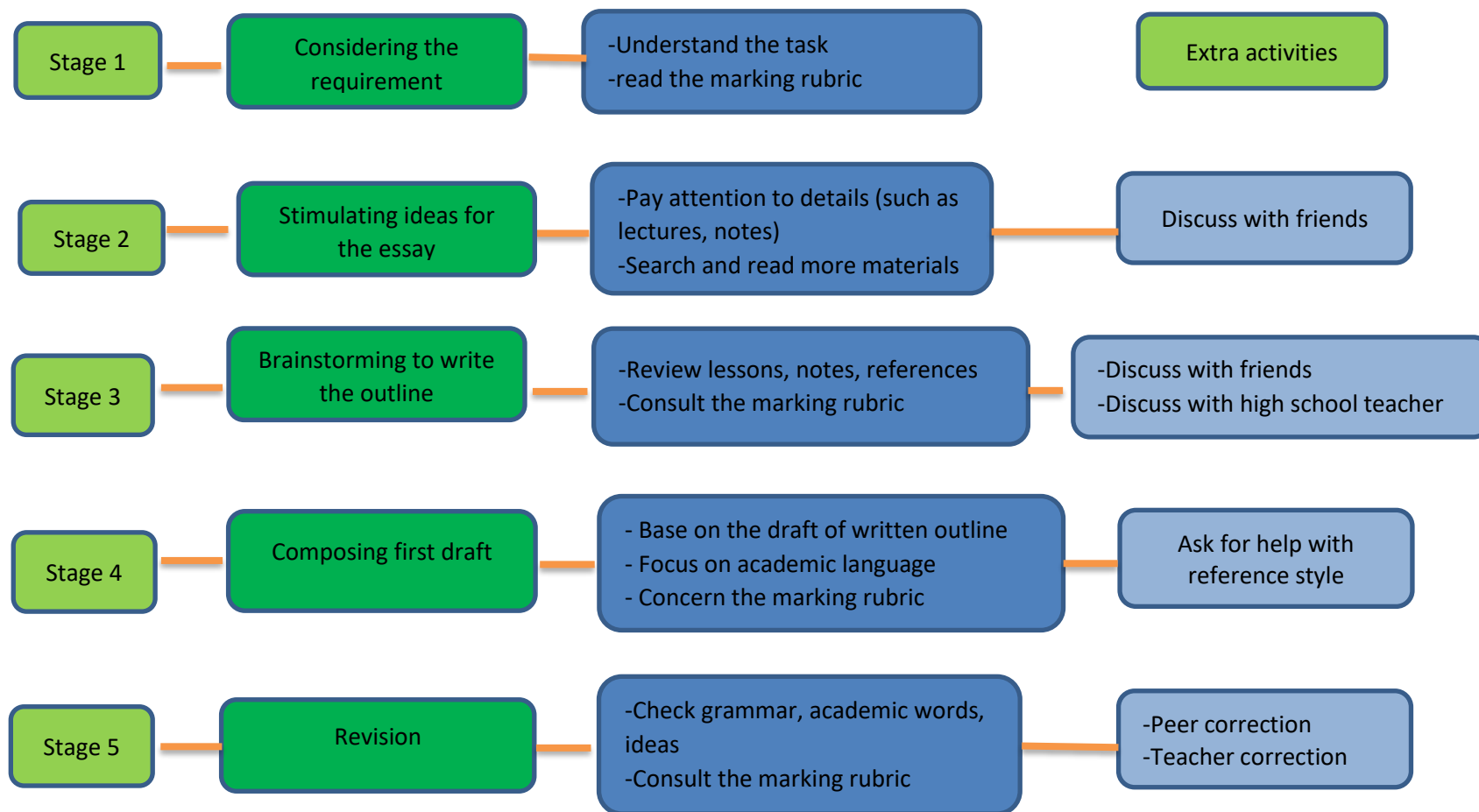


Figure 5.1. Writing process of approaching university writing assignment

5.1.2. What challenges do these students have to overcome in a new education setting?

The present study also explored four main challenges faced by these seven international EAL participants during the writing process: academic language in writing; citation and plagiarism in writing; language barrier; and cross-cultural problems in learning styles and critical thinking. These challenges also match the explorations of some previous studies such as Lin and Yi, (1997), Krause (2001), Bretag et al. (2002) and Wong (2004). However, in terms of cross-cultural issues, the present study also explored that, besides differences in learning styles and critical thinking, difference in weather is also an important factor which students could be more concerned about when studying overseas. One participant (Rapunzel) shared that she had struggles with the cold weather in Sydney, because in her country, the temperature was always around 40 Celsius. As a result, her sickness strongly influenced her study in winter. In brief, the explored findings on these challenges may help EAL students who intend to study abroad to have good preparation for their study. In addition, teachers and managers may be concerned in relation to these challenges that students have appropriate support, when they are in the situation of working with overseas students.

5.1.3. What impact do different autonomous behaviors have on students' success?

Lastly, the findings show that there was a correspondence between levels of exercising LA behaviours and the students' success in their university writing assignments. This finding may illustrate the important role of LA in students' enhancement of their writing skills. The LA behaviours that participants exercised during the writing process (see Table 4.2) were not much different from the reviewed points comparing to LA behaviours presented by Oxford (1990) and Cotterall (1995). With these behaviours, students could be considered as autonomous learners as illustrated via their independent actions, problem solving and decision making, critical reflection, and students' motivation and confidence in studying, which match autonomous learner definitions of Little (1991), Littlewood (1996) and Oxford (2015).

In addition, the findings show that students could control the writing process to achieve their study goal thanks to exercising different levels of LA behaviours. This result partly supports the viewpoint of Benson (2011) when he indicated that LA behaviours can be measured via the way students control their learning management, cognitive process and learning content. Especially, these also match the perception of Illes (2012) when she added one more LA aspect, which involves

finding and reading references, and searching solutions for grammar and lexical problems online for completing a written assignment, for learners to have control during their learning process.

However, as can be seen in Table 4.2, some of the LA behaviours were not much exercised by the participants. This does not mean that these LA behaviours should not be useful and followed. The reason was that, in some cases students did not have chance to show their LA behaviours. For example, one participant (Elsa) did not show her LA behaviours during her writing process because every reading, references and the experiment were provided and conducted with the teacher in class; whereas Carol, Rapunzel and Pinocchio lack some LA behaviours in critical reflection because they were satisfied with the high distinction scores. This finding may add another possible explanation for the LA definition, “a capacity to control one’s own learning”, from Benson (2013), with his three overlapped circles (ability, freedom, and desire) describing the capacity of students to control their learning management, cognitive processes and learning content (see Section 2.2.1.). In this case, students lacked freedom in doing the assignment to show their LA behaviours.

In summary, the present study proves that LA behaviours played a significant role in the international EAL students’ success in approaching a university writing assignment. Especially, some good LA behaviours used by successful students are provided so that international EAL students can implement to improve their writing ability.

5.2. Contributions

This study has made important contributions to the second language learning and teaching research field. Firstly, it may be a reading reference on LA and writing process beyond the classroom, with some challenges faced by international students who come from non-English-speaking countries. Secondly, the findings confirm the impact of LA in the second language learning and teaching process, especially in writing skills. Finally, the study may assist the process of enhancing the LA of students more effectively by providing a additional category of successful LA behaviours which can be applied during the writing process. In general, the study could be beneficial for both research and language teaching in the field of autonomy and writing ability.

5.3. Limitations

Although this study achieved its research aims, some limitations should be considered. Firstly, the participant recruitment process completely depended on the students’ volunteerism, because it

happened nearly at the end of the semester, the assignment submission time for all subjects. As a result, there was not a wide range of participants for selection, although seven cases was also an ideal number to conduct a multiple case study (Stake, 2013). In addition, it is not an exception to that all volunteer students were occasionally the ones who may have been high-performing, and more autonomous in their study. Secondly, the lack of teacher feedback for some students is also a limitation of the study. These students would provide more reflections and solutions based on the feedback, from which some more LA behaviours could be explored, if such feedback was delivered. Finally, because this is a multiple case study, the findings cannot be generalized as a result for all international EAL first-year students; however, students could follow the writing process and exercise these LA behaviours to enhance their writing skills as well as acknowledge the challenges, to have good preparation for overseas studying.

5.4. Recommendations for future research

The present research focuses on international EAL students who for the first time have come to study in a university in an English speaking country. The study produced some interesting findings on their writing process of approaching a university writing assignment, the most significant challenges they faced during the process, and LA behaviours exercised by these students to overcome these challenges to achieve a good result for their writing assignment. These findings create some curious thoughts in the researcher's mind: "How about native English speaker international students, do they have the same writing process?"; "If non-native students have difficulties in English proficiency, what difficulties may native international students have?"; or "Do they have the same LA behaviours exercised during the writing process?" In addition, the study context happened in an overseas university, thus raising the question of what the findings might be if a study were to be conducted in students' home countries.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

FHS Ethics <fhs.ethics@mq.edu.au>

Fri, May
4, 2:40
PM

to Phil, Cassi, me

Dear Professor Benson,

Re: "Investigating international students' approaches to university writing assignments: An exploration of learner autonomy" (5201800242)

Thank you very much for your response. Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Faculty of Human Sciences Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee and approval has been granted, effective 4th May 2018. This email constitutes ethical approval only.

This research meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The National Statement is available at the following web site:

<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/book/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research>

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Dr Cassi Liardet
Mrs Bao Tram Nguyen
Professor Phil Benson

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports.

Progress Report 1 Due: 4th May 2019
Progress Report 2 Due: 4th May 2020
Progress Report 3 Due: 4th May 2021
Progress Report 4 Due: 4th May 2022
Final Report Due: 4th May 2023

NB. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:

<https://www.mq.edu.au/research/ethics-integrity-and-policies/ethics/human-ethics/resources>

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Sub-Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Sub-Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:

<https://www.mq.edu.au/research/ethics-integrity-and-policies/ethics/human-ethics/resources>

5. Please notify the Sub-Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at the following websites:

<https://www.mq.edu.au/research/ethics-integrity-and-policies/ethics/human-ethics/post-approval>

<https://www.mq.edu.au/research/ethics-integrity-and-policies/ethics/human-ethics/resources/research-ethics>

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this email.

If you need to provide a hard copy letter of approval to an external organisation as evidence that you have approval, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Secretariat at the address below.

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of ethics approval.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Naomi Sweller
Chair
Faculty of Human Sciences
Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee

FHS Ethics

Faculty of Human Sciences Ethics
C5C-17 Wallys Walk L3
Macquarie University, NSW 2109, Australia
T: +61 2 9850 4197 | <http://www.research.mq.edu.au/>
Ethics Forms and Templates

<https://www.mq.edu.au/research/ethics-integrity-and-policies/ethics/human-ethics/resources>

The Faculty of Human Sciences acknowledges the traditional custodians of the Macquarie University Land, the Wattamattageal clan of the Darug nation, whose cultures and customs have nurtured and continue to nurture this land since the Dreamtime. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.



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Appendix 2



- Are you a first-year, undergraduate **international** student?
- Do you want to earn an “easy” **\$ 60**?

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating learner autonomy in approaching a university writing assignment:

“Investigating international students’ approaches to university writing assignments: An exploration of learner autonomy.”

This research study will INVOLVE:

- An online questionnaire which will take approximately 5 minutes; and
- 2 interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes each.

If you agree to participate, you will RECEIVE:

- Gift cards totalling \$60 for completing all the three tasks.

If you would like to participate in this study, please email the researcher directly at the email address given below and include your best contact telephone number.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics and Integrity (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Learner Autonomy Study Bao Tram: 0452 301 076 bao-tram.nguyen@students.mq.edu.au	Learner Autonomy Study Bao Tram: 0452 301 076 bao-tram.nguyen@students.mq.edu.au	Learner Autonomy Study Bao Tram: 0452 301 076 bao-tram.nguyen@students.mq.edu.au	Learner Autonomy Study Bao Tram: 0452 301 076 bao-tram.nguyen@students.mq.edu.au	Learner Autonomy Study Bao Tram: 0452 301 076 bao-tram.nguyen@students.mq.edu.au	Learner Autonomy Study Bao Tram: 0452 301 076 bao-tram.nguyen@students.mq.edu.au	Learner Autonomy Study Bao Tram: 0452 301 076 bao-tram.nguyen@students.mq.edu.au	Learner Autonomy Study Bao Tram: 0452 301 076 bao-tram.nguyen@students.mq.edu.au
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Appendix 3

Screen questions for participant recruitment

1. Are you 1st year student? --> No → STOP
If YES → Question 2
2. Are you international student? (EAL) → No → STOP
If YES → Question 3
3. Did you study at a pathway college, ELICOS in Australia before you started your degree here? Yes → Stop
If No → Question 4
4. Are you required to submit a writing assignment this semester?
If No → STOP
If YES → Question 5
5. Is this your 1st or 2nd semester at MQ? → Prefer the 1st semester

Appendix 4

Department of Linguistics
Faculty of Human Sciences
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109



Phone: +61 (0)2 9850 6704
Fax: +61 (0)2 9850 9190
Email: philip.benson@mq.edu.au
cassi.liardet@mq.edu.au

Chief Investigator: Prof. Philip Benson, Linguistics
Co-Investigator: Dr. Cassi Liardét, Lecturer, Linguistics
Co-investigator: Bao Tram Nguyen, MRes candidate, Linguistics

Participant Information and Consent Form

Name of Project: *Investigating international students' approaches to university writing assignments: An exploration of learner autonomy*

Dear Student,

You are invited to participate our project investigating university learner autonomy, sharing your experiences on preparing university assignments. The purpose of the study is to investigate the processes in which international students approach a university assignment.

The study is being conducted by Prof. Philip Benson (Chief Investigator), Dr. Cassi Liardét (Co-Investigator) and Bao Tram Nguyen (Co-Investigator, MRes student). This project is designed for Bao Tram Nguyen's Masters by Research study under the supervision of Prof. Philip Benson and Dr. Cassi Liardét of the Department of Linguistics. Contact details are as follows:

Prof. Philip Benson (Chief investigator)
Email: Philip.benson@mq.edu.au
Office: 12 Second Way, Rm 514, Macquarie University, NSW, 2109.
Phone: 02 9850 9352

Dr. Cassi Liardét (co-investigator)
Email: Cassi.Liardet@mq.edu.au
Office: 12 Second Way, Rm 518, Macquarie University, NSW, 2109.
Phone: 02 9850 6704

Bao Tram Nguyen (co-investigator)
Email: bao-tram.nguyen@students.mq.edu.au
Office: 2 First Walk, Rm 517, Macquarie University, NSW, 2109.

If you decide to participate, you will first be asked to complete an 11-question questionnaire that should take 5-10 minutes. Second, you will be asked to engage in a 14-question "post-submission"

interview to be scheduled at a time after you have submitted a major assignment for one of your classes. The interview will last between 25-30 minutes. Finally, once you receive feedback on your assignment, you will be asked to complete another 5-question interview that should last approximately 20-25 minutes.

The questionnaire will ask you about your background information, the “post-submission interview” will ask you about the processes you followed when preparing your assignment and the “post-feedback interview” will ask you to reflect on the feedback you receive. The interviews will be audio-recorded for purposes of accuracy.

To compensate you for your time, if you complete the questionnaire, you will receive a \$10 gift card. If you complete the “post-submission interview”, you will receive a \$20 gift card. If you also complete the “post-feedback interview”, you will receive an additional \$30 gift card.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate and if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

A summary of the results of the project are available to you on request “via email” at baotram.nguyen@students.mq.edu.au

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential, except as required by law. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. If you choose to participate, you will be assigned a number to protect your anonymity; only the chief investigator (Prof. Philip Benson) and two co-investigators (Dr. Cassi Liardét and Bao Tram Nguyen) will have access to your name.

I, _____ (*participant’s name*) have read and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

☐ I agree to have my interview audio recorded. I understand the recording will be saved on the investigator’s password-protected desktop and will be used for transcription purposes only (i.e., the recording will not be played for anyone else).

☐ I **do not agree** to have my interviews audio recorded.

Participant’s Name: _____
(Block letters)

Participant’s Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator’s Name: _____
(Block letters)

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics and Integrity (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

INVESTIGATOR'S (PARTICIPANT'S) COPY

Appendix 5

Department of Linguistics
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MACQUARIE
University

Chief investigators: Professor Philip Benson, Linguistics
Co-investigator: Dr. Cassi Liardet, Linguistics
Co-investigator: Bao Tram Nguyen, MRes candidate, Linguistics

Questionnaire

Project Title: *Investigating international students' approaches to university writing assignments: An exploration of learner autonomy*

Dear participants,

Thank you for participating in our study. This research project aims to investigate the processes in which international students approach their university writing assignments. Please read each question carefully and write your answers in the given blanks.

I. General background information.

1. Your full name: _____
2. Your age: _____
3. Preferred email address: _____
4. Phone number: _____
5. Where are you from? _____
6. What language do you speak at home? (i.e. What is your dominant language?) _____
7. How long have you lived in Australia? _____

II. Education information.

8. What major are you studying? _____

9. How long have you been studying English? _____

10. Have you taken the IELTS test? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what was your IELTS score? _____

If no, have you taken another equivalent language proficiency exam? _____

Please give details _____

11. Do you have to submit a written assignment for any of your courses this semester?

☐ YES

☐ NO

If **YES**,

What is the name of the course? _____

What type of the assignment is it? _____

What is the due date? _____

When will you receive feedback on this assignment? _____

Thank you for your time and cooperation!

Appendix 6

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Phone: +61 (0)2 9850 8740
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Chief investigators: Professor Philip Benson, Linguistics
Co-investigator: Dr. Cassi Liardet, Linguistics
Co-investigator: Bao Tram Nguyen, MRes candidate, Linguistics

POST-SUBMISSION STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Project Title: *Investigating international students' approaches to university writing assignments: An exploration of learner autonomy*

The following interview questions aim to explore the processes through which the participants approach their assignments. It is divided into 3 clusters of questions.

Cluster 1: Assignment requirement

1. What is your assignment about (i.e. task, question)?
2. What are the requirements of the assignment? (e.g. word count, report, essay, etc.)
3. How did your teacher prepare you for the assignment? (e.g. classroom activities, model assignment, etc.)
4. Did you need to submit a first or second draft to your teacher before the submission?

Cluster 2: Process of doing the assignment

1. How do you feel about your assignment? (e.g. unsure, confident, etc.)
2. When did you start to work on this assignment?
3. In total how much time did you spend on this assignment?

4. What did you do to prepare this assignment? Tell me about your process? What did you do first? Second? Etc.
5. Did you ask anyone for help on the assignment? If so, how did they help you?

Cluster 3: Challenges and solutions for completing the assignment

1. What challenges did you face during the process of preparing this task? What did you find most difficult?
2. How did you overcome these challenges?
3. What do you find most difficult about studying in Australia compared to studying in your home country?

Cluster 4: Exercising learner autonomy

1. If you had more time, what else would you do before handing in this assignment?
2. If you were giving advice to a new student, what would you tell them to do to be successful on this assignment?

Appendix 7

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Phone: +61 (0)2 9850 8740
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Chief investigators: Professor Philip Benson, Linguistics
Co-investigator: Dr. Cassi Liardet, Linguistics
Co-investigator: Bao Tram Nguyen, MRes candidate, Linguistics

POST-FEEDBACK STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Project Title: *Investigating international students' approaches to university writing assignments: An exploration of learner autonomy*

These questions will be asked after the participants receive feedback on their writing assignment

1. What feedback did you get on the assignment? Do you understand the comments/ feedback you received?
2. How do you feel about the feedback? Is it what you expected?
3. Do you think you deserve the score you earned?
4. If you had a chance to do it over again, what would you do differently?
5. From these experiences, how will you approach and/ or prepare for assignments in the future?

Appendix 8

The Participants' descriptions

Ariel came from Vietnam, a non-English speaking country, but she had more than 10 years studying English at school as a foreign language. Her English proficiency was at band 7.0 of the IELTS score. She had lived in Australia for 4 months and was a first-year-undergraduate student at Macquarie University majored in Marketing. The unit she would mention in the interview was Marketing Fundamentals. She shared her experiences on preparing an assignment named 'marketing portfolio'. This was her first semester at Macquarie University.

Elsa was also from Vietnam and had spent 13 years studying English. She was 20 years of age. She had lived in Australia for one year and a half. At the time of doing the interview, Elsa was in her first semester at Macquarie University as an undergraduate student majoring in Psychology. Her IELTS score was also at band 7. However, different from student one, this student had spent one year studying a pathway program on business at Macquarie University International College.

Anna was another Vietnamese participant studying Professional Accounting at Macquarie University. She was an exchange student between a university in Vietnam and Macquarie University. Before coming to Vietnam, she had spent her first academic year in Vietnam and then she came to Australia for the remaining three years of the program. At the time of the interview, she had lived in Australia for 3 months for the first semester at Macquarie University. She also had learnt English for 14 years as a foreign language and now her English IETS score was band 7.5.

Cinderella was the fourth Vietnamese participant of the study, who also spent one academic year studying Professional Accounting in Vietnam as an exchange program between the two universities. She had lived in Australia for 4 months to start her first semester at Macquarie University. Similar to the three previous participants, she also learnt English for more than ten years at school and now her English proficiency was at band 7.0 of the IELTS test.

Rapunzel came from the Maldives where the citizens used Dhivehi as their home language. Like in Vietnam, students in this country had learnt English as a foreign language at school and this student had learnt English for more than ten years. She was 21 and was a first-year student at Macquarie University studying Professional Accounting. She had lived in Australia for 11 months

and this was her second semester of the first academic year. She did not take the IELTS test but had achieved the Cambridge level that enabled her to study at Macquarie University.

Carol was very different from the others because she was much older than other participants at 28 years of age and had already obtained her first university degree in her own country. Thus, she was more experienced and mature. She was from Iran. Her home language was Farsi (Persian). English is also her foreign language and it was taught at school as well. However, she almost forgot it after she graduated from her first degree. Then, when she decided to study the second university degree in Australia, she started to learn English again to adapt the English entry to Macquarie University. She had lived in Australia for 20 months. She spent one year in studying English to take the IELTS exam, and her English proficiency now was at band 7.0. This was her second semester at Macquarie University majoring in Medical Science, but until this second semester she had no writing assignment to do.

Pinocchio was also a special case because he had more experience in doing writing assignments in his major. Because he was in an exchange program, he spent the first two academic years in his country, Colombia, and another two more years at Macquarie University to obtain the university degree. He had come to Australia for 4 months to study his first semester of the third academic year in Biology. He spoke Spanish as his first language. He spent 2 years in studying English and achieved a band of 7.5 for the IELTS score.

Appendix 9

Instrument Descriptions

Questionnaire

The questionnaires contained 11 closed-item questions (see Appendix 5) with some more sub-questions used to ask for more information relating to the chosen answer in the main question. There were two sections asking participants to provide their general background information and education information. The first seven questions focused on getting each participant's name, age, nationality, home language, contact details, and time living in Australia, to make sure that they are international EAL students at Macquarie University and had just come to Australia for their first-year studying in the university. The second section aimed to explore participants' study programs in detail, their major, time in studying English, English proficiency, especially information on the writing assignment they were doing such as kinds of assignment, what unit, date for submitting, and receiving feedback. These were significant questions because they would help the researcher decide whether each participant was eligible for the study. The chosen ones should have a writing assignment which had not been submitted or had just been submitted but for which they had not yet received the feedback. The reason was they had to participate in two interviews in the following stages: a post-submission one, and a post-feedback one.

Post-submission interview

The post-submitting interview was a set of 14 questions (see Appendix 6) divided into four clusters comprising: assignment requirement; process of doing assignment; challenges and solutions in completing the assignment; and exercise of learner autonomy. The questions were designed strongly based on the purposes of the study, exploring the process and challenges of approaching a university writing assignment of international EAL students and examining how learner autonomy was exercised and how it influenced the whole assignment preparation process, which led to learners' success in their study. Therefore, the first four questions in Cluster one aimed to investigate the assignment that participants needed to submit. The five questions in cluster two focused on exploring the process that each participant followed when they prepared for their assignment. These questions also allowed the researcher to examine students' learner autonomy behaviors. Cluster three aimed to question which challenges students faced during the writing

process and the ways in which they solved these types of problems, from which some more learner autonomy behaviors would also be explored. Cluster four is a predicted question section in which participants shared their reflection on the process of the writing preparation they had done and the reason why they earned such confidence in their paper.

Post-feedback interview

This second interview included 5 questions focused on asking the participants' result of their writing assignment (score or specific feedback), and their reflection on the results and their experiences which they would apply for future writing assignments for better results. This interview was conducted as soon as the participants received the feedback on their assignment. The interview happened at the same place as the post-submitting one and was also audio-recorded for the purpose of accuracy. The approximate time for this interview was about 15-20 minutes.