

Title of Project:

An exploration into the writing ability of generation 1.5 and international second language writers: A mixed methods approach

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Abstract:

A growing body of research suggests that the writing ability of international second language learners (IL2) and US-resident second language learners, also referred to as Generation 1.5 (G1.5), differs, despite a dearth of substantial empirical evidence supporting such claims. The present study provides much-needed empirical evidence concerning the nature of similarities and differences in the writing ability of these two groups of learners.

A mixed-methods research design was adopted to examine IL2 and G1.5 learners' writing ability from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Many-facet Rasch measurement (MFRM) procedures were used to analyze learners' writing scores from three raters in five different components designed to represent the construct of writing ability. A whole-group MFRM analysis indicated that the IL2 learners, as a group, performed better than the G1.5 learners. Separate-group MFRM analyses revealed that the two groups had opposing strengths and weaknesses in two components of writing ability. Specifically, the IL2 learners performed best in grammatical control yet poorly in sociopragmatic control, and the G1.5 learners performed best in sociopragmatic control yet poorly in grammatical control.

Subsequent qualitative analyses included an in-depth examination of a subset of IL2 and G1.5 learners' writing, with a particular focus on grammatical errors and use of sociopragmatic markers. Findings revealed that the G1.5 group's grammatical errors reflected a lack of awareness of certain grammatical features of academic writing. Likewise, the IL2 group's use of sociopragmatic markers reflected a tendency to draw on personal opinions and other non-academic sources in their writing.

Considering both the quantitative and qualitative findings in light of one another, the results showed that both IL2 and G1.5 learners' writing difficulties stemmed from a lack of adherence to different aspects of academic writing. Such findings are valuable for writing program administrators and writing teachers in search of empirical evidence as to the types of writing instruction that students with different L2 backgrounds may require.

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