Time Allocation Effect on Test Scores for Academic Writing of Indonesian English Learners

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Abstract—It is widely known that test takers with a more extended time allotment in IELTS can perform better in the writing portion than those with a lower time allotment. The most compelling argument for test providers to limit test administration time, particularly for academic writing activities, is practicality. This article assesses how the time allotted differently of 30 or 50 minutes affects the writing skills of English learners and that the time allotted for the IELTS test is confirmed as the most efficient. The test takers’ writing was evaluated using a variety of measures in this study. An interview was also conducted to unveil their experiences related to the time allotment. The findings reveal improved writing skills in terms of fluency when a lengthier (30-minute) time limit was given. Complexity is also enhanced, and the learners are difficult to conclude. The learners’ results could vary due to the two-timing conditions; they believe in performing better under the extended time allotment.

Index Terms—argumentative academic essay, time allocation, writing skill, discourse measure

I. INTRODUCTION

It is acceptable that students' competency and performance in educational settings are generally measured by a test of at least two items. A competence test reveals learners' ability to work out a task correctly (Arafah et al., 2020; Kaharuddin et al., 2020). It assesses the ability or skills of learners in choosing the correct response from a set of possible reactions. This kind of test includes multiple-choice, true-false, and matching items. A performance test is about the learners' capacity to achieve something by utilizing their knowledge (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019; Anggrawan et al., 2019; Fadillah et al., 2022). It assesses the ability of learners to construct their responses, such as a test in an essay or short answer items. Many standardized examinations use the second type of test, particularly essay tests (Lovett et al., 2010; Hasjim et al., 2020), which is more commonly utilized rather than multiple-choice. However, it is limited by time (Powers, 2005; Purwaningsih et al., 2020; Mutmainnah et al., 2022), which considerably may affect the learners’ opportunity to finish their essays with more sentences. The number of inputs that can be written through the test taker's interpretation contains relevant local cultural messages associated with the society in which he/she lives (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023a; Arafah et al., 2023; Suhadi et al., 2022). It could be an attempt to express local values in writing. It should be noted that it can be poured into various sectors, including written text (Arifin et al., 2022). In this case, the language used becomes meaningful and informative for learners to improve their skills in writing (Kuswanty et al., 2023). This fact may also impact the learners' scores due to the amount of text submitted, which is substantially connected with the length and quality of their essays (Hopkins, 1998; Powers, 2005; Gregg et al., 2007; Lovett et al., 2010). Learners nowadays have become more active through the internet, and they can also improve their academic or vocational skills using digital media by reading, understanding, and evaluating various information and then trying to
An essay is expected to be intellectual. Language style, figurative language, symbols, and signs are not required, mainly when the text contains many uncertain terms that must be interpreted further using semiotics, such as metaphors (Asriyanti et al., 2022; Baa, et al., 2023; Hasiyim & Arafah, 2023b). When the text is literary, the language style is part of the aesthetic component (Manugeren et al., 2023; Yudith, et al., 2023). In this writing, words and symbols are frequently interpreted into explicit and implicit meanings (Iksora, et al., 2022; Siwi, et al., 2022). Sometimes, some words are difficult to understand as they can cause multi-interpretations depending on the readers (Asri et al., 2023). Cultural features and meaningful signs and symbols of objects, events, and others can be found in many works of literature (Takwa et al., 2022; Takwa, et al., 2022). Because an author's imagination performs literary labour, it is classified as a fictional text in which reality is false (Sunyoto, et al., 2022). However, writing an essay is part of an educational system that must be completed with much care in the hope that the text examiner understands and offers the best test score.

Standardized essay assessments have a relatively low time limit, usually about 10 or 15 minutes (Lovett, et al., 2010; Hasiyim, et al., 2020; Yulianti, et al., 2022). Reduced time allotment will allow the testers to administrate and evaluate the exam more practically. Writing solutions should be used to address the issue that test takers encounter when writing with limited time (Arnawa & Arafah, 2023). They are eager to complete the test by practising writing (Mokoginta & Arafah, 2022). Furthermore, educators must adapt to the optimal time allocation adjustment that test takers require (Arafah, et al., 2023). However, it has been questioned whether lower time allotments provide the testees ample time and the chance to perform their aptitude of writing naturally. Surprisingly, a more in-depth study has yet to be undertaken to explicitly assess the time allocation effect on the writing skill of the testees. Some academics tend to determine how much test scores result from working rapidly (Lovett, et al., 2010). This study is conducted to investigate quantitatively the effect of the 30- and 50-minute timing condition on the testees' accomplishment revealed by the scores they got on a test of argumentative academic writing and to describe the viewpoint of the testees related to the two conditions of time allotted. Therefore, two problems are considered. The first relates to whether or not the learners' scores in writing alter between the two conditions, and the second relates to their perception of the two-timing conditions.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Biola (1982) conducted one of the first researches that evaluated the students' competence in working out argumentative writing tasks in the allotted time. The research in the form of an argumentative writing task was carried out on 96 university students with time allotted 45 to 120 minutes. The findings were that the students given more time performed significantly better than those with less time. The topics assigned to the students were controlled. A conclusion was drawn that the restriction of two-hour time allowed all students equally to perform well in writing.

Powers and Fowless (1996) conducted the same research topic by assigning a writing task of two essays to 304 students. The time was limited to 30 minutes and 60 minutes. The finding was that giving extra time to students enabled them to produce better writing output. Meanwhile, the examinees preferred to be given extra time over the allotted time. A more recent study by Lu (2011) demonstrated that testees could create more sophisticated argumentative essays with no time allotment rather than time allotment. A corpus-based analysis examined 3,678 essays written by undergraduate students from nine institutions.

Elder et al. (2009) found that learners showed high mean scores on the test of the argumentative essay when the time was allotted 55 minutes (long) and 30 minutes (short) for doing the test in which the fluency, content, and form of the writings were items to be measured. There were differences but not statistically significant, leading the authors to conclude that decreasing the time allotment has no significant effect on the learners' academic competence in writing argumentative essays.

Kroll (1990) evaluated 100 essays writing produced by 25 students. He discovered that the essays written at home for 10-14 days were higher overall mean scores in syntactic and global-level holistic than those written in class for 60 minutes. However, both scores differed in minimal or no statistically significant that the two temporal circumstances significantly affect students' competence in writing essays. Caudery (1990) found no significant variations in the writing performance of 24 adolescent pupils who wrote argumentative essays with time restricted and unrestricted related to the language and organization metrics and total scores.

Knoch and Elder (2009) recently explored the effect of the time allotment of 30 and 55 minutes on students' writing of argumentative essays. They demonstrated that students performed better in' writing fluency, substance, scores of forms, and the overall score if more time was given. However, the reported differences were statistically insignificant. When the discourse was thoroughly analyzed, the students were revealed to produce more words in a more prolonged time, showing that students need more time to produce more fluent writing. The other variables, accuracy, complexity, and cohesiveness, gave the students less time allowance and an advantage. Knoch and Elder also investigated the examinee's views and discovered that the students need more time to plan and revise on writing.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

Participant
Four participants, two males and two females aged 22 to 28 years old, handed over eight writings. Three of them, learners 1, 2 and 4, had completed Bachelor’s degrees. They took the official test of IELTS and received scores of 5.5, 5.5 and 6.5, respectively. Learner 2 took the IELTS test twice, and she got a score of 6.5 on the first test. Another learner, learner 3, was still in the last semester and had to take the official test. He had already taken a practical test as part of the IELTS course and got an overall band score of 5.5 with a writing section band score of 6.0. (Table 1 shows the specific details for each participant).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>IELTS Writing Score</th>
<th>IELTS Overall Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learner 1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner 2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5.5/6.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner 3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner 4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instruments

Two writing tasks were used: argumentative essays about technology to ensure the two variables, topic and genre, were controlled. An argumentative essay is a type of writing in which students must discuss a topic while establishing their point of view (Ismail et al., 2020; Arafah & Hasyim, 2022; Kaharuddin et al., 2022). The time limit for Assignment 1 was 30 minutes, and Assignment 2’s was 50 minutes. Students were instructed to write an essay with at least 200 words for each. An example of a writing task is presented below:

**Task 1**
You should spend 30 minutes on this task.

Some people are concerned that technology improvements, such as cell phones, would cause people to become less socially engaged.

How much do you agree or disagree?

To assist you in answering the questions, you should clarify your rationale and offer relevant examples from your expertise or experience.

Please write a minimum of 200 words.

**Interview:** After completing the two tasks, each participant was given a semi-structured telephone interview. The semi-structured interview gathers data by asking open-ended questions within a predetermined topic framework (Sunardi et al., 2018; Abidin & Kaharuddin, 2021; Arafah et al., 2021). Participants were polled on whether they thought of having enough time to finish the tasks. They were also instructed to plan and revise the difficulty or differences in the task or topic and perception related to the two-time constraints. The interview in Indonesia was intended to ensure that the participants provided complete responses. The questions proposed in the interview are as follows:

**Questions for an Interview**
1. How can you explain the differences between the two topics?
2. (How do you balance the two tasks given the time difference?)
3. How do you manage your time to visit two different locations on time? (Do you have enough time to do both tasks?)
4. What steps do you use to plan/brainstorm before beginning a task?
5. (Do you make a plan for both activities before you begin writing?)
6. How do you intend to revisit your thesis?
7. (Do you revise/proofread/edit after completing the task?)
8. What makes top Kenya the same or different?
9. (Regarding the topic, how did you find both tasks?)

**IV. DATA ANALYSIS**

**Measures based on discourse analysis:** All essays were coded for various quantitative linguistic metrics, including T-units and clause-based accuracy, fluency, and grammatical complexity (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019; Arafah et al., 2020; Afiah et al., 2022). The coding scheme by Cummings et al. (2005) was used in terms of T-units and phrases. The T-unit with the dependent clause(s) is an independent clause in this context. The clause includes independent and dependent clauses (adverbial, relative, and nominal).

The number of words (W) and T-units (T) were used as fluency measures (Knoch et al., 2015). The error-free T-units (EFT/T) and error-free clauses (EFC/ C) were used to assess accuracy. Grammatical complexity was gauged by the number of words used in one T-unit (W) and the number of clauses used in one T-unit (C/T).

In terms of correctness, the morphological, syntactical, and lexical faults were counted. The faults in morphology are...
related to subject-verb agreement, articles, and tenses. The faults in syntax are about the missing parts of a sentence and the word order. The fault in lexis is word choice. Meanwhile, spelling and punctuation errors were not considered in this counting.

**Criteria for IELTS evaluation:** IELTS Task 2 for writing band descriptors (public version) and discourse-analytic metrics were applied to assess the students’ essays. The aspects in the essay to measure were task achievement, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical range and accuracy.

**The interview was semi-structured:** The results were summarized by examining the emerging themes. Students’ perceptions about whether the time was appropriately allotted to finish the tasks and how the variables affected their planning and revising were carefully separated into categories.

V. RESULTS

**Students’ scores in writing tasks with 50 minutes and 30-minute time allotment**

Before this research result presentation is to affirm the first research question to be answered: "Do students' writing task scores differ between the 50 and the 30-minute times’ allotment?" In this regard, the student's scores in writing tasks with the 50- and 30-minute time allotment were revealed by employing discourse measures to compare the participants' results in the two-time settings. The descriptive findings for the examination of fluency at 30 and 50 minutes are shown in Table 2. The data stated that the number of words on average and the T-units increased somewhat under the protracted condition. As a result, students can write longer essays in the allotted 50 minutes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Time allotted</th>
<th>Student 1</th>
<th>Student 2</th>
<th>Student 3</th>
<th>Student 4</th>
<th>Overall mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total words (W)</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>237.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>261.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-units (T) Count</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 displays the students’ accuracy and overall mean scores across the two-time allotments. The comparison of the mean score revealed a decrease in the percentage of error-free T-units and clauses. As a result, despite the longer time limit, the students still needed improvement in the accuracy of their essays.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Time allotted</th>
<th>Student 1</th>
<th>Student 2</th>
<th>Student 3</th>
<th>Student 4</th>
<th>Overall mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T-unit ratio with no errors (EF/T)</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 mins</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error-free clause ratio (EFC/C)</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 mins</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows how the complexity metrics produced a different picture. The table demonstrates that, in general, the average of both measurements, words per T-units and clauses for the T-unit ratio, has increased slightly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Time Allotted</th>
<th>Student 1</th>
<th>Student 2</th>
<th>Student 3</th>
<th>Student 4</th>
<th>Overall mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Words per T-units (W/T)</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>20.85</td>
<td>18.12</td>
<td>18.33</td>
<td>13.75</td>
<td>17.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 mins</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17.74</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15.86</td>
<td>18.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clauses per T-unit ratio (C/T)</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 mins</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So far, the findings reveal that each student used more words under the time allotment of 50 minutes, and the composition was grammatically more sophisticated. However, there was a modest drop in the accuracy as measured by the error-free T-units and phrases, as shown in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Time alloted</th>
<th>Student 1</th>
<th>Student 2</th>
<th>Student 3</th>
<th>Student 4</th>
<th>Overall mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievement of Task</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherence and Cohesion</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 mins</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical Resource</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 mins</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammatical Range and Accuracy</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 mins</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total scores</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 mins</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The analytic rating scale of IELTS for writing task 2 (public version) was applied to assess the students’ band scores in task achievement, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and the average writing scores the students could get in completing the writing task 2 with long and short-time allotment. Table 5 denoted that the student's overall scores in task achievement were half a band higher for the 50-minute time allotment. However, the coherence, cohesion, grammatical range, and accuracy scores were half a band lower for the more extended time allotment. The lexical resource band scores were steady. The overall score in the average writing scores confirms no variations in the participants' overall band scores under the allotment of the two-time conditions.

Alloting 50 minutes to students to work out their writing task of essay enables them to produce more grammatically - albeit marginally - complicated essays. In addition, they could satisfy the task achievement criteria. However, along with the increasing time allotment, the student's essays needed more consistency, coherence, cohesion, and lexical resource. Research indicated no variations in the total band scores of participants revealed by the IELTS scale in overall mean under the two-time allotted. In this case, the time allotment of 30 and 50 minutes shows no significant differences.

**Students’ perception of the two-time allotment**

The second research question was, "How do the students perceive the differences between the two-times allotment?" This problem would be answered by asking whether the students have enough time to finish the writing task, including their planning, revising, task or topic difficulty or differences, and perception of the two times allotment.

**Time-limited:** The students were given limited time to complete writing an essay with at least 200 words. One student (student 2) could finish the task after 30 minutes and used 308 words above the instructed word amount. The student stated that she must be made aware of using such words in her essay. Therefore, the students could finish writing an essay within the time allotted and the word amount required.

**Planning:** Students stated that they made plans for each activity but reported various preparation methods due to different times allotted. Student 1 stated she thought Task 1 differed from Task 2. She could only prepare the critical elements in a short time frame, whereas in a lengthy time frame, she could prepare the primary concepts and supporting elements. Similarly, student 3 acknowledged spending more time thinking of more precise ideas within the more extended time limit.

Student 2 indicated that she needed less time to plan for Task 2 than Students 1 and 3 because the topics were comparable. Student 4 also mentioned that the two different time conditions should have influenced his plan. His preparation for both job circumstances was the same. As a result, the results demonstrate that students' planning altered due to different times allotted.

**Revising:** Students 1 and 2 required more extra time to make revisions. They assumed the time was allotted shorter. Student 4, on the other hand, stated that he could do each job in under 30 minutes, providing him enough time for revision. Student 3, on the other hand, needed more time to revise; nonetheless. He stated that the time to revise his writing in Task 1 was shorter since it was longer to revise Task 2.

**Overall opinion.** Two students reported performing substantially better in writing essays under the 50-minute condition. Student 2 claimed she wrote better over the extended period because she needed 30 minutes to complete her writing essay. Similarly, student three was convinced he could produce a better writing essay over an extended period because he had more time to plan and revise.

Surprisingly, student 1 found Task 2 more difficult due to the topic difference; for her, the time limitation was not a problem, but it was the topic she believed could affect her writing essays. Finally, student 4 indicated that the different time constraints did not substantially affect the quality of his writing essay because he could complete both tasks in under 30 minutes.

**VI. DISCUSSION**

Whether or not the different time allotment of 30 minutes and 50 minutes for completing a task of writing academic argumentative essays affects students’ writing performance, the study reveals that the overall IELTS writing scores the students have do not show any significant difference in their scores. It means that the time allotments do not significantly affect the students’ writing performance. It is congruent with research findings by Caudery (1990), Elder et al. (2009), Knoch and Elder (2009), and Kroll (1990), who found marginal score variations in essay assignments under different time allotments. Therefore, the research findings contradicted those of Biola (1982), Lu (2011), and Powers and Fowlless (1996).

However, after examining the more specific data of the IELTS rating scale and the discourse measures, the students with the longer time allowance were discovered to appear to improve task accomplishment ratings by half a band. Student's fluency (as judged by multiple words and T-units) and complexity (as measured by words per T-units and sentences per T-unit ratio) also improved.

For the improved fluency performance, the current findings correspond to the study of Knoch and Elder (2009), who found that participants’ scores under the more prolonged time (55 minutes) were statistically significantly better than those under the shorter time (30 minutes). However, to account for the somewhat higher grammatical complexity scores, this study had to be compatible with Knoch and Elder (2009), who demonstrated the lower score of participants under the more prolonged time condition. Thus, the current study on complexity may confirm the findings of Lu (20011), who found that students scored higher on complexity under untimed test conditions.
Consistent with earlier research (e.g., Knox & Elder, 2009; Powers & Fowless, 1996), the study also demonstrated that students preferred more time allotted for writing essays since it provided more opportunities to make plans and modification opportunities. Although research has revealed that examinees prefer a more time allotment, no studies have proven that such perceptions alter their performance outcomes.

VII. CONCLUSION

In academic writing competence, the students perform similarly under the time setting of 50 minutes and 30 minutes based on the discourse metrics and rating scale of IELTS. However, the student's scores in fluency improved under the condition of a more prolonged time. Complexity rises but is marginal, making it difficult to make conclusions. In addition to the minor variations in their results, the participants were sure and believed in having created high-quality essays when extra time was given.

REFERENCES


Mardiana is a lecturer in English Language Teaching at the English Education Department, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Alauddin Makassar. She was born on August 15, 1969, in Pinrang, South Sulawesi. She studied at the Institute of Teacher Training and Education (IKIP) in Ujung Pandang, earning a bachelor's degree in English education in 1993. She earned a Master's Degree in English Education Department after completing her studies at Hasanuddin University (UNHAS) in 1996 and working as an English Lecturer at UIN Alauddin Makassar since 1999. She then obtained her doctorate at Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ) in 2012. Wherefore, her strong interest in English education has provided her with numerous opportunities to participate in professional training programs at foreign universities, such as four-month courses at Ohio State University in Columbus and two-month courses at Gottingen University in Germany. She also spent two months in Canada (Montreal, Ottawa, and Kitchener) for a community outreach program and published in respectable Scholarship Awardee Alumni (ALPHA-I).

Burhanuddin Arafah obtained his PhD in English literature at the University of Newcastle, Australia, in 2003. He earned his Master's degree in American literature at Gadjah Mada University (UGM) Yogyakarta of Indonesia in 1995 and his Bachelor's degree in English literature at Hasanuddin University (UNHAS) in 1988.

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