The Pragmatics of Korean University Practical English Composition: Current Deficiencies, Preferred Genres, and Effective Learning Strategies[*]

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Abstract

The significance of pragmatics relating to writing acquisition within South Korean universities is apparent as practical English writing courses are becoming increasingly more popular. This signifies ambitions by administration, students, and society as a whole to acquire real-world compositional skills. Unfortunately, writing instruction has been neglected thus creating contextual production deficiencies. Furthermore, underlying pragmatic factors affect perceived genre practicality, topic relevancy, and overall authenticity, which can decrease motivation. Therefore, this study will first reveal the current inadequacies of South Korean English composition instruction. It will then explore the shared values and social perceptions of practical English writing by revealing the student desired writing genres through the use of an in-depth survey. Lastly, the results of learner preferred academic situations will be examined by means of student interviews. The results will allow an educator to design practical English writing courses that are more relevant to their learners thus increasing student compositional competencies.

Key words: *Practical English writing, pragmatics, EFL, writing development*

I. Introduction

In modern language education, it is becoming difficult to ignore pragmatics and its relationship with English as a Foreign Language (EFL) composition. This association is significant since the ability to write in practical or real world situations is a means to effective communication in our English obsessed world. This is due to the fact that English has developed into a language that functions as a lingua franca. Seongja (2008) describes this linguistic preoccupation by stating that "English has evolved into an international language for global communication.

While 350 million people speak English as a mother tongue, 400 million speak the language as a second language, and 750 million speak it as a foreign language" (p. 371). To further illustrate this movement, Kachru and Nelson (2001) state that "there is little question that English is the most widely taught, read, and spoken language that the world has ever known" (p. 1). In addition, Guo and Beckett (2007) assert that "English has become the dominant global language of communication, business, aviation, entertainment, diplomacy and the internet" (p. 117). Finally, Akinwamide (2012) maintains that the "English Language can be said to dominate among the four to five thousand languages in the world" (p. 16). Clearly, the span of this vernacular is constantly growing, signifying a trend that is not going to dissipate any time soon.

Therefore, it essential that pragmatics is considered when developing practical English writing courses in order to prepare students for the rigours and demands of real world English composition. Central to this concept involves first defining the term 'pragmatics' and then creating a definition for the pragmatics of practical English writing. The Oxford Dictionary (2013) defines pragmatics as "dealing with things sensibly and realistically in a way that is based on practical rather than theoretical considerations". De Villiers (2004) claims "pragmatics concerns the functional use of language in communication and discourse" (p. 57). Furthermore, Nino and Snow (1999) explain that "pragmatics is the study of the use of language in context for the purpose of communication" (p. 1). Evidently, the precise definition of this term is difficult to conceptualize as it is viewed in different ways by varying scholars and practitioners.

In contrast, the definition of practical is "of or concerned with the actual doing or use of something rather than with theory and ideas" (Oxford Dictionary, 2013). A second definition is "of, relating to, or manifested in practice or action: not theoretical or ideal" (Merriam-Webster, 2013). A final consideration relates to how practical can be connected to the term authentic in regard to how they both exhibit notions of concrete realism. Thus, we can tie the definition of practical to "…the use of materials that were not originally developed for pedagogical purposes…Such materials are often thought to contain more realistic and natural examples of language use than those found in textbooks and other specially developed teaching materials" (Richards, Platt & Weber, 1985, p. 43).

When considering all the definitions presented, we see that both pragmatic and practical are comparable in nature when linked to composition in that they can relate to the use of writing in realistic or real life situations. For the purpose of this

study, the definition of the pragmatics of practical English writing will be defined as classroom genres that are authentic, functional, genuine, and useful in real-life situations. Furthermore, this definition relates to the actual classroom topics and learning preferences that students feel are essential to their future success.

To associate the presented definitions of pragmatic and practical to the specific genres, settings, and learning strategies in this study, it must be noted that what a student views as relevant or pragmatic is directly linked to the intrinsic student perceptions of what is recognized as practical. For example, a student who finds the presented English composition topic relevant to their future writing plans will see more of a pragmatic value associated to that genre. Conversely, if the student does not see the relevance of the writing topic in their future plans, then they will have a diminished value of the pragmatics related to the presented genre. The goal is to teach genres that increase pragmatic relevance among students, which contributions to their intrinsic motivation to learn the presented topics. The higher the accepted pragmatic value of the practical English genres and settings, the better students are able to succeed in learning topics that are relevant to their lives. Thus, the association between pragmatics and practical English writing is a relationship that needs careful attention in order to satisfy the learners writing goals.

Previous academic research reveals that there have been minimal investigations or discussions related to the pragmatics of practical English writing in EFL contexts. Thus, this paper is innovative as it will first provide a brief historical summary of English composition instruction within South Korea. It will then explore Korean students' shared cultural ideals and communal discernments related to practical English writing. To conclude, the student desired learning circumstances, genres, and atmospheres will be examined.

II. Historical English Composition in South Korea

Since the introduction of formal English education in South Korea during the 1880's, developmental and instructional foci related to writing have become rather narrow in scope. To illustrate this deficiency, Ahn (1995) emphasized that "writing has long been neglected in English language teaching in Korea" (p. 73) and, more specifically, he continues by stating that in the English classroom, "the writing exercises take the form of dictation, manipulation, translation, and the construction

of isolated sentences" (Ahn, 1995, p. 73). By the time Korean students enter university, they have normally been taught a minimal range of practical composition styles or genres beyond basic sentence construction. This impedes their capability to produce various writing genres when required in their post-secondary English composition classes as, in their previous studies, "little attention is paid in the classroom to developing students' ability to write at a paragraph or discourse level" (Ahn, 1995, p. 73).

To further demonstrate, traditional writing instruction has concentrated almost entirely on language rules as "the first five national English curriculums (1955-1991) for secondary schools in Korea heavily focused on using the Grammar Translation Method" (Hwang, 2012, p. 8). By concentrating on grammar and translation devices, the important skills of writing production or output have been disregarded as students emphasize only grammatical precision. As Freiermuth (2005) states: "writing presents difficulties for non-native speakers of English for a number of reasons; grammatical accuracy issues are a constant focus" (p. 16). This limited compositional emphasis results in reduced awareness of how to write in a variety of different genres and formats.

Such a view is supported by Tyson (2000) who states: "the emphasis in English composition courses at Korean universities has traditionally been on the correct use of grammar with little regard for other higher-level concerns such as organization, development of ideas, and writing for a specific audience" (p. 4). It is these advanced level matters and writing competencies that are lacking. Furthermore, this instructional concentration on grammar and how to use it correctly in basic sentences is not going to develop practical or useful writing skills as students are too concerned about perfecting their grammar. This methodology mimics Toh's findings in Thailand where "the teachers' preoccupation with grammar, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary suggests that language is viewed very much as structure and not as meaning or communication" (2000, p. 102).

Having such an emphasis on grammatical structures has evolved into a case where "writing has been neglected while reading has been emphasized in Korean high school English classrooms" (Lee, 2012. p. 60). Tyson (2000) maintains that "as a result, students are often not well prepared for the kinds of writing tasks they encounter in the real world" (p. 4). Unfortunately, a balanced teaching methodology for English language learning has not occurred which is apparent as learners enter university with a lack of how to write in different practical English

genres such as formal or informal emails, different letter formats, various essay styles, and resumes to name a few.

This problem is exasperated as Korean students strive to merely memorize the specific English required to pass this language section in their College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) during their final year of high school. To demonstrate, "most Korean students memorized a lot of English vocabulary, idioms, and linguistic forms because they were tested with a written exam that focused on many English rules and words" (Hwang, 2012, p. 5). The problem with this approach is that "the Korean educational style - rote memorization and regurgitation - may work well for math and science, but not for English" (Stevens, 2009, para. 5). This method is ineffective in developing wide-ranging English compositional skills as writing requires more than just the memorization of various grammar rules, vocabulary, idioms, and linguistic elements. It involves the ability to combine all these essentials to produce functional writing skills that are required in practical situations. This synthesis aspect of composition including the ability to assemble all the grammatical and structural pieces together into cohesive pragmatic and practical arrangements is what is missing in Korean English education.

In analyzing the specific shortcomings of the CSAT, Frain (2009) found that it "…has an approximate 20% weighting in English but currently tests only listening and reading skills" (p. 4). This statistic is alarming and further investigation reveals that the English section specifically focuses on the receptive skills of listening (26%) and reading (56%) leaving the important productive skills such as writing (10%) and speaking (8%) as marginalized components of this important assessment (Kwon, 2003, p.10). Furthermore, these receptive skills represent an alarming 82% of the CSAT English section while the production skills represents only 18%. Therefore, Korean high school students spend countless hours studying and memorizing receptive English skills and as a result, have poor productive compositional abilities when they enter university. Frain (2009) provides an ideal interpretation in the Korean context when he states that "…the input macro skills of listening and reading are preferred to the output skills of speaking and writing" (p. 2). When learning English, productive compositional skills are being neglected because they are not heavily weighted in this required and important examination.

Traditionally, South Korea has been recognized as a competitive and test-driven society with student results on the CSAT determining their eligibility to pursue post-secondary studies in addition to the possibility of future job prospects. Kwon (2003) characterizes the situation by pointing out that "as is well known in

Korea, the CSAT exam is considered very important because it can determine many things regarding one's status, job opportunities, and quality of life" (p. 10). High school students focus only on what will be tested while ignoring the important productive English skills such as writing as it is not part of this examination and has minimal influence on their CSAT scores. In a further examination of the inefficiencies of the CSAT, Hwang (2012) claims that "writing and grammar ability is tested through the reading comprehension test indirectly. Students are given paragraphs with phrases removed and they can logically choose the correct multiple-choice answer" (p. 11). This is clearly not an effective measure of writing ability as the productive aspect is essentially non-existent in a multiple-choice format such as this.

As a result of the main writing focus being grammar-translation and receptive language skills during their secondary studies, Korean students are unable to produce diverse compositional genres related to common practical English writing formats. Regardless, they do express a desire as "…the rapid industrialization of the country where competence in English is required more than ever, there have been growing demands from students and society that college English focus on developing competence in practical English" (Kwon, 2000, p. 1). This creates a production problem as Kim (2008) explains that "in higher education, students are often required to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding through various forms of academic writing, including short essays, book reviews, reports, term papers, exams, theses, and dissertations" (Kim, 2008, p. 106). Students are unable to produce these types of texts, which is a problem because having a high level of compositional competence is important in becoming proficient in a variety of English writing situations.

In response, many universities and colleges now offer practical English writing courses that attempt to teach students how to write in everyday situations. From Kwon's extensive research into the types of English writing courses offered at Korean universities and colleges, we see that English composition, practical writing, academic writing, in addition to creative English writing were the most common among 37 different tertiary institutions in Korea (2003, p.7). These courses are readily available and enrollment is consistent. This epitomizes a trend towards post-secondary compositional competencies that are more pragmatic and realistic to student's needs in a practical sense.

The previously stated hindrances prohibit development in the pragmatics of compositional curriculum. In addition to these issues, practical English writing

could include hundreds of potential genres, each having their own merits, or related student desire. For example:

Practical writing covers a wide range of subject matters including advertisements, resumes, summaries, book reports, instructions, letters of applying for studying chance, application letters, messages, notices, lost and found notices, essays, invitation letters, business letters, abstracts, experiment reports and so on. (Liu, 2010, p.82)

Given such an array of possible genres, what specifically do Korean university students want to learn in practical English writing courses? How does an educator come to realize the student perceived practicality of each genre? More importantly, what is practical English writing and how does one create effectual curriculums? These are the defining pragmatical questions every educator must consider before designing these courses. The answers are inherently based on intercultural pragmatics, in addition to the intrinsic goals and values unique to the target students.

Therefore, practical English writing instructors in this context need to be conscious of pragmatics as "…finding ways to effectively develop Korean L2 learners' writing abilities is an urgent issue for L2 writing researchers to address in this new trend emphasizing the importance of communication" (Shin, 2008, p. 3). By providing students with the tools and knowledge required to compose in genuine English environments, they will be better able to function in a variety of compositional situations. Thus, uncovering the pragmatic aspects of writing will open the door to solidifying productive English composition by revealing the most effective discourse methods that will increase student success.

III. Literature Review

Student perspectives in regard to practical English writing will vary based on the real circumstances they encounter every day or plan to confront in the future. If the presented genre is not related to their perception of practical, then dissuasion can occur. To illustrate, Freiermuth (2005) states that "…'students' goals, which may be exceedingly difficult to identify, often go unrecognized by the teacher. This can result in the creation of assignments that are of little interest to students"

(p. 17). Additionally, "Korean university students enrolled in writing classes have a variety of majors, and various reasons for attending the class, such as further academic studying and improved job opportunity" (Kim Y. & Kim J., 2005, p. 3). Given such varied educational profiles and intrinsic motivators, the development of writing curriculum that is truly practical in students' minds can be arduous.

Academic aspects, such as the year of study, can also play an influential role in the desirability of writing topics. A senior student who is in their final year of studies will have a different view of topic relevancy compared to a freshman. Seniors are typically more interested in workplace related writing as they are soon going to be part of the labor force and may need to use English in occupational settings. Furthermore, freshmen are normally more interested in the academic aspects of practical English writing as they may have several more years of English related courses. Nevertheless, Fredericks (2012) explains that, "writing is an essential communication skill, and students who communicate effectively through writing have advantages in school and in their personal lives. These advantages will be invaluable even later as they enter the workforce" (p. 24). Compositional proficiency in practical situations is thus a key to success and something that must first meet the needs of each learners' actual ideals.

Regardless of these underlying motivators, students want to learn genre variety in these writing classes. This is in line with Ismail's results in that "the overall mean indicated that students had high perceptions about the importance of EFL writing skill for their academic study and their future career" (2011, p. 77). Therefore, emphasis on the authenticity of presented genres is crucial because "…a genuine writing task should place a learner in situations that require authentic use of language to communicate" (Ismail, 2011, p. 73). The focus should be on "…providing students with sufficient opportunities to write texts, which are meaningful to the students, and which allow students to visualize and write for the intended readers" (Freiermuth, 2005, p. 16). When a task is authentic and intrinsically meaningful, it becomes more motivating, which leads to increased writing procurement.

To demonstrate the comprehensive possibilities of genres that students may find practical in a writing class, we must understand and accept that the pragmatics of genre can differ between the cultural, social, and age variations among students. As Ismail states: "students usually bring their assumptions and beliefs about what a writing course should offer them and in what way" (2011, p. 74). He continues by expressing how pragmatics is essential in writing curriculum development as

"research on students' perceptions and beliefs has revealed that knowing students' perceptions and beliefs can play a crucial role in developing the right program to meet their needs" (Ismail, 2011, p. 74).

Additionally, awareness of student expectations should be considered as Kim Y. and Kim J. (2005) state that "in order to achieve appropriate classroom methodologies in Korean contexts, we need to identify what Korean university students expect from writing classes and what goals and objectives they have when taking Korean university writing classes" (p. 13). Satisfying the requirements of the learner assumes topics covered in class will be intrinsically relevant. Hwang (2012) raises a worthy notion by stating how "English lessons should not be teacher-centered, instead they should be learner-centered, focusing on students' wants and needs" (p. 7). Moving away from teacher preferred topics to student desired genres is the key to effective writing instruction.

By including the most desired student topics, learners will be more inspired and motivated to acquire the material. Nation (2013) clarifies this notion by stating "a well-thought-out writing program gives the learners practice in writing about the topics which are useful for them and, where appropriate, covers a wide range of topics" (p. 77). Providing a diverse selection of student desired writing genres is a clear indication of an operative practical English writing course where students want to be in class and gain valuable compositional knowledge. As Ismail (2011) states: "writing skills can be developed when the learners' interests are recognized and when they are exposed to situations where they can produce an authentic piece of writing" (p. 73).

As a result, as English writing classes in Korean universities have historically focused heavily on the grammar-translation method, students are unable to compose different styles of writing when required. Tyson (1999) confirms this by stating that "in Korea, as in many other Asian countries, the focus in teaching EFL (English as a Foreign Language) composition at the university level tends to be almost entirely on grammatical correctness" (p. 1). Having spent over ten years learning receptive English grammar skills, productive writing abilities among Korean university students are lacking. Therefore, the investigation outlined in the subsequent sections attempts to identify how practical English writing courses are vital for EFL students to become proficient writers who can effectively produce a variety of intrinsically pragmatic and practical genres.

IV. Methodology

Research Questions

The central questions in this study are pragmatical as they seek to answer what Korean university students deem practical in compositional courses in addition to what learning situations and environments they prefer. More specifically, what actual classroom topics or genres are most popular and what ideal authentic classroom activities or learning strategies do they desire.

Context and Participants

The subjects in this study were 89 students (31 male, 57 female) studying at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS) during the 2012 school year. Their age range was from 19 to 27 years with the average being 23.6. The reported academic specializations varied widely from numerous language majors, business and economics, to English literature students as well. Of the total sample size, 39% were in their first year, 20% were in their second, 14% were in their third, and 26% were in their final year of study. Their declared English levels varied from high intermediate to high advanced levels with their average Test of English for international Communication (TOEIC) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores being 883 and 104 respectively. Most participants stated that they have been studying English for 7-10 years with 77% of respondents replying to this timeframe. The majority of the participants previously studied English in high school in addition to private language institutes in Korea.

As HUFS is the most prestigious language focused post-secondary institution in South Korea, prospective students must receive high marks on the CSAT in order to be accepted. To achieve this, these participants have endured additional English language studies apart from public school education prior to entering HUFS. Even though they have been studying English for such a long time, their writing skills related to diversity of genres were quite low as they reported that simple sentence construction, basic essay writing, and grammatical precision were their only areas of familiarity.

Measurements and Testing Instruments

The present study employed two research instruments: quantitative data collection using a detailed survey and qualitative data collection involving individual interviews with selected students.

The structured survey contained mostly closed-ended questions with fixed response options. It was administered to deduce the desired practical English writing topics, preferred learning contexts, and to understand the demographics of the participants. Moreover, it was designed to outline the target participants by determining to what extent they would respond strongly to the given questions. Possible answer choices were rated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Appendix A).

The focused (semi-structured) individual interviews were conducted using seven students at the university with minimal disturbances in order to reduce distractions and increase willingness to communicate. The chosen participants for the interviews were selected to include a variety of majors, English abilities, years of study, and ability to communicate. Open-ended questions were designed to gain further insight into student responses, themes, and outcomes gathered from the surveys (Appendix B). The main goal was to understand the student's views in regard to practical English writing and further enhance the ideas deduced from the survey results. Each interview lasted for approximately 15 minutes and all correspondence was recorded in addition to notes having been taken to be used in further research analysis.

Research Design and Procedure

The method used to investigate the main research questions involved administering the survey, analyzing the results, and then conducting the interviews. The survey was designed using the findings in Liu's study related to effectual topics in practical English writing classes (2010, p. 82). From this, 42 questions were created which measured three distinctive components.

The first section was entitled 'Preferred Situations and Settings', which included questions related to what practical English writing means to students. It directly linked to contexts such as everyday life, workplace, or a variety of these.

The second section was 'Actual Classroom Topics and Genres' and was connected to what students found most interesting, useful, or important to their

success. It included a list of 26 different practical English writing genres of which students were required to rate their importance or relative usefulness towards their language development.

The third section, 'Ideal Authentic Classroom Activities', identified the preferred learning situations and environments that students felt benefited them. It included nine different learning styles that students were required to rate based on personal preferences. All results were electronically tabulated using Microsoft Excel.

In the final assessment, each interview question was carefully designed to gain further insight into the overall themes and trends identified in the survey results. The seven students chosen were from a practical English writing class and were selected based on the criteria discussed in the previous section.

V. Results and Analysis

After carefully investigating the collected data, many interesting themes began to appear. Some were expected outcomes while others contradicted initial predictions. The presentation of the results will be divided into measurement sections in order to focus on each element separately.

Preferred Situations and Settings

Investigating the results from the preferred situations and settings that students desired, it was found that the participants favored learning genres related to the following circumstances: real-world (social and every day writing), occupational (workplace correspondence), and academic (school composition). Students were unanimous in agreeing that these were the most important with 79, 67, and 61 out of a total of 89 students who agreed or strongly agreed. This represents an 89, 75, and 69 percent response rate to the above circumstances respectively.

Combining the above areas proved to be equally essential to the participants as they indicated that a variety of the above situations would be beneficial to them in a practical English writing class. The results verified that 75 out of 89 students agreed or strongly agreed that variety is their preferred learning situation which represents 84% who would favor this in their practical English writing classroom.

Actual Classroom Topics and Subjects

In examining the specific genres that students would prefer to learn in practical English writing courses, the results were ranked from the most to least important based on percentage that agreed and strongly agreed (Table 1). Subsequently, subjects 1-10 showed a positive response rate of 64% or higher who agreed. This means that the majority of the students in this study believed that these are the most important genres to learn in their practical English writing class.

Looking at the particulars, both academic and occupational genres prevailed as job references (79%), formal writing styles (78%), critiques (73%), business English related documents (72%), and speeches and presentations (71%) were chosen as preferred subjects.

As for the genres that students did not want to learn in this type of class, students reported that newspaper articles (40%), personal letters (40%), fiction texts (45%), taking lecture notes (46%), and APA or MLA formatting (51%) were the least important.

Table 1: Most requested practical English writing genres[1]

		SA	A	N	D	SD	Agreed	Disagreed
1	Job reference letters	15	55	12	6	0	79%	7%
2	Formal writing styles	21	48	15	2	2	78%	4%
3	Critiques	20	45	15	7	1	73%	9%
4	Business English related documents	18	46	18	5	1	72%	7%
5	Speeches and presentations	20	43	19	5	1	71%	7%
6	Academic essays	9	52	25	0	2	69%	2%
7	Resumes and cover letters	18	42	19	9	0	67%	10%
8	Current event opinion papers	13	45	23	7	0	65%	8%
9	Learning common grammatical errors	13	44	22	7	2	64%	10%
10	Proof-reading and editing skills	11	46	26	4	1	64%	6%
11	Summaries of written text	10	44	21	11	2	61%	15%
12	University applications and entrance exams	7	45	27	7	2	58%	10%
13	Travel or holiday related materials	9	42	24	10	3	57%	15%
14	Editorials or opinion papers	6	44	26	10	2	56%	13%
15	Book reports and summaries	10	40	24	10	4	56%	16%
16	Common daily writing materials	12	38	29	7	2	56%	10%
17	Daily reflective journals	11	38	25	10	4	55%	16%
18	Letters of complaint	5	44	28	9	2	55%	12%
19	Casual writing styles	6	43	25	13	1	55%	16%
20	Research papers	10	38	31	6	3	54%	10%
21	Reviews for TV shows, movies, or music	11	37	25	13	2	54%	17%
22	APA or MLA formatting	9	36	24	16	9	51%	28%
23	Taking lecture notes	8	33	31	11	5	46%	18%
24	Fiction texts	11	29	30	14	4	45%	20%
25	Personal letters	7	29	34	16	2	40%	20%
26	Newspaper articles	11	25	31	17	4	40%	24%

[1]The Likert Scale of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neutral (N), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD) was utilized to determine student responses in the survey.

Ideal Authentic Classroom Activities

The classroom activities that students felt they learn best from revealed interesting results. It was found that students preferred working on activities alone rather than in groups. Furthermore, students would rather complete writing assignments using a traditional pen and paper method as opposed to using a computer to type.

It also seems that students would prefer to listen to a lecture about a genre, use hands-on textbook activities to complete assignments, and work alone in addition to after class in order to finalize assignments.

Student Interviews

Although the results from the interviews exhibited some intriguing findings, they also confirmed some initial presumptions. To begin with, students in Korea typically do not learn any type of writing genres except for basic essay composition from elementary school to the end of their high school English studies. They expressed that they do not understand the structure required to compose an effective English email or formal letter in addition to the other genres of practical English writing presented.

Moreover, all students agreed that what practical English writing means is dependent on the year of study or future goals of each student. For example, a learner that is close to graduation would be interested in job related or workplace compositions. In contrast, a student who is in their first year would be more interested in learning how to write essays or other related academic materials.

After further discussion, it was found that one of the main reasons many students are learning English writing at the university level is to have a better chance at getting a high TOEIC score, which will allow them to work at one of the major Korean companies such as Samsung, LG, or Hyundai. This is verified by Mikio (2008) who states, "English ability is connected directly to good jobs and good universities. It is not uncommon for the score of English tests, such as TOEIC, to play a crucial role at the time of a student entering a company" (p. 387). These coveted positions are extremely competitive in Korea with thousands of applicants vying for only a few positions. Thus, greater English writing competencies will give potential candidates a competitive advantage when it comes time to graduate and get a job. In essence, "English enjoys a predominant

foreign-language status in Korea" (Ahn, 1995, p. 71) where proficiency requirements for graduating university students and the continual expansion of language acquisition programs within Korea signifies a need to further enhance the writing abilities of these students.

Lastly, all students from the interviews strongly agreed that learning new practical English genres are very important and something that they value deeply in their education. They also pointed out that they are unfamiliar with these types of genres and hope to continue learning more in their future courses.

VI. Discussion and Recommendations

This study set out with the aim of assessing the importance of pragmatics in practical English writing courses within South Korean universities. More specifically, it attempted to develop a framework that could be used to develop relevant curriculum, by focusing on the variables of appropriate genres, shared cultural values, social perceptions, and preferred learning situations. The findings revealed that in this context, the above variables were dependent on students' intrinsic motivators and underlying ambitions for writing in English. In a pragmatic sense, these participants identified the situations, settings, genres, and classroom activities that they felt were needed in the future which may consist of real-world, social, academic, or occupational settings. This is how the participants viewed the functionality and context of English writing for communication purposes.

One of the most interesting findings was that the actual classroom activities that students preferred and the desired method of delivery were very individualistic in nature. There are several possible explanations for this outcome, but due to the scope of this paper, only the main reason will be presented. Historically, Korean society has been based on deep-rooted Confucianism where students' entire education from kindergarten enrolment to university graduation is based on respect for their instructor where interaction during class is typically minimalized. To illustrate this thought,

> *Confucianism has been the main foundation of traditional thought that deeply spread its roots in Korean society. Throughout Korean history, the Korean people respected Confucian learning and attached*

its great significance to education. This tradition continues to the present time. (Lee, 2001, para. 5)

As a result, students are most familiar with a lecture style where they are delegated to the role of passive listeners with minimal questions posed to the teacher. Although this is slowly beginning to change in modern Korean education, from the interviews, it was expressed that this is still a very common occurrence in today's classrooms.

Therefore, students in this study expressed that they preferred to learn alone rather than in groups because it was something that they were familiar with and it minimalizes the possibility of anxiety that could be caused when working with their peers who may have better English abilities. Understanding this concept and developing classes that fit their learning needs will avoid apprehension and allow students to learn to the best of their ability.

Another notable outcome was that students preferred not to use a computer to complete their writing assignments. In the present technological era where computer literacy and typing fluency are increasingly important, it is surprising that these participants would prefer traditional pen and paper composition. This was unexpected and suggests that this may be due to student's low English typing skills. This seems startling as most of these students will be required to use typing skills when they take their TOEIC or TOEFL tests in the future and these tests are extremely important. As Dean (2008) states, "the two tests that dominate Koreans' lives are the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) developed by ETS in the U.S...." (p. 155). Having accomplished English keyboarding skills will result in better scores on these tests as students are required to type their answers within a given time limit. Therefore, the more proficient and accurate their keyboarding skills, the better their results will be. Regardless, pen and paper was their preferred writing method and one that should be understood by the instructor and incorporated into classroom activities.

As indirectly implied in the Historical English Composition section of this paper, the focus of Korean English education needs to make radical changes in order to create learners that have balanced language skills that are both receptive and productive in their writing. This problem is apparent as Koreans consistently rank low in worldwide English proficiency levels among non-native speaking countries. For example, "Korean students and office workers invest colossal

amounts of time and money learning English. But their investment doesn't seem to be paying off, as they are showing no marked improvement in English proficiency by global standards" (Kang, 2009, para. 1). In addition, Korean educational experts are beginning to "…criticize the quality of the overall public English curriculum for poorly preparing students for real-world English use, neglecting vital skills such as writing and speaking, and instead placing too much focus on preparing for college entrance exams" (Ramirez, 2013, para. 11). The current English education system is not effective and despite many years of effort, their work has not improved the overall proficiency of this language in South Korea.

That being said, there are currently major discussions taking place among education policy administrators to drastically reinvent the English proficiency requirements for graduating high school students. The tentative new assessment is called the National English Assessment Test (NEAT), which will replace the English section on the CSAT. Unfortunately, its scheduled implementation date has continuously been postponed due to numerous governmental and public opinion disagreements that are beyond the scope of this study.

Regardless, this test is revolutionary for Korean English education because "if the Korean government accepts the exam, it will be the first time a speaking and writing exam will be necessary for entering university" (Hwang, 2012. p. 24). This new assessment will move testing from ineffective receptive language measures to more productive forms. Furthermore, "… the new exam NEAT in Korea may also lead to a positive washback effect in terms of English proficiency" (Hwang, 2012, p. 30). Students will now have to study productive language skills in order to achieve high marks on this exam, which will result in more balanced language skills among Korean English learners. This washback effect will change the current study routine as students will focus on productive writing skills rather than the ineffective receptive composition that they currently focus on. Thus, students would learn more practical writing genres in high school because it would be tested in their new examination. Consequently, students will come into university classrooms with more practical English writing capacities and educators will have to determine what areas students want to develop in order to increase their pragmatic relevance. Therefore, this new assessment will completely change the way curriculum is designed in tertiary practical English writing classrooms as students will enter university with greater productive writing capabilities.

VII. Limitations

It must be stated that with such a small contextualized study, caution must be applied, as the findings might not be transferable to all learners and cannot be extrapolated to all areas of English writing instruction. The reasons are that exposure and ability to practice writing outside of the classroom in an EFL context such as Korea is drastically different from an English as a Second Language (ESL) environment such as America. In Korea, for example, these students very rarely have a need to write in English outside of the classroom as everyday life is conducted in their native Korean language. The need to compose in English very rarely arises for the language learner in this context. However, in an ESL environment, students are exposed to the language every day and must use it in order to function in society. Being able to practice what they are learning in the classroom and being exposed to a variety of forms of composition is a huge advantage for ESL learners and thus necessitates the need for increased learning, practice, and exposure to practical English writing among EFL learners in Korea.

VIII. Suggestions for Further Development

As there is currently little research related to this topic in the field of EFL writing instruction, this study represents an effective introduction to the subject. However, more investigation into this issue needs to be undertaken before a stronger association between pragmatics and practical English writing is more clearly understood.

One such development would be to include year of study as a determining factor in the variables. In the author's opinion, this would unveil some interesting results that could change the pragmatics behind how an instructor would develop practical English writing curriculum. This present study briefly looked at age variants, but further investigations including this variable would provide some useful outcomes for educators who teach different age groups.

Additional inquiries should also be conducted to investigate the pragmatical elements of practical English writing in an ESL context to compare the results found in this study and identify any contextual variances. Possible research questions that could be asked are as follows:

- *What authentic topics or genres are most popular among ESL students?*

- *What shared cultural ideals and societal perceptions of practical English writing do ESL students hold?*
- *What learning circumstances and settings do ESL students find useful in a practical English writing class?*

This research would give educators a more comprehensive view of how pragmatics is important in the development of writing courses worldwide. Future research on this topic in different contexts is therefore recommended.

IX. Conclusion

Didactical methodologies related to effective English writing instruction continue to evolve with creative teaching practices being introduced on a regular basis. With this change comes the need to look back at the specific genres or topics that are actually being taught in writing classes in addition to the ways in which learners want to learn in order to evaluate their related pragmatic values in the eyes of students. More specifically, educators need to design courses that include materials that are relevant, authentic, and intrinsically motivating by presenting materials in the desired formats so as to increase the enthusiasm levels of all students.

This article has given an account of the reasons for the widespread use of pragmatics in university level practical English writing courses within South Korea. The purpose was to determine how important this topic is and how its incorporation into curriculum development is essential. These findings suggest that in general, this process is a beneficial endeavour and one that teaches students the skills they need to become successful writers in the future. The results of this research support the idea that pragmatics is an important element in practical English writing and it enhances our understanding of how to conduct effective compositional discourse in Korean universities.

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Appendix A. Quantitative Data Instrument - Structured Survey Questions

Topic 1 - What does 'Practical English Writing' mean to you? What settings are most important?

Question 1 - It is about learning to write in real-world, social, or everyday life situations.
Question 2 - It is about learning to write in academic or school settings such as High School, Academies, University, etc.
Question 3 - It is about learning to write in workplace or occupational settings including inter-office emails, reports, letters
Question 4 - It is about learning to write in a variety of the above situations or settings and not just one specific area.
Question 5 - It is about writing in none of the above situations or settings.

Topic 2 - What Practical English Writing topics are most interesting, useful, and important to your success?

Question 7 - Learning how to write different styles of academic essays.
Question 8 - Learning how to write English style resumes and cover letters for potential jobs.
Question 9 - Learning how to write research papers for your current studies or post-graduate programs.
Question 10 - Learning how to write business English related documents such as emails, reports, letters etc.
Question 11 - Learning how to write editorials or opinion papers in response to news reports.
Question 12 - Learning how to write fiction (Not real) including short stories or related creative writing.
Question 13 - Learning how to write book reports or book summaries.
Question 14 - Learning how to write a daily reflective journal about your everyday life events.
Question 15 - Learning how to write critiques expressing your opinion.
Question 16 - Learning how to write common daily things such as notes, memo's, emails, contacting friends etc.
Question 17 - Learning how to write personal letters to family and friends.
Question 18 - Learning APA or MLA formatting (Citations and Referencing) for writing University level research papers.
Question 19 - Learning how to complete English speaking University grad school applications and entrance exams.
Question 20 - Learning how to write speeches or presentations.
Question 21 - Learning the most common grammatical errors made by English learners in their writing.
Question 22 - Learning how to proof-read and edit your work before submitting final copies.
Question 23 - Learning about writing opinion based responses to current events.
Question 24 - Learning how to write reviews for TV shows, movies, or music.
Question 25 - Learning how to write a newspaper article.
Question 26 - Learning how to write travel related pieces such as booking hotel accommodations, booking flights.
Question 27 - Learning how to write in a formal style to sound more professional.
Question 28 - Learning how to write a letter of complaint about goods and services.
Question 29 - Learning how to write letters of reference for getting a job.
Question 30 - Learning how to write in an in-formal or casual style to sound less professional.
Question 31 - Learning how to take notes in English during a lecture.
Question 32 - Learning how to write a summary of written text.

Topic 3 - What types of Classroom Activities Do You Learn Best From?

Question 34 - Listening to a lecture about the topics and taking notes, then completing a writing assignment in class.
Question 35 - Completing writing assignments alone after class as homework.
Question 36 - Using computer-based materials to learn how to write.
Question 37 - Reading a textbook and completing writing activities from the textbook.
Question 38 - Doing hands on writing activities in class using examples or samples.
Question 39 - Typing writing assignments in class on a computer.
Question 40 - Completing writing assignments in class using a pen and paper.
Question 41 - Working together in class on writing activities with a partner or in groups.
Question 42 - Working on writing activities alone.

Appendix B. Qualitative Data Instrument - Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Is learning Practical English writing important to you? Why?

2. Why is learning different styles/formats of English writing important to you?

3. What do you consider Practical English Writing? Why? (Real-world, school, workplace)

4. What kind of English writing would you really like to learn? Why?

5. Do you learn Practical English writing styles and topics in Korea? What do you normally learn?

6. Do you find sometimes you learn things in English writing that are not useful? What does that do?

7. Do you learn best in groups or alone? Why

8. Do you like learning English writing by taking steps?

9. Do you think it is best to work with other students brainstorming before you write?