

Uncovering EFL Learners' Writing Problems and Effective Approaches to Overcome Them

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the writing difficulties experienced by EFL learners and identify possible solutions to overcome these challenges. Writing skills are considered one of the essential competencies in English learning; however, many students perceive writing assignments as challenging and complex. Although mastery of writing skills is an important indicator of successful learning, many learners still encounter difficulties in developing effective written communication, particularly in academic contexts. Students are required to acquire fundamental writing skills to support their future academic needs, including thesis and research writing. This study focuses on EFL learners from the English Department of IPB Cirebon who are enrolled in academic writing courses. The differences in students' English proficiency levels create various challenges in the learning process, especially in generating ideas, organizing information, and applying appropriate writing structures. Therefore, understanding students' writing difficulties is necessary to provide appropriate learning strategies and instructional approaches. This research is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of EFL learners' writing problems and provide insights for future studies in developing effective methods for teaching academic writing. The findings may also support educators in improving writing instruction and helping learners enhance their writing competence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is considered one of the essential skills for EFL learners, particularly in academic contexts where students are required to communicate ideas effectively through written forms. However, many students perceive writing as a challenging skill and often experience difficulties when completing writing tasks. Although achieving mastery of learning materials is one of the main objectives of teaching and learning activities, students' ability to apply writing knowledge effectively remains a significant challenge. Therefore, learners need to acquire fundamental writing skills to support their future academic requirements, such as preparing theses, research papers, and academic articles.

In the classroom context, differences in students' English proficiency levels often create various challenges in the writing process. Some learners struggle with generating ideas, organizing information, and applying appropriate structures to produce meaningful texts. Furthermore, understanding writing forms and

textual organization is crucial because these aspects contribute to effective written communication. Writing activities also encourage students to develop their critical thinking skills by organizing and expressing ideas systematically rather than simply producing spontaneous responses. Thus, investigating students' perspectives and challenges in writing is necessary to understand the difficulties encountered by EFL learners (Ansas & Sukyadi, 2019). In addition, analyzing writing elements, including cohesive devices that function to connect ideas within texts, can provide a deeper understanding of learners' writing performance (Williyan, 2020).

Writing ability plays a significant role in determining students' academic achievement. Nevertheless, learning to write effectively in English remains a complex process for many EFL learners. Firman (2022) explains that students develop writing skills through interaction and learning experiences; however, writing is often regarded as more difficult than other language skills. For students in English education programs, producing written texts in English requires not only linguistic competence but also the ability to organize ideas and communicate meaning clearly. Similarly, Nacira (2010), as cited in Long (2023), highlights that writing skills are important because they enable individuals to maintain communication and participate in academic discourse. Therefore, teachers are expected to implement appropriate strategies and approaches to assist learners in developing effective writing abilities.

Several previous studies have investigated EFL learners' writing difficulties. Marrani (2024), through a study entitled "An Investigating of Yemen EFL Learners' Writing Problems," examined approximately 70 undergraduate students at Sana'a University. The findings revealed that students encountered various difficulties in writing paragraphs and essays, particularly in planning ideas, developing topic sentences, creating thesis statements, organizing supporting details, and producing effective conclusions. These difficulties indicate that learners experience challenges not only in language use but also in the overall writing process.

Similarly, Purnama (2021) investigated EFL students' difficulties in argumentative paragraph writing at the STIKOM Bali Institute of Technology & Business. The study found that students experienced problems related to linguistic aspects and critical thinking skills. Linguistic challenges included difficulties in word formation, punctuation, grammar, tense usage, and content development. The study suggested that lecturers should provide appropriate instructional strategies to guide students in improving both writing competence and critical thinking abilities.

Another study conducted by Listyani and Budjalemba (2020), entitled "Factors Contributing to Students' Difficulties in Academic Writing Class: Students' Perceptions," explored the factors influencing students' academic writing difficulties. Using qualitative methods through open questionnaires and interviews, the researchers found that students' writing problems were caused by both internal and external factors. Internal factors included lack of motivation, limited confidence, insufficient knowledge, and academic pressure, while external factors involved teaching approaches, classroom environment, learning materials, and writing-related aspects.

Furthermore, Afdal (2021) examined students' abilities and problems in writing opinion columns. The study focused on writing dimensions and common errors experienced by students in essay writing courses. The findings showed that students' writing performance remained at basic and below-basic levels based on writing assessment criteria. Common errors were identified in capitalization, punctuation, sentence structure, spelling, subject-predicate agreement, word choice, prepositions, passive voice, and other grammatical aspects. These findings indicate that EFL learners still face significant challenges in producing accurate and well-organized academic writing.

Based on previous studies, writing difficulties among EFL learners have been widely discussed. However, most previous research mainly focuses on identifying writing problems without providing comprehensive solutions to address those difficulties. Moreover, learners' motivation and engagement in writing activities also influence their writing development. In many cases, students may initially show enthusiasm in learning writing skills, but their motivation decreases due to various factors, including instructional practices and learning experiences (Williyan & Darma, 2022). Therefore, there is a need for further investigation that not only explores students' writing difficulties but also identifies possible strategies to help learners overcome these challenges.

Consequently, this study aims to explore EFL learners' writing difficulties and examine possible solutions that can support students in improving their academic writing skills. The findings of this research are expected to provide insights for students and educators in developing more effective writing instruction, enabling learners to enhance their ability to produce academic texts such as theses, journal articles, and other scholarly works.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach as its research design. Qualitative research focuses on understanding social phenomena by examining participants' perspectives within their natural contexts (Thao & Herman, 2020). This approach was selected because the study aims to explore the writing difficulties experienced by EFL learners and identify possible solutions to address these challenges. Furthermore, this research is expected to provide insights for learners regarding the importance of writing skills, particularly for academic purposes. The study specifically investigates university students' difficulties in academic writing contexts (Escobar Fandiño et al., 2019).

The participants of this study were five third-semester students from the English Department of IPB Cirebon. The participants were selected because they were actively involved in academic writing courses and had experiences related to the challenges of developing writing skills. The data analysis focused on the various aspects of writing difficulties encountered by the students. This research was conducted with these participants because the researchers shared similar experiences with other students in learning writing skills, which helped them better understand the challenges faced by EFL learners and explore potential solutions.

Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews with the participants. The interview process used a structured interview format to guide the data collection process; however, semi-structured interviews were also applied when additional information was needed. The participants were asked several questions regarding their experiences, challenges, and perceptions of writing activities. Their responses were then analyzed to identify common patterns of difficulties and possible strategies for improvement based on relevant previous studies.

The data analysis process was conducted by examining participants' responses to determine the various types of writing difficulties experienced by EFL learners. Through this analysis, the researchers aimed to explore differences in students' writing challenges and identify possible solutions that could support learners in improving their academic writing abilities. As stated by Simanihuruk et al. (2021), data analysis plays an important role in interpreting research findings and generating meaningful conclusions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The writing difficulties experienced by EFL learners were identified through four main aspects, including affective, cognitive, and linguistic factors related to the writing process. The interview findings were analyzed to explore and understand the challenges encountered by five EFL learners from the English Education Department. The researchers conducted interviews with the participants to investigate their experiences and difficulties across these writing aspects. Furthermore, the participants' writing challenges were presented and interpreted based on the data collected through questionnaires and interviews (Bulqiyah, 2021).

3.1 Writing Difficulties Experienced by the EFL Learners

The findings of this study reveal that EFL learners encountered various challenges in developing their writing skills. The data were collected through questionnaires and interviews to explore students' experiences and perceptions regarding writing difficulties. The analysis of students' responses was categorized into three main aspects, namely affective, cognitive, and linguistic aspects. These three aspects represent different dimensions that influence students' writing performance. The questionnaire results are presented in the form of percentages, while the interview data are used to provide deeper explanations regarding the reasons behind students' difficulties.

The affective aspect refers to students' emotional conditions, motivation, interest, confidence, and attitudes toward writing activities. The cognitive aspect focuses on students' mental processes during writing, including generating ideas, organizing information, and transferring meaning into the target language.

Meanwhile, the linguistic aspect relates to students' language knowledge, such as grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction. The following sections describe the findings obtained from the participants.

The affective dimension plays an important role in students' writing development because emotional factors can influence students' willingness, confidence, and consistency in practicing writing. The results indicate that several participants experienced difficulties related to motivation, interest, and the ability to develop ideas while writing.

Table 1. Affective Problem in Writing

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Students are difficult to improvise the text	38.1%	47.6%	42.9%	14.3%
Students have no interest in writing	28.2%	12%	20.5%	11.1%
Student rarely practice in writing	23.8%	57.1%	52.4%	10.5%

Based on Table 1, the first statement shows that most participants experienced difficulties in developing or improvising their written texts. The percentage indicates that 47.6% of students agreed that they found it challenging to expand their ideas into complete written forms, while 38.1% strongly agreed with the statement. This finding suggests that many students struggled to transform their initial thoughts into organized sentences and paragraphs. Writing does not only require students to have ideas but also requires the ability to elaborate those ideas into meaningful and coherent texts. Meanwhile, 42.9% of participants selected the neutral option, indicating that some students experienced difficulties in developing texts but did not always consider them as serious obstacles. Only 14.3% disagreed with the statement, which implies that a smaller number of students were able to develop their writing ideas more easily. The second statement investigated students' interest in writing activities. The results showed that 28.2% of participants strongly agreed that they had limited interest in writing, while 12% agreed with the statement. This finding indicates that some students experienced a lack of motivation when dealing with writing assignments. Furthermore, 20.5% of participants chose the neutral option, showing that students' interest in writing could depend on the topic, learning environment, or writing activity provided by the lecturer. The low level of interest may influence students' willingness to practice and improve their writing abilities. The third statement focused on students' writing practice habits. The results showed that 57.1% of participants agreed that they rarely practiced writing, while 23.8% strongly agreed with this statement. This finding demonstrates that limited writing practice was one of the important factors contributing to students' writing difficulties. Writing skills require continuous practice because improvement occurs through repeated exposure, revision, and feedback. However, 52.4% of students selected the neutral response, suggesting that some learners practiced writing occasionally but not consistently.

The interview results supported the questionnaire findings. Several participants explained that they experienced difficulties in determining appropriate writing styles and constructing effective sentences. Some students stated that they often felt confused when choosing suitable expressions and organizing their ideas into paragraphs. In addition, several participants admitted that they lacked motivation to practice writing regularly, which influenced their progress in developing writing competence. Therefore, the findings indicate that affective factors significantly influenced students' writing performance. The main affective challenges experienced by students included difficulty in expanding ideas, lack of motivation, limited interest, and insufficient writing practice. Although some participants did not experience these difficulties strongly, they still recognized similar challenges during the process of learning academic writing.

The cognitive aspect refers to the thinking processes involved in writing activities, including generating ideas, organizing thoughts, and transferring concepts into the target language. Writing requires learners to process information, select appropriate expressions, and arrange ideas logically. The findings show that students experienced difficulties in these cognitive processes.

Table 2. Cognitive Problem in Writing

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Transferring to target text	22.5%	45.5%	14.6%	10.1%

Generating idea	30%	40.7%	15%	11.7%
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Based on Table 2, the first statement reveals that transferring ideas from the students' first language into English was one of the difficulties experienced by participants. Around 45.5% of students agreed and 22.5% strongly agreed that they had problems transferring their thoughts into the target language. This finding indicates that students often understood what they wanted to express but experienced difficulties in finding appropriate English expressions. This challenge may occur because English requires different sentence structures, vocabulary choices, and grammatical patterns compared to students' first language. Meanwhile, 14.6% of participants selected the neutral response, indicating that some students experienced this difficulty but could manage it through learning strategies. Only 10.1% disagreed with the statement. The second statement examined students' ability to generate ideas. The results showed that 40.7% agreed and 30% strongly agreed that they faced difficulties in generating ideas during writing activities. This finding suggests that many students struggled not only with language but also with developing content. Students often had difficulties expanding a topic into supporting explanations, examples, or arguments.

The interview findings confirmed that idea generation was one of the most challenging stages of writing. Several participants explained that they could identify a topic but were unsure how to develop it into a complete paragraph. They often had ideas in their minds but struggled to organize them into logical sequences. Some participants also stated that transferring ideas into English was challenging because English was not their first language. Overall, the cognitive difficulties experienced by students were mainly related to generating ideas and transferring meaning into the target language. These findings indicate that students need more guidance in organizing thoughts, developing content, and practicing academic writing strategies.

The linguistic aspect relates to students' knowledge and control of language components needed to produce accurate written texts. These components include grammar, vocabulary, and general linguistic knowledge. The findings demonstrate that linguistic problems were among the most significant challenges experienced by EFL learners.

Table 3. Linguistic Problem in Writing

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Linguistic Knowledge	25.6%	30.3%	20%	15.6%
Grammatical Error	40.9%	30.7%	25.4%	10.9%
Vocabulary Challenge	37.2%	40.1%	30.3%	13.7%

Based on Table 3, the first statement indicates that students experienced difficulties related to linguistic knowledge. Approximately 30.3% agreed and 25.6% strongly agreed that their limited linguistic knowledge affected their writing performance. This finding suggests that students were aware of the importance of understanding language rules and structures in producing academic texts. The second statement shows that grammatical errors became one of the most dominant writing problems. Around 40.9% of participants strongly agreed and 30.7% agreed that grammar was a major challenge. Grammar plays an essential role in writing because incorrect grammatical structures can influence the clarity and accuracy of messages. Students' difficulties included tense usage, sentence structure, and applying grammatical rules appropriately. Furthermore, vocabulary challenges were also experienced by many participants. The findings showed that 40.1% agreed and 37.2% strongly agreed that vocabulary limitations influenced their writing ability. Students often struggled to select appropriate words and remember suitable vocabulary when expressing their ideas.

The interview results strengthened the questionnaire findings. Several participants stated that grammatical errors were the most difficult aspect of writing because they were uncertain about sentence patterns and language rules. Other participants mentioned that limited vocabulary made it difficult to express their thoughts clearly. Some students explained that although they understood the topic, they could not fully develop their writing because they lacked appropriate vocabulary. In conclusion, linguistic problems,

especially grammatical errors and vocabulary limitations, were significant barriers for EFL learners in academic writing. The combination of questionnaire and interview findings shows that students need continuous language practice and appropriate instructional support to improve their writing competence.

3.2 The Possible Solutions for the Writing Difficulties

Based on the findings of this study, EFL learners experienced various challenges in developing their writing skills, including affective, cognitive, and linguistic difficulties. Therefore, several solutions are proposed to help learners overcome these barriers and improve their academic writing competence. These solutions involve the role of teachers, the integration of technology, and institutional support to create a more supportive writing environment.

Teachers Should Provide Constructive and Continuous Feedback

One of the essential strategies for improving EFL learners' writing ability is providing meaningful and constructive feedback. Writing development does not only depend on students' knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but also requires continuous guidance throughout the writing process. Teachers need to provide explicit instruction and appropriate scaffolding during each stage of writing, including pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing. By guiding students step-by-step through the writing process, teachers can help learners develop fundamental writing abilities, such as generating ideas, organizing paragraphs, maintaining coherence, and applying correct grammatical structures. Rather than expecting students to immediately produce a complete academic text, instructors should divide writing tasks into smaller components to allow learners to gradually develop their competence.

Furthermore, feedback should not only focus on correcting students' errors but also encourage them to understand the reasons behind those errors. Detailed feedback enables students to identify their weaknesses and improve their future writing performance. Therefore, teachers should implement formative assessment activities, such as regular writing exercises, weekly writing tasks, peer-review activities, and writing consultations. These continuous practices allow students to connect theoretical knowledge with practical writing performance. In addition, writing instruction should shift from a teacher-centered approach toward a learner-centered and performance-based learning environment. Students need opportunities to actively participate, practice writing, receive feedback, and revise their work. Through repetitive practice and consistent evaluation, learners can gradually develop confidence and independence in writing (Alharbi, 2019).

Teachers Should Balance Material Development and Writing Practice

Another important solution is maintaining a balance between delivering writing materials and providing sufficient opportunities for writing practice. In many cases, students understand writing concepts theoretically but struggle to apply them when producing actual texts. Therefore, teachers need to design writing activities that encourage students to actively use their knowledge. Teachers should provide various genre-based writing activities, including descriptive, narrative, argumentative, and academic writing tasks. These activities allow students to recognize different writing purposes, structures, and language features. Through continuous exposure to various genres, students can gradually develop awareness of how ideas should be organized and expressed in written communication.

Moreover, writing instruction should not be limited to explaining textbook materials. Teachers need to integrate grammar instruction, vocabulary development, and writing strategies into practical writing activities. Grammar plays an important role in academic writing because inaccurate sentence structures may affect the clarity and effectiveness of communication. Therefore, students need opportunities to practice applying grammatical rules within meaningful writing contexts rather than only memorizing grammatical concepts (Umamah, 2019). Besides linguistic improvement, teachers should also consider students' affective challenges. Some students experience anxiety, lack of confidence, and low motivation when writing. Therefore, educators should create a supportive classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable expressing ideas and making mistakes as part of the learning process. Encouragement, motivation, and positive reinforcement can reduce students' fear of writing and increase their willingness to practice. Teachers should also encourage learners to develop independent writing habits outside the classroom. Self-directed writing activities, such as maintaining journals, practicing paragraph writing, or analyzing academic texts, can help students internalize writing strategies and improve their language awareness.

Teachers Should Utilize Technology in Writing Instruction

The integration of technology has become an important alternative solution for addressing students' writing difficulties. Digital tools can provide additional support for learners by offering flexible learning opportunities and assisting students throughout the writing process. Technology-based learning environments allow students to access writing resources, receive feedback, and practice writing beyond classroom limitations. The use of digital platforms can support students' higher-order thinking skills by helping them analyze, organize, evaluate, and revise information. During the writing process, learners can use technological tools to improve idea development, text organization, and language accuracy. These activities are particularly useful because writing requires students to continuously review and improve their texts.

Furthermore, technology can increase students' motivation and engagement in writing activities. Learning management systems, such as online classroom platforms, allow teachers and students to communicate effectively, exchange materials, submit assignments, and provide feedback. These platforms create a more interactive learning environment and reduce students' anxiety toward writing tasks (AlMarwani, 2020; Nenotek et al., 2022). Technology also supports independent learning because students can practice writing according to their own learning pace. Instead of depending only on classroom instruction, learners can explore additional resources, revise their writing, and improve their skills through continuous digital interaction.

Universities Should Provide Academic Writing Support Centers

Apart from classroom instruction, institutional support is also necessary to improve students' writing competence. Universities should establish and maintain academic writing centers that specifically support students in developing their writing skills. Such centers can function as learning communities where students receive additional guidance, consultation, and academic literacy support. A writing center can provide various services, including individual writing consultations, academic writing workshops, grammar assistance, and research writing guidance. These services are especially important because university students are required to produce academic texts such as research papers, journal articles, and theses. Additionally, universities should consider implementing diagnostic assessments, such as English placement tests, to identify students' initial writing abilities. The results of these assessments can help institutions design appropriate writing programs based on students' different proficiency levels.

The development of effective writing support requires collaboration between language specialists and subject-area lecturers. Language instructors can focus on linguistic and rhetorical skills, while content lecturers can help students understand discipline-specific writing requirements. This collaborative approach allows students to develop both academic knowledge and the ability to communicate that knowledge effectively (Manjet Kaur Mehar Singh, 2015). A well-developed writing center can become an important part of university academic culture. It not only assists students with immediate writing problems but also promotes long-term academic development by encouraging independent learning, critical thinking, and scholarly communication.

Teachers Should Develop Effective Communication Skills

Effective communication between teachers and students is another important factor in supporting students' writing development. Teachers who communicate clearly can help students better understand writing concepts, instructions, and feedback. Clear explanations allow learners to recognize their weaknesses and identify strategies to improve their writing performance. Teachers should communicate writing expectations through understandable instructions and examples. When providing feedback, educators need to explain students' strengths and weaknesses rather than only marking errors. This approach helps learners understand the writing process and encourages them to actively revise their work. Furthermore, teachers should create opportunities for students to discuss their ideas, ask questions, and share difficulties during writing activities. Classroom interaction can help students overcome anxiety and build confidence in expressing their thoughts. Through effective communication, teachers can better understand students' needs and provide appropriate assistance based on their individual challenges. Therefore, strong teacher communication skills contribute significantly to creating a supportive writing environment. When students feel guided and understood, they are

more likely to participate actively in writing activities and gradually improve their academic writing competence.

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the writing difficulties experienced by EFL learners during the learning process of an academic writing course. The findings revealed that students encountered various challenges that influenced their ability to produce effective written texts. These challenges emerged from three major dimensions of writing, namely affective, cognitive, and linguistic aspects. The results indicate that writing difficulties are not only related to students' language knowledge but also influenced by their motivation, learning habits, confidence, and ability to organize ideas.

The affective aspect was identified as one of the important factors affecting students' writing development. Most participants reported that they experienced difficulties in maintaining motivation and interest in writing activities. Some students explained that they felt less interested in writing because they considered writing tasks complicated and challenging. In addition, limited writing practice became another factor that influenced students' writing progress. Since writing is a skill that requires continuous practice, students who rarely engage in writing activities may experience difficulties in developing ideas, organizing texts, and improving their overall writing performance. Therefore, students need to increase their writing frequency through both academic and non-academic writing activities to develop confidence and achieve better writing outcomes. Furthermore, the findings showed that linguistic problems were considered the most significant difficulties faced by EFL learners. Grammatical errors, limited vocabulary, and insufficient linguistic knowledge were identified as major barriers in producing academic texts. Many participants admitted that they struggled to apply appropriate grammar rules, choose suitable vocabulary, and construct accurate sentences. These linguistic challenges affected students' ability to express their ideas clearly and coherently. Therefore, improving linguistic competence should become an important focus for both learners and instructors. Students need continuous exposure to language structures, vocabulary development activities, and practical writing exercises to gradually improve their writing accuracy.

Besides linguistic challenges, cognitive aspects also contributed to students' writing difficulties. The ability to transfer ideas into the target language and generate ideas became challenging stages for many participants. Some students stated that they had ideas in their minds but experienced difficulties when transforming those ideas into well-organized English paragraphs. This finding indicates that writing competence requires not only language knowledge but also cognitive skills, such as planning, organizing, and developing ideas. Therefore, students need to be guided through writing strategies that can help them generate ideas, create outlines, and structure their texts effectively. Another important finding was related to students' difficulty in improvising and developing texts. Some participants explained that expanding simple ideas into complete sentences and paragraphs was one of the most challenging parts of writing. They often struggled to determine appropriate expressions and connect sentences logically. This difficulty is particularly important in academic writing because students are expected to produce texts that are coherent, well-structured, and meaningful. Therefore, teachers need to provide sufficient guidance on paragraph development, text organization, and revision strategies to support students in improving their writing performance.

The findings of this study also highlight the important role of teachers in creating effective writing instruction. Students' difficulties may be influenced by teaching approaches, learning environments, and the types of writing activities provided during the course. Therefore, lecturers should consider implementing more interactive and supportive teaching strategies that encourage students to actively participate in writing activities. Providing constructive feedback, designing various writing practices, and creating opportunities for students to revise their work can help learners overcome their writing barriers.

This research was conducted among students of the English Department of IPB Cirebon who participated in an academic writing course. The findings provide valuable insights into students' perceptions and experiences regarding writing difficulties. However, further research is still needed to explore writing challenges from different perspectives, involving a larger number of participants, different educational contexts, or various levels of English proficiency. Future studies may also investigate the effectiveness of particular teaching strategies, digital tools, or instructional approaches in improving EFL learners' academic writing abilities. Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexity of writing difficulties experienced by EFL learners. The findings are expected to become a reference for educators and researchers in developing more effective writing instruction. By addressing affective, cognitive, and linguistic barriers, teachers and institutions can support learners in becoming more confident and competent academic writers who are capable of producing quality academic texts, such as research papers, journal articles, and theses.

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