

EFL STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES AND PERFORMANCE IN WRITING CLASS: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to investigate the difficulties and performance of students in writing. A qualitative research design was employed, involving a sample of 36 EFL students, to examine these aspects. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire and interviews. The findings revealed several challenges faced by students in their writing process. The primary difficulty encountered by students was generating ideas (18%) of the participants. Additionally, 17% of students struggled with grammar, while 16% lacked vocabulary skills. Spelling was considered difficulty, with only 7% of students reporting it. Motivation and anxiety emerged as significant factors influencing students' writing performance. It was found that 25% of students required high levels of self-motivation, as well as motivation from teachers and a supportive environment, to effectively engage in writing tasks. Furthermore, 17% of students experienced anxiety when assigned writing tasks, particularly when writing in English. The study will further discuss the factors contributing to writing difficulties and students' performance, and provide suggestions based on the research findings.

Keyword: writing process, writing difficulties, writing performance

1 INTRODUCTION

Teaching writing in secondary school as well as in higher education is important because writing is one of the four language skill [1]. Writing is one of the finest levels of academic ability since it shows how well a person can use words, build concepts, and abstract ideas[2]. To compose effective writing, students must combine a variety of elements, for instance cohesiveness and coherence in writing. For many students, implementing these points will be challenging, because writing process includes not only structuring dealing ideas, but also turning these ideas into readable prose. Writing requires more work because it requires careful sentence generation and sentence organization. Some students struggle with grammar and vocabulary, and they may have poor writing skills [3]. If a student does not learn a lot of vocabulary and grammar, it will be a problem when they complete their writing because vocabulary is the best way for students to build ideas in a piece of writing.

Writing is the presentation of language using deliberately learnt and acquired visual elements. Finding ideas, expressing them, and organizing them into a strong paragraph are all parts of the writing process [4]; [5]. [6] said that writing is a process of manipulating word and grammar in correct sentences that done by students. By paying attention to the proper language and punctuation, the author of the aforementioned sentence was able to establish a connection with the notion of the actual topic [7]. Therefore, writing is a process of brainstorming to good sentence until paragraph observing proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Student difficulties in writing also exist when students write a text. There are several types of text that students learn at school such as descriptive text. Students have difficulty explaining their ideas in writing descriptive text and in grammar [8]. They have difficulty arranging words so that it becomes a correct sentence [9]. Student writing will be perfect if it gets support from teachers and friends around who can review writing components such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation so as to produce an effective piece of writing [10].

Descriptive text is a text that aims to describe thing, place, and particular person. Descriptive text has two structure that is identification and description [11]. It also has language characteristics, such as the use of specific participants, connecting verbs, adjectives, present tense, and intellectual and material processes [12].

The issue of writing descriptive text has been the subject of numerous research. According to [9] investigation (2020), firstly, students struggle when writing descriptions is grammar and the second is the development of the text descriptions' content. Students also struggle with vocabulary as well as organizing and compiling description texts. [13] explained the results of her research, which showed that students have difficulty choosing words to compile a description text. Students are also interested in writing pronouns, prepositions, and article placement.

Performance is the act of completing a task while putting one's knowledge, abilities, and skills to use. It is also the result of language in the real world. Although it might properly measure competency, it might also contain grammar mistakes. Due to memory issues, interruptions, changes in attention and interest, errors (both random and characteristic), and other psychological factors, performance may be subpar. It also only represents a small sample of possible utterances (Hofmann, Jacobs, & Gerras, 1992; Ployhard & Hakel, 1998) in [14]. Affective elements influencing EFL writing performance include achievement motivation, self-efficacy, and anxiety [15]. According to [16] study, people with high writing anxiety outperformed those with low and moderate writing anxiety in a writing task. Students were more motivated when teachers used more motivating teaching techniques. The students' writing performance improved when they were more motivated [17]. Therefore, psychological and environmental factors can influence student writing performance.

The difficulties that students face when learning to write have been studied by [18] said that the difficulties of writing such as generic structure, grammar, and spelling. Students' difficulties in learning to write have an impact on their performance. It has been studied by [19] that several factors related to writing performance cause anxiety, low self-efficacy, and low motivation in students. Students exhibit motivation in writing, which encompasses the entirety of the writing process and holds significance in transforming the act of writing into a tangible outcome [20]. Research on students' struggles and writing performance, however, is still incredibly scarce. Hence, the author is curious about;

1. What are students' difficulties in EFL writing?
2. What factors influence their performance in EFL writing?

2 METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative design. A research technique called the qualitative approach, which uses the researcher as the primary instrument to study items scientifically, is based on the postpositivist school of thought [21]. The problem formulation for this qualitative descriptive study directs researchers to investigate and capture images of social events that will be exhaustively, extensively, and in-depth evaluated [21]. The participant in this study is a secondary school student. It involved student 36 (12 male, 24 females, age 14-16 years old) on second semester in this year. In this study, researchers employed questionnaires to collect data because the answers will be properly arranged. Furthermore, interviews were conducted to ensure the validity of the data obtained from questionnaire.

The questionnaire for this study is split into two sections. Section A discusses the difficulties of students confront while creating a descriptive text. Part B discusses numerous aspects that influence student performance when writing descriptions. The questionnaire employs a 5-point Likert-type scale, with responses ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Where each item receives score from 1 to 5. During the interview, the interviewer employs a semi-structured interview technique in which the author does not ask coherent questions based on the pre-existing list of questions.

Data were collected by two procedures, namely (1) the questionnaire was distributed simultaneously for all participants. The questionnaire was distributed on g-form and accessed by students. 2) Interviews were conducted for approximately fifteen minutes for each student in one day after all questionnaires were collected and recorded to support the accuracy of the analysis. After all the questionnaires were collected and recorded, an interview was conducted for about fifteen minutes with each student in one day and the teacher asked questions based on the interview list to verify the correctness of the analysis.

The data in this study were analysed with the aid of the Excel chart data series software application, and the data were then well-narrated in accordance with the information offered by this software. Additionally, data from a survey was provided as a percentage, whereas data from an interview

was properly characterized based on the respondent's comments and in this interview, the first language was employed in this research.

3 FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The research findings revealed several concerns regarding the writing performance of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. The data provided below highlight the difficulties encountered by students in this particular writing task and the underlying reasons for these challenges.

3.1 Students' Difficulties Questionnaire

To know the EFL students' difficulties in writing. The researcher posed several questions in a questionnaire about students' difficulties in writing, resulting in the following findings:

Table 1. *Students Respond of Difficulties Questionnaire*

Categorize	Results
Spelling	7%
Developing Idea	18%
Vocabulary	16%
Grammar	17%

The findings presented in table 1 illustrated the outcomes of a questionnaire that examined the challenges encountered by EFL students in their writing endeavors. The results highlight several prominent difficulties faced by students when it comes to writing. The biggest problem faced by EFL students in writing were developing idea with 18%, then followed by grammar (17%) and also followed by vocabulary (16%). The lowest problem was spelling (7%).

3.2 Students' Performance Questionnaire

These were students' answers about performance questionnaires. The researcher used questionnaire to know about students' performance in writing. Therefore, the writer identifies the factors that influence their performance in writing.

Table 2. *Students Respond of Performance Questionnaire*

Factors	Results
Motivation	25%
Anxiety	17%

Table 2 shows the results of the questionnaire on several factors that influence students' performance in writing. According to the results of the chart above, two main factors affect their performance in writing. The first factor is motivation (25%), followed by anxiety (17%). Therefore, the EFL students' questionnaire it found that student need more motivation to increase their performance in writing.

3.3 Students' Responds of Interview

In addition to utilizing a questionnaire, the author also employed interviews to obtain in-depth responses regarding the performance and difficulties of students in writing. There are some responds of students' interview:

Student 1: The first student expresses their main difficulty in writing English, which is spelling. The student is still confused about spelling words because, in their opinion, English is a foreign language that they are not accustomed to using. Factors such as classroom environment, peers, and the teacher's motivation influence the student's desire to write.

Student 2: The second student shares their difficulty in writing, which is a lack of vocabulary. As a result, when given writing assignments, the student needs to rely on remembering and frequently looking up

words in a dictionary. Google becomes one of the alternatives for searching and developing ideas. Grammar is the second factor that poses challenges in writing. Students also need more motivation from teachers before writing lessons.

Student 3: The third student expresses that the difficulties in writing are related to spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. The student also feels anxious when the teacher suddenly assigns writing tasks in English. Typically, the student chooses Google as an alternative to find and develop ideas. The motivation provided by the teacher before the instruction significantly influences the student's performance in learning, particularly in writing instruction.

To gain a deeper understanding of students' difficulties in writing, the researcher employed a separate questionnaire specifically designed to identify these difficulties. According to [22] and [23] have classified students' ability in writing paragraphs in English as satisfactory. These studies indicate that students excel in organizing and developing content, but struggle with vocabulary usage and grammatical mechanics. Based on the research findings from this study, it can be reported that the students encountered difficulties in various writing aspects, including spelling, idea development, vocabulary, and grammar. These were the results of students' difficulties questionnaire.

Table 1. presents the outcomes of this questionnaire, providing insights into the specific difficulties faced by EFL students in writing. The highest reported difficulty was developing ideas, accounting for 18% of the responses. This suggests that students struggle with generating and organizing their thoughts effectively in written form. Grammar was identified as the second major challenge, with 17% of students acknowledging its difficulty. This indicates that students encounter issues related to sentence structure, verb tenses, and grammatical rules. Additionally, vocabulary proved to be problematic for 16% of students, indicating a limited range of words and expressions at their disposal. Conversely, spelling emerged as a comparatively minor difficulty, with only 7% of students reporting it as a significant difficulty.

According to [24] a variety of higher-level distinctions have been linked to variations in individual writing proficiency. To instruct writing in a successful manner, it is important to comprehend these individual distinctions and their impact on writing achievement. [25] posits that writers differ in their gender, level of interest in writing, cognitive and linguistic capacities, age, self-efficacy, anxiety, and other factors. In this study, it was found that students experience high levels of anxiety when faced with writing tasks, indicating that students also require motivation in their learning process, particularly in writing, as shown in the table below:

The data obtained from the performance questionnaire shed light on the factors influencing students' performance in writing. Table 2. displays the results of the questionnaire, highlighting the two main factors that affect students' performance in writing: motivation and anxiety. It was revealed that motivation plays a crucial role, with 25% of students acknowledging its significance. This indicates that students require a higher level of motivation to enhance their performance in writing. On the other hand, 17% of students reported experiencing anxiety, which can negatively impact their writing abilities. These findings underscore the importance of addressing students' motivational needs and alleviating anxiety to improve their writing skills effectively.

To supplement the findings from the questionnaires, interviews were conducted to obtain more detailed responses from the students. The insights gained from these interviews further highlight the difficulties encountered by the students. It is evident that students face various challenges in writing, including developing ideas, grammar usage, vocabulary acquisition, spelling, and anxiety. To address these difficulties, it is crucial to enhance students' motivation, provide adequate support in vocabulary and grammar, and create a conducive classroom environment. Teachers should focus on promoting students' confidence, providing meaningful writing tasks, and offering guidance and feedback to improve their writing skills effectively.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the research findings indicate that students face difficulties in various aspects of writing, including idea development, grammar usage, vocabulary acquisition, and spelling. The difficulties questionnaire reveals that students struggle the most with developing ideas, followed by grammar and vocabulary. Therefore, focused attention and support should be provided to help students improve their proficiency in these areas. Additionally, motivation and anxiety significantly impact students' writing performance. Students require increased motivation to improve their writing skills, while high levels of anxiety can hinder their abilities. These challenges emphasize the need for targeted support and instruction in these areas. The results from the questionnaires highlight the importance of addressing

students' motivational needs. Enhancing motivation can positively influence their writing abilities. Insights from interviews further emphasize the difficulties encountered by students, including challenges related to idea development, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and anxiety. To overcome these difficulties, teachers should implement strategies to enhance students' motivation, create a supportive classroom environment, and provide targeted instruction in vocabulary and grammar. Additionally, offering guidance and feedback will help students improve their writing skills effectively. A comprehensive approach that considers motivation, specific writing challenges, and individual differences is essential to enhance students' writing skills. Teachers play a crucial role in addressing these factors by understanding the influences on writing performance and implementing appropriate instructional strategies. By providing meaningful writing tasks, creating a supportive learning environment, and offering guidance and feedback, educators can support students in becoming more proficient and confident writers. In future research, it is expected that the researchers will delve into a more detailed examination of students' difficulties in writing and the factors influencing their writing performance.

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