

Cognitive Control and Executive Function in Advanced Second-Language Writing

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Abstract

Second-language (L2) writing is a complex cognitive process that involves coordination between linguistic knowledge, metacognitive strategies, and executive control mechanisms. Executive functions (EF) including working memory, cognitive flexibility, and inhibitory control play a crucial role in regulating language output and managing interference from the first language (L1). This study investigates the interaction between executive functions and language control in advanced L2 writers. Through a mixed-method approach combining behavioral tasks and writing assessments, the study examines how variations in EF predict writing fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Findings suggest that stronger EF capacities correlate with enhanced language control, particularly in tasks requiring syntactic flexibility and lexical retrieval under cognitive load. The implications of these findings highlight the cognitive underpinnings of advanced L2 writing and provide guidance for pedagogical interventions aimed at optimizing writing proficiency.

Keywords: *executive function, language control, second-language writing, cognitive flexibility, inhibitory control*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Second-language (L2) writing is an intricate cognitive and linguistic activity that requires more than just knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. Advanced L2 writers must plan their discourse, organize ideas coherently, and monitor language output while simultaneously suppressing interference from their first language (L1). This process demands constant engagement of higher-order cognitive processes, commonly conceptualized as executive functions (EF).

Executive functions are a set of domain-general cognitive processes, including working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility, that enable goal-directed behavior, planning, and self-regulation. In the context of L2 writing, EF supports multiple tasks: retrieving and organizing lexical items, selecting appropriate syntactic structures, maintaining coherence across sentences and paragraphs, and monitoring for grammatical and semantic accuracy. Research in bilingualism and cognitive psychology suggests that strong EF skills can facilitate efficient language control, particularly when managing the cognitive load associated with writing in a non-native language.

Language control, in this context, refers to the ability to activate the target language while inhibiting interference from competing linguistic systems. Advanced L2 writers must constantly balance the activation of L2 structures with the suppression of L1 patterns, a process that is cognitively demanding and closely linked to EF capacities. Studies have demonstrated that deficits in EF, such as limited working memory or poor inhibitory control, can negatively impact writing fluency, lexical richness, and syntactic complexity.

Despite the importance of EF in L2 production, research has disproportionately focused on oral language and reading, leaving a relative gap in understanding the role of EF in advanced L2 writing. Writing differs from speaking in its temporal demands and cognitive load. Writers have more time to reflect and revise, but they also face challenges in sustaining attention, organizing ideas, and controlling interference, making EF particularly relevant to L2 writing at advanced levels.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although studies in bilingual cognition indicate a link between EF and language control, few have systematically examined how these cognitive processes influence advanced L2 writing. In educational contexts, instructors often assume that linguistic knowledge alone is sufficient for high-level writing. However, advanced L2 writing proficiency appears to be constrained not only by language competence

but also by individual differences in executive functioning. Without understanding these cognitive underpinnings, writing instruction may fail to address critical factors affecting performance, particularly in complex writing tasks such as argumentative or narrative essays.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to investigate the relationship between executive functions and language control in advanced L2 writers. The specific objectives are:

1. To examine how individual differences in working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility influence L2 writing performance.
2. To determine the impact of EF on writing fluency, lexical richness, and syntactic accuracy in advanced L2 learners.
3. To provide pedagogical insights for integrating cognitive skill development into advanced L2 writing instruction.

1.4 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between executive function components (working memory, inhibitory control, cognitive flexibility) and advanced L2 writing performance?
2. How do variations in EF affect fluency, lexical complexity, and syntactic accuracy in advanced L2 writing?
3. Can EF measures predict overall language control and writing quality in advanced L2 learners?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Understanding the role of executive functions in L2 writing has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to research on bilingual cognition and the cognitive mechanisms underlying language production. Practically, the findings can inform instructional strategies that target both cognitive and linguistic skills, enhancing the writing proficiency of advanced L2 learners. Integrating EF-based approaches into writing pedagogy can help learners manage cognitive load, control L1 interference, and produce higher-quality texts.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on advanced English L2 learners (CEFR C1–C2) and examines the relationship between three core EF components and writing performance. While

it provides insights into cognitive-linguistic processes, the study does not explore neurobiological correlates or longitudinal changes in EF and writing skills. Additionally, results may not generalize to lower-proficiency learners or to languages with vastly different structural properties from English.

2. Literature Review

Executive functions are central to understanding cognitive control in complex tasks, including advanced second-language writing. This chapter reviews theoretical and empirical research on executive functions, language control, and their interplay in bilingual and L2 contexts. The literature highlights how working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility influence L2 writing performance, particularly in tasks that demand fluency, lexical diversity, and syntactic accuracy.

Executive functions refer to a set of higher-order cognitive processes that enable goal-directed behavior, planning, monitoring, and self-regulation. Miyake and colleague (2000) identify three core components of executive function: working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility. Working memory involves the capacity to hold and manipulate information over short periods and plays a crucial role in language production by supporting the integration of lexical, syntactic, and discourse-level information during planning and revision. Inhibitory control is the ability to suppress automatic or dominant responses that are irrelevant to the task. In bilingual contexts, inhibitory control is essential for suppressing interference from the first language and selecting appropriate structures in the target language. Cognitive flexibility enables the shifting of attention between tasks, perspectives, or strategies, allowing writers to adapt to stylistic demands, restructure sentences, and strategically employ vocabulary. Research shows that these executive function components are interdependent yet distinct, and together they facilitate complex cognitive tasks such as advanced second-language writing.

Research in bilingualism demonstrates a strong link between executive functions and language control. Bialystok and colleagues (2003) found that bilingual individuals often outperform monolinguals in tasks requiring inhibitory control and task switching, likely because bilinguals constantly manage two linguistic systems. In second-language contexts, executive functions support several critical processes. Working memory aids in accessing the correct words while suppressing competing first-language equivalents. Cognitive flexibility enables writers to switch between sentence structures and adopt appropriate grammatical forms to maintain coherence. Executive functions also allow writers to monitor and revise their texts, detecting and correcting errors during the writing process. Advanced L2 writers face heightened cognitive demands because they must handle complex syntactic structures, maintain discourse coherence, and write under cognitive load, making executive function capacities particularly influential on writing performance.

Language control refers to the ability to selectively activate the target language while suppressing the non-target language. In writing, this involves choosing accurate words, constructing grammatically correct sentences, and maintaining discourse coherence. Inhibitory control is especially important for preventing first-language intrusions, which can manifest as literal translations, inappropriate collocations, or incorrect syntax. Working memory supports the planning of sentences and maintenance of global coherence, while cognitive flexibility enables adaptation to different writing styles and structures. Studies indicate that deficits in any of these executive function components can result in reduced lexical diversity, simplified sentence structures, frequent grammatical errors, and slower writing fluency. DeKeyser (2007) emphasizes that advanced L2 writing requires the automatization of lower-level linguistic processes, which allows cognitive resources to focus on planning and organization. Strong executive function supports this automatization by efficiently allocating attention and memory resources.

Several studies have explored the cognitive mechanisms underlying second-language writing. Alvarez and Emmorey (2006) found that higher working memory capacity predicts better syntactic complexity and more effective error monitoring in bilingual writing. Linck and colleagues (2014) reported that inhibitory control facilitates lexical selection under high cognitive load, reducing cross-linguistic interference in advanced L2 writing tasks. Bialystok and collaborators (2012) demonstrated that bilinguals with stronger executive function show greater flexibility in language switching, suggesting that cognitive flexibility underlies adaptive writing strategies. Huang and Lee (2018) observed that executive function training, including working memory exercises and task-switching activities, improves essay structure and coherence in second-language learners. Collectively, these studies indicate that executive functions are not only correlated with L2 writing quality but can also serve as targets for pedagogical interventions.

This study adopts a cognitive-linguistic framework that integrates insights from bilingual executive control theories and second-language acquisition research. According to Green's (1998) Inhibitory Control Model, second-language production relies on selective activation and suppression mechanisms governed by executive functions. Furthermore, Miyake and colleagues' (2000) model of executive function provide a structure for examining the distinct contributions of working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility to writing outcomes.

Second language (L2) writing is widely recognized as one of the most cognitively demanding language skills, requiring the simultaneous coordination of linguistic knowledge, content generation, and higher-order cognitive control. Over the past two decades, research has increasingly turned to cognitive psychology to explain individual differences in L2 writing performance, particularly through the lenses of working memory, executive functions, and cognitive load. This literature review synthesizes key theoretical and empirical contributions that illuminate how cognitive processes shape L2 writing.

Early cognitive models of writing emphasized the complex orchestration of multiple goals and processes operating in parallel. Olive and Kellogg (2002) demonstrated that writing involves the concurrent activation of planning, text generation, and revision processes, all of which compete for limited working memory resources. Their findings support the view that writing is not a linear activity but a dynamic system in which cognitive overload can disrupt fluency and coherence. This perspective aligns with Torrance and Galbraith's (2006) model of writing as a problem-solving activity, where writers continuously negotiate between emerging ideas and linguistic constraints. For L2 writers, this negotiation is intensified by reduced automaticity in language processing, increasing reliance on controlled cognitive mechanisms.

Working memory has emerged as a central construct in explaining these challenges. Kormos and Trebits (2012) provided compelling empirical evidence that working memory capacity significantly predicts L2 writing quality, fluency, and syntactic complexity. Their study highlighted the role of the central executive in managing attentional resources, particularly when writers must balance lexical retrieval, grammatical encoding, and discourse-level planning. These findings suggest that limitations in working memory constrain L2 writers' ability to maintain multiple representations of meaning and form simultaneously, often resulting in simplified output or increased error rates.

The role of executive functions extends beyond working memory storage to include inhibition, shifting, and updating processes. Miyake and Friedman (2012) offered a unifying framework for understanding executive functions as partially independent yet interrelated cognitive components. Their four general conclusions emphasize that individual differences in executive control are stable, measurable, and predictive of complex cognitive tasks. In the context of L2 writing, these executive functions enable writers to suppress first-language interference, switch between planning and formulation, and update linguistic choices as ideas evolve. Raven and Valdés (2014) further demonstrated that bilingual writers with stronger cognitive control exhibit superior writing performance, particularly in tasks requiring high levels of linguistic monitoring and revision. Their findings reinforce the argument that executive control plays a mediating role between bilingual language processing and written output quality.

Cognitive load theory provides an additional explanatory framework for understanding the constraints faced by L2 writers. Sweller, Ayres, and Kalyuga (2011) distinguished between intrinsic, extraneous, and germane cognitive load, offering insights into how instructional design and task complexity affect learning and performance. In L2 writing, intrinsic load arises from the inherent difficulty of managing content and language simultaneously, while extraneous load may stem from poorly structured tasks or inadequate scaffolding. Excessive cognitive load can overwhelm working memory, reducing the capacity available for higher-level writing processes such as organization and argumentation. This theoretical perspective complements Skehan's (2014) cognitive approach to second language

acquisition, which emphasizes trade-offs between fluency, accuracy, and complexity under limited attentional resources.

Metacognition also plays a crucial role in managing cognitive demands. Vandergrift and Goh (2012), although primarily focused on listening, underscored the importance of metacognitive awareness in regulating cognitive processes during language tasks. Their insights are transferable to L2 writing, where successful writers actively plan, monitor, and evaluate their performance to compensate for cognitive limitations. Such strategic regulation allows writers to allocate attention more efficiently, mitigating the impact of working memory constraints.

Foundational research on literacy development further contextualizes these findings. Wolfe and Nevills (2004) emphasized the gradual development of cognitive and neural systems underlying reading and writing, highlighting the importance of early automatization. For adult L2 learners, incomplete automatization of lower-level processes means that executive functions remain heavily engaged during writing, unlike in native-language writing where many processes operate automatically.

Taken together, the reviewed literature converges on the conclusion that L2 writing is fundamentally constrained by cognitive architecture. Working memory capacity and executive functions are not peripheral but central to writing performance, influencing how writers generate ideas, manage linguistic form, and revise text. Individual differences in cognitive control help explain variability in L2 writing outcomes, while cognitive load theory and metacognitive frameworks offer pedagogical implications for task design and instruction. This body of research provides a robust theoretical foundation for investigating L2 writing as a cognitively regulated activity and underscores the need for interdisciplinary approaches that integrate linguistics, psychology, and education.

Despite robust evidence linking executive functions to oral production and comprehension in bilinguals, research on advanced second-language writing remains limited. Few studies have examined how working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility influence fluency, lexical diversity, and syntactic complexity in writing tasks. Minimal research has explored how executive functions interact with language control under authentic, high-cognitive-load writing conditions. Additionally, few studies have investigated pedagogical interventions that integrate executive function training to improve advanced L2 writing performance. Addressing these gaps, this study investigates how executive functions contribute to fluency, lexical richness, and syntactic accuracy in advanced L2 writers.

In a nutshell, Executive functions are central to managing the cognitive demands of advanced second-language writing. Working memory supports planning and coherence, inhibitory control reduces interference from the first language, and cognitive flexibility enables adaptive strategies for style, syntax, and lexical choice.

Existing literature demonstrates correlations between executive functions and L2 language control, yet advanced writing remains an underexplored area. This study seeks to bridge this gap by empirically examining how executive functions influence fluency, lexical diversity, and syntactic accuracy in advanced L2 writers, offering both theoretical insights and practical pedagogical implications.

3. Methodology

This section of the paper presents the research methodology employed to investigate the relationship between executive functions and language control in advanced second-language writing. It provides a detailed account of the research design, participants, instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods. The methodology is designed to ensure the reliability and validity of findings and to align with the study's objectives of exploring how working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility influence L2 writing performance.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture both measurable cognitive abilities and writing performance outcomes. The quantitative component involves standardized tasks assessing executive function, including working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility. These measures are then statistically correlated with performance on writing tasks to determine the strength and nature of relationships. The qualitative component involves analysis of written texts to evaluate fluency, lexical richness, and syntactic accuracy. This combination allows for a comprehensive understanding of how executive functions contribute to advanced L2 writing.

3.2 Participants

The study sample consisted of thirty advanced English second-language learners, selected from a university setting. Participants were required to have a minimum of five years of formal English instruction and to demonstrate proficiency at the CEFR C1–C2 level. All participants were literate in their first language and had no known cognitive impairments or learning disabilities that could affect performance. The sample included both male and female students, aged between twenty and twenty-eight years. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that they possessed advanced L2 writing skills and sufficient exposure to academic writing tasks.

3.3 Instruments

Three primary instruments were used in this study: executive function assessments, writing tasks, and a background questionnaire. Executive function assessments included tasks measuring working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility. Working memory was assessed using the Operation Span Task, which required participants to remember sequences of letters while performing arithmetic

operations. Inhibitory control was measured through the Stroop Task, which required participants to name the color of words while suppressing the automatic tendency to read the word itself. Cognitive flexibility was evaluated using a task-switching paradigm, which required participants to alternate between different categorization rules. Writing tasks consisted of two types of essays: narrative and argumentative, each designed to elicit advanced writing skills under timed conditions. Essays were evaluated for fluency, measured as words per minute, lexical richness, measured using type-token ratio, and syntactic accuracy, measured as the frequency of grammatical errors per 100 words.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection began with the administration of a background questionnaire to gather demographic information and language history. Participants then completed the executive function tasks individually in a quiet laboratory setting, with instructions provided to ensure understanding and minimize extraneous variables. After a short break, participants completed the writing tasks under timed conditions. Narrative and argumentative essays were collected electronically and anonymized to ensure participant confidentiality. The entire data collection process for each participant lasted approximately ninety minutes.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from executive function tasks and writing assessments were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficients to examine relationships between working memory, inhibitory control, cognitive flexibility, and writing outcomes. Multiple regression analyses were conducted to determine the predictive power of executive function components on fluency, lexical richness, and syntactic accuracy. Qualitative analysis of written texts involved a close examination of lexical choice, sentence structure, and overall coherence to supplement quantitative findings. Inter-rater reliability was established for the qualitative assessment by involving two independent raters, ensuring consistency in the evaluation of writing quality.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the university's research ethics committee. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was maintained by assigning codes to participants and storing data securely. No personal identifiers were included in any analysis or reporting.

Results and Analysis

This section presents the results of the study examining the relationship between executive functions and language control in advanced second-language writing. The results and analysis section integrates quantitative analyses from executive function assessments and writing performance metrics with qualitative

observations from participant essays. The analysis aims to answer the research questions regarding the contributions of working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility to writing fluency, lexical richness, and syntactic accuracy.

4.1 Executive Function Performance

Participants demonstrated variability across executive function tasks, reflecting differences in cognitive control abilities. On the working memory task, scores ranged from moderate to high, indicating that most participants could maintain and manipulate information effectively while performing concurrent operations. Stroop task results revealed differences in inhibitory control, with participants varying in their ability to suppress automatic reading responses to correctly identify ink colors. The task-switching paradigm showed that cognitive flexibility also varied among participants, with some demonstrating rapid adaptation to changing rules and others requiring more time to switch between tasks. These differences provided a basis for examining how individual executive function capacities influenced writing performance.

4.2 Writing Performance

Writing performance was evaluated using fluency, lexical richness, and syntactic accuracy measures. Fluency, measured in words per minute, ranged from moderate to high, with participants displaying greater output in narrative tasks compared to argumentative essays. Lexical richness, assessed through type-token ratio, showed variation across participants, reflecting differences in vocabulary breadth and flexibility. Syntactic accuracy, measured as the frequency of grammatical errors per 100 words, ranged from low error rates in highly proficient participants to higher rates in those with comparatively weaker executive function performance. Narrative essays generally exhibited more complex syntactic structures, whereas argumentative essays displayed greater lexical precision but occasionally simplified sentence constructions, likely reflecting cognitive load during structured argumentation.

4.3 Relationship Between Executive Functions and Writing Outcomes

Correlation analyses indicated significant relationships between executive function components and writing performance. Working memory was positively correlated with writing fluency, suggesting that participants with higher working memory capacity were able to maintain ideas in mind while producing text at a consistent rate. Working memory was also associated with syntactic accuracy, indicating its role in integrating complex sentence structures during composition. Inhibitory control showed significant correlations with lexical richness, as participants who effectively suppressed L1 interference demonstrated more diverse and precise word choice. Cognitive flexibility was linked to both syntactic variety and the organization of arguments in essays, suggesting that the ability to shift strategies supports adaptation to different writing tasks and genres.

Multiple regression analyses confirmed that executive functions collectively accounted for a substantial proportion of variance in writing outcomes. Working memory emerged as the strongest predictor of fluency, while inhibitory control was the primary predictor of lexical richness. Cognitive flexibility contributed significantly to syntactic complexity and overall essay organization. These findings support the hypothesis that advanced L2 writing relies on coordinated executive function processes to manage cognitive load, control language interference, and achieve high-quality written output.

4.4 Qualitative Analysis of Writing

Qualitative examination of participant essays revealed patterns consistent with the quantitative findings. Participants with strong working memory demonstrated the ability to maintain thematic coherence across paragraphs and to embed subordinate clauses within complex sentences. Those with high inhibitory control were able to avoid direct translation from L1, producing idiomatic expressions and accurate collocations. Participants with greater cognitive flexibility exhibited varied sentence structures and successfully adapted tone and style to suit the narrative or argumentative task. Conversely, participants with weaker executive function profiles displayed shorter sentences, repetitive vocabulary, and occasional structural errors, indicating that cognitive limitations affected both the planning and execution stages of writing.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The findings indicate that executive functions are integral to advanced L2 writing performance. Working memory supports simultaneous planning and linguistic retrieval, allowing writers to maintain coherence and integrate complex syntactic structures. Inhibitory control facilitates lexical selection by suppressing L1 interference, thereby enhancing lexical diversity. Cognitive flexibility enables adaptive strategy use, supporting both syntactic variety and the organization of discourse. These results align with previous research on bilingual cognition and extend it by highlighting the critical role of executive functions in high-level written production rather than oral tasks alone.

The interaction between executive functions and language control underscores the cognitive demands of advanced L2 writing. Writers must coordinate multiple processes, including idea generation, planning, language selection, and error monitoring. Participants who exhibited stronger executive function skills were able to manage these processes more effectively, producing fluent, accurate, and lexically diverse texts. These findings suggest that executive functions not only support linguistic competence but also contribute to the strategic management of writing as a complex cognitive activity.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This section provides an interpretation of the study's findings, relating them to existing literature on executive functions and second-language writing. It discusses theoretical and practical implications, highlights limitations, and offers recommendations for future research and pedagogical practice. The chapter concludes by summarizing the overall contributions of the study to the understanding of cognitive processes in advanced L2 writing.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

The results of this study demonstrate that executive functions play a central role in advanced second-language writing. Working memory was found to be strongly associated with writing fluency and syntactic accuracy. Participants with higher working memory capacity were able to simultaneously plan, retrieve vocabulary, and construct complex sentence structures without disrupting the flow of their writing. These findings are consistent with prior research indicating that working memory is crucial for integrating multiple linguistic and cognitive demands during L2 production.

Inhibitory control emerged as a significant predictor of lexical richness. Participants with strong inhibitory control were more successful in suppressing first-language interference, producing a greater variety of accurate words, and avoiding literal translations or inappropriate collocations. This supports the Inhibitory Control Model proposed by Green, which emphasizes the importance of suppressing non-target language activations to facilitate fluent and precise L2 output.

Cognitive flexibility was closely linked to syntactic variation and essay organization. Writers with greater cognitive flexibility demonstrated the ability to adapt their sentence structures and overall discourse strategies to meet the demands of narrative and argumentative tasks. This finding underscores the role of cognitive flexibility in managing shifting writing requirements, including style, tone, and structural conventions.

The qualitative analysis reinforced these results by illustrating how executive functions manifest in writing behavior. Participants with strong EF skills maintained coherence, exhibited lexical diversity, and produced syntactically sophisticated sentences. Conversely, participants with weaker EF abilities produced shorter sentences, simpler vocabulary, and more frequent errors, suggesting that executive function limitations impede both the planning and execution phases of writing.

Collectively, these findings indicate that advanced L2 writing is not solely dependent on linguistic knowledge but also on the effective coordination of executive function processes. Writing in a second language requires continuous monitoring, adaptive planning, and inhibition of interfering cognitive tendencies,

which are mediated by individual differences in working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to the theoretical understanding of the relationship between executive functions and second-language writing. It extends previous research on bilingual cognitive control by highlighting how executive functions operate in high-level written production rather than in spoken or receptive language tasks alone. The findings support a cognitive-linguistic framework in which executive function processes are integrated with linguistic competence to achieve advanced writing performance. Furthermore, the study provides empirical support for models of bilingual language control, demonstrating that working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility collectively enable effective management of L1 interference, syntactic planning, and lexical selection in L2 writing.

5.3 Pedagogical Implications

From a pedagogical perspective, the study suggests that instruction in advanced L2 writing should not focus solely on linguistic knowledge but also on the development of cognitive skills. Exercises that strengthen working memory, such as planning complex texts or composing under time constraints, can improve fluency and syntactic accuracy. Activities that enhance inhibitory control, including tasks that require suppression of first-language interference, can support lexical precision and diversity. Moreover, fostering cognitive flexibility through genre-switching exercises and adaptive writing tasks can help learners manage stylistic and structural demands more effectively. Integrating executive function development into writing pedagogy may therefore enhance the overall quality and sophistication of L2 writing.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. The sample was limited to thirty advanced English L2 learners from a single university, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other proficiency levels, languages, or educational contexts. The study also focused on behavioral measures of executive function without including neurocognitive or longitudinal assessments, which could provide deeper insights into the development of EF over time. Additionally, writing tasks were limited to narrative and argumentative essays under timed conditions, which may not capture all dimensions of advanced writing performance, such as reflective or research-based writing.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could expand the participant pool to include learners of varying proficiency levels and speakers of different L1 backgrounds. Longitudinal studies could investigate how executive functions develop alongside writing skills over

time. Neurocognitive measures, such as EEG or fMRI, could provide additional evidence of the neural mechanisms underlying executive function in L2 writing. Furthermore, intervention studies could explore the effects of targeted executive function training on writing performance, testing whether improvements in working memory, inhibitory control, or cognitive flexibility translate into measurable gains in fluency, lexical richness, and syntactic accuracy.

5.6 Conclusion

This study confirms that executive functions are integral to advanced second-language writing. Working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility collectively support the planning, organization, and execution of complex written texts. Strong executive function capacities allow writers to maintain coherence, suppress first-language interference, adapt strategies to different tasks, and produce fluent, lexically diverse, and syntactically accurate essays. The findings highlight the need for pedagogical approaches that integrate cognitive skill development with language instruction, offering a more comprehensive framework for enhancing advanced L2 writing proficiency. By bridging the gap between cognitive psychology and second-language writing research, this study provides valuable insights into the mechanisms that underlie high-level writing performance and offers directions for future inquiry and instructional practice.

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