Catalysts and Challenges in Essay Writing Proficiency among College Students: Insights from Motivation, Literacy, Cognition, and Language Skills

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Abstract. This study delves into the various factors that influence the essay writing skills of college students, including motivation, literacy, cognitive abilities, and language proficiency. A mixed-method approach was used, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The data was collected through questionnaire surveys and interviews to analyze the impact of these factors on students’ writing capabilities. The findings reveal that the majority of students find writing enjoyable, with over 90% expressing interest in essay composition. However, procrastination tendencies were observed, with 46% of students admitting to submitting essays on the last day. Furthermore, excessive instructor feedback negatively affected the motivation of more than 50% of respondents. Regarding literacy, approximately 66% of students engage in daily reading, a critical component for enhancing writing skills. A strong correlation between reading and writing was identified, as students often utilize relevant sources to support their essays. However, 75% of participants admitted to reading primarily within the confines of coursework. Cognitive capabilities played a significant role, with over 80% of students effectively planning and developing essay content. However, content comprehension proved to be challenging for 56%, affecting the coherence of their essays. Interviews revealed difficulties in paragraph development and topic selection. Language skills were deemed essential for coherent writing, with 80% of students constructing sentences adeptly and employing grammar effectively. Despite these skills, students struggled with syntax and word choice. Interviews highlighted issues with sentence construction and word selection, impacting the clarity of their messages. The research findings can potentially be implemented to design strategies, models, and learning media that focus on improving the essay writing proficiency of college students.

Keywords: Motivation, Literacy, Cognitive Abilities, Language Skills, Essay Writing

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INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of effective writing skills is of crucial importance for academic success and professional advancement in today's information-rich landscape. The task of crafting coherent and compelling essays falls upon college students, who engage in a complex process that intertwines motivation, literacy, cognitive abilities, and language competence. Analyzing the dynamics of these dimensions can provide insightful observations into the factors that catalyze or hinder students' essay writing proficiency. Essay writing proficiency is a fundamental skill that transcends disciplinary boundaries. The ability to convey ideas concisely, logically, and persuasively empowers students to articulate their thoughts, engage in critical discourse, and contribute to knowledge construction. Writing proficiency serves as a bridge between academic achievement and effective communication in real-world contexts (Kang et al., 2024; Guo, 2023; Banat, 2023).

Research on the proficiency of essay writing among English as a foreign language (EFL) learners has been extensively conducted in diverse contexts and educational levels. This research encompasses a wide range of aspects, including writing strategies, skill development, pedagogical practices, as well as writing evaluation and assessment. Some common themes explored in this context include the efficacy of writing strategies, the cultivation of writing skills, approaches to teaching and learning writing, and the evaluation and assessment of writing. The importance of research on essay writing proficiency in EFL is underscored by the fact that writing is a fundamental communication skill in language learning. By comprehending the factors that contribute to writing proficiency, educators can devise more effective pedagogical strategies, and enable EFL learners to attain higher levels of competency in writing. As such, research in this field has been a key priority for scholars and practitioners alike (Hwang & Kim, 2023; Kim et al., 2023; Phuong et al., 2023, Sattar et al., 2023; Patwary et al., 2023).

Previous studies have extensively investigated writing strategies employed by students in crafting English essays, encompassing various techniques such as planning, drafting, and text revision (Wang, 2023; Bui et al., 2023). Furthermore, previous research has attempted to identify factors that influence the development of writing skills among EFL learners, including curriculum, learning environment, and technology (Muftah, 2023; Quadir et al., 2023). Similarly, previous research has sought to comprehend the effectiveness of different writing teaching methods in the EFL context, such as technology use, teacher feedback, and integrated writing practices (Yang et al., 2023; Teng, 2024). Moreover, previous studies have endeavored to comprehend evaluation methods for assessing the quality of writing in English, such as the application of assessment rubrics, analysis of common errors, and strategies for improving writing quality (Waer, 2023; Wang et al., 2023).

Understanding the catalysts that ignite students' enthusiasm and the challenges that hinder their progress is pivotal for educators and instructional designers (Zhang, 2024; Yuksel & Bailey, 2024). By crafting tailored interventions that nurture motivation, bolster literacy skills, enhance cognitive strategies, and address language deficiencies, educators can foster a supportive environment that enables students to surmount obstacles and flourish as adept essay writers. As the realms of
academia and professional pursuits increasingly demand effective written communication, delving into the underlying dynamics of college students' essay writing proficiency serves as a catalyst for educational innovation. Exploring the nuanced interplay between motivation, literacy, cognition, and language skills not only enriches pedagogical strategies but also equips students with the competencies required to excel as proficient and impactful writers. According to the research background, this study tried to delve into the various factors that influence the essay-writing skills of college students, including motivation, literacy, cognitive abilities, and language proficiency. The research findings can potentially be implemented to design strategies, models, and learning media that focus on improving the essay writing proficiency of college students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing Skills

Writing skills have become a major part of the learning process (Ray, Graham, Houston, & Harris, 2016). Students must be good at writing to succeed at school, at work, and personal lives (Graham, 2019). However, it is not easy to produce good writing because there are factors that affect students' writing abilities. English lecturers must find the factors causing the inability of many students to master writing skills. According to Brown (2000), these factors are personality, socio-cultural, motivation, attitude, cognitive, and language skills. The factors could be detected through observation and interviews (Yasin, 2011) regarding their impact on students' writing skills.

Cognitively, reading and writing skills are active and recursive processes entailing meaning construction, interactivity, and schema action. Writing skills are obtained through the reading quantity, and quality is achieved consciously and unconsciously. Before writing, students obtain information by reading (Prittimaa, Takala, & Ladonlahti, 2015). Writing also improves thinking skills and becomes a higher cognitive function of analysis and synthesis developed through written language (Durga & Rao, 2018). For this reason, it is important to master writing skills, especially for students studying a foreign language such as English. Students' ability to use vocabulary, grammar, and other language aspects are traced through writing. Besides, students can produce good writing if they have motivation, positive attitude, literacy, cognitive ability, and language ability.

Writing skills are important for EFL students to master so that they can complete the various academic assignments given. However, it is realized that writing skills are difficult skills, many studies have been conducted to determine the factors that influence students' writing difficulties. Psychological factors related to self-esteem are factors of difficulties experienced by students when writing. The factor that occupies the second position is the linguistic factor, especially the selection of the right diction for writing. Rastri et.al (2023) also found that the difficulty factor students faced when writing was the linguistic factor. Deciding which set of linguistic units must be removed, replaced, provided, or reorganized is therefore regarded as the primary obstacle in writing research proposals. This indicated that most of the students found it difficult to choose the correct linguistic units for their proposal.
Another study by Yani, Suyadi, & Dinata (2022) found that psychology factors such as motivation, self-esteem, and anxiety got the highest score (40.36%) while linguistics factors got 29.96%. Thus, it can be assumed that psychology factor is the most influencing factor in students’ difficulty in writing. A study conducted by Dema (2022) revealed that a negative disposition such as lack of reading skills hinders students’ writing. A few students expressed dissatisfaction over writing tasks assigned by teachers. They stated that teachers are more concerned with the final product, and students plagiarized others’ work to meet the entry number in the writing portfolio without learning anything. Besides, Dema also found that motivation is essential for inspiring as well as sustaining students’ interest in writing. The findings of the survey revealed that motivation plays a key role in improving students’ writing abilities.

Writing is a language performance with a graphic system suitable for improving learners’ linguistic knowledge and expressing their ideas, attitudes, and beliefs (Smetanova, 2013). It is one of the productive and most complex of the four language skills (Rao, 2019). Writing skills could control the teaching and learning process, determine the students’ grades, consolidate teaching, and spot language errors. Additionally, the writing skills help teach punctuation marks, learn other skills, and improve students’ language skills to transform their abilities into good performance (Darancik, 2018).

Writing is a fundamental language skill that requires lecturers’ assistance to be developed (Vakili & Ebadi, 2019). Students may lack linguistic expression skills when writing in a foreign language. As a result, the students interpret their ideas only by showing meaning without applying accurate linguistic expressions (Shahsavar, 2019). Learning to write is not a natural process similar to speaking (Haerazi, 2019) because it requires high critical thinking skills (Pei, Zheng, Zhang, & Liu, 2017). Writing skills require a strong learning process and access to knowledge sources (Hafidz & Aditya, 2019). To gain this new knowledge, effective feedback is needed in the classroom to correct grammar errors (Sermsook, Liamnimitr, & Pochakorn, 2017).

**Students’ Writing Deficiency**

Students’ writing inability has been documented in several previous studies, which found that writing skills are difficult to master even in their mother tongue (Wahyuni, Darmansyah, & J, 2021). This inability affects students’ grades and sparks ongoing debate about writing skills deficiencies. The deficiency is traditionally attributed to poor English teaching in secondary schools. The easy entry requirements allow admission for all students, even for those without basic English (Bouchefira, 2015).

Writing errors are common no matter how hard students try to avoid mistakes in their text (Ahmed & Ahasan, 2015). Toba, Noor, and Sanu (2019) found that Indonesia’s EFL students’ writing ability was good, with an average score of 77.83. However, some found difficulties writing, especially regarding content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanism. The weaknesses are caused by limited writing knowledge and personal reasons, such as lack of practice, interest, and teachers’ assistance, as well as fear, negative perception, and low motivation. According to Alghammas & Alhuwaydi (2020), writing weakness comes from their low ability to
speak English. Students in Indonesia think writing is a difficult endeavor (Dewi, Daud, & Chairina, 2017) and challenging for teachers (Adam, Abid, & Bantulu, 2021).

Factors Affecting Student Writing Skills

Brown (2000) stated that students’ writing results could be identified with two affective domains. The first domain comprises the personality or internal factors contributing to successful language learning, including cognition, motivation, and attitude. The second domain constitutes extrinsic factors such as socio-cultural variables because foreign language students bring two intersecting languages and cultures. The language ability or linguistic factor also contributes to deficient students’ writing skills. In this research the factors affecting students’ writing skills are focused on motivation, literacy, cognitive ability, and language ability.

Motivation

Motivation acts as a driving force that propels students on their writing journey. Intrinsic motivation, fueled by a genuine interest in the subject matter, sparks creativity and fosters a sense of ownership over written content. Extrinsic motivation, tied to academic goals and achievements, provides an additional impetus. Investigating the motivations that underpin students' writing efforts unveils the extent to which enthusiasm and ambition impact their writing outcomes.

Motivation is the driving force to carry out certain activities to achieve certain goals. Therefore, motivation is an impulse to make behavioral changes. In education, motivation is an influential factor (Filgona et al., 2020). Learning motivation is students’ internal and external encouragement to make behavioral changes with several supportive indicators or elements. The success of learning depends on whether or not the learners are motivated. Motivation drives learners in reaching learning goals. Learning motivation indicators include the desire to succeed, encouragement and need to learn, and hopes and aspirations for the future. Low writing motivation can cause lack of interest in writing (Lestari, Masrul, & Rianti, 2022). Low motivation and lack of interest in writing will result in poor writing skill. Cahyono and Rahayu (2020) mentioned that EFL students who have a higher level of motivation in writing have better writing proficiency. In order to improve students’ writing performance, writing instructors should take advantage of students interest to write because it is an inherently satisfying and enjoyable activity (Graham, et al., 2021). Moreover, Camacho et al. (2021) asserts that motivation has a fundamental contribution to students’ writing performance.

Writing is an iterative process that requires students’ internal motivation. Teachers has the responsibility to build students’ confidence and lower their anxiety (Pratiwi, Hendriwanto, & Nurjannah, 2021) when they engage in writing activities. Perseverance as a result of internal motivation is needed in learning writing skills. For instance, before writing, students must search for information to complete a given task and write, edit, and rewrite the first draft. Motivation is a pivotal element that prompts learners’ persistence, attentiveness and growth of skills in language learning, as motivation is closely related with academic proficiency (Ouahidi, 2020).
Literacy

The symbiotic relationship between reading and writing is undeniable. Proficient readers often exhibit enhanced writing skills due to their exposure to diverse language structures, styles, and content. Active reading practices, encompassing comprehension, critical evaluation, and synthesis, contribute to informed and well-structured writing. Understanding the intricate interplay between reading and writing literacy offers a comprehensive perspective on students' writing abilities.

Literacy refers to a person's ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, and communicate something in spoken or written form. For the purposes of this paper, the author limits literacy in terms of reading and writing skills only. It is because reading and writing share the same cognitive aspects. Lack of reading activity may hinder students to develop ideas in their writing. It is because the ability to develop ideas in an essay depends on the amount of information gained through reading. Wide range of information or ideas can only be obtained through reading sources directly related to the topic. In other words, students should have information literacy. Information literacy skills which are part of critical thinking skills can help improve student writing ability and academic performance (Shao & Purpur, 2016). Information literacy includes the ability to locate information, evaluate and use it effectively whereas critical thinking involves the process of exploring and evaluating ideas in order to make a decision or form an opinion on a topic or problem (Wertz et al., 2013).

Indonesia's low literacy levels and lack of reading interest have presented a challenge for educators seeking to improve students’ writing abilities (Anaktototy, 2023). According to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) research report released by the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2019, Indonesia's literacy level is ranked among the lowest 10 of 70 countries. Furthermore, UNESCO reports that only 0.001 percent of Indonesian people show an interest in reading, making it challenging for students to develop their language skills, particularly in writing (Risman & Rozimela, 2019).

The integration of reading and writing activities in ESL/EFL classes is a crucial step in enhancing students' writing skills, particularly in countries such as Indonesia with low literacy levels and limited reading interest (Anaktototy, 2023). Apsari (2018) said that reflective reading can be used effectively to improve students' writing skill. Besides, students can also develop ideas, improve textual coherence, and textual cohesion. Reading is the main key to knowing everything, including everyday information and clues that significantly impact life. It gives a person broad knowledge, enriches vocabulary, and increases the ability to understand the ideas in a text. Therefore, understanding the ideas in the reading text assists the reader in becoming a better writer. Indeed, there is a reciprocal relationship between reading and writing. Reading can improve writing in the same way that writing can improve reading (Renandya, 2021).
Cognitive Ability

The cognitive aspects of essay writing encompass the intricate process of idea generation, organization, and synthesis. Students engage in critical thinking, strategize content development, and construct logical arguments. Proficiency in navigating cognitive challenges such as topic selection, content coherence, and essay type mastery directly influences the quality of written output. Exploring students’ cognitive strategies provides insights into their approach to tackling complex writing tasks.

In the learning process, students move from being ignorant, understanding, and knowledgeable to being experts in the studied field. This series becomes one of the patterns in forging an individual’s cognitive ability. Cognition is inseparable from intelligence, implying all mental activities that make an individual connect, assess, and consider an event to gain knowledge. Examples are seen when a person learns, constructs an idea, and solves a problem. Additionally, cognition relates to a person’s ability to remember, feel, and recognize something learned. Students’ cognitive abilities must be seen in applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information. Writing is a very complex and effortful cognitive task. It is a challenge for students to turn their ideas into text because it depends on their cognitive resources. All at once students have to cope with ideas, content, language norms and type of text. If students do not have enough working capacity they will lose their focus in writing.

Planning is a fundamental cognitive process in writing. It always starts by thinking about what to say and how to say it and converting into written text. Then, reviewing to edit the content of the written text (Fawa’reh, 2019). Therefore, there is a cognitive demand in writing an essay which is characterized by a process if critical thinking. Students must think and determine what topic to write about. Students have to write outline before start writing the essay. Students will start writing their essay by using eye catching sentences and thesis statement that can be elaborated in the essay. So producing a written product requires good cognitive abilities. As mentioned by Uluşan (2018) that if writing production is considered at a much higher level such as essay writing, it will be seen that the task is much more complicated than the task of producing a simple sentence, as it requires, in addition to lexical and syntactic processing, strategy, creativity, planning, organization, artistic concerns as well.

Language Ability

Language skills are the bedrock of effective communication. Proficiency in grammar, vocabulary, and syntax empowers students to convey their ideas with clarity and precision. The nuanced interplay between grammar and vocabulary shapes the flow of ideas and influences the persuasive impact of writing. Investigating language skill challenges sheds light on hurdles students face in achieving fluency and coherence.

Language ability implies using language to express ideas orally and in writing and using vocabulary and grammar to produce acceptable sentences. Students must have good language skills to write their ideas according to acceptable English
Without good language skills, students experience problems in expressing themselves to readers. The ability to use acceptable grammar when writing becomes a problem for EFL students. Grammatical errors, lack of variations in sentence structure, inappropriate use of vocabulary, and lack of vocabulary are the difficulties faced by students (Pratiwi, Rukmini, & Faridi, 2017). It is realized that students perceived the importance of the use of correct grammar and textual structure in their writing (Hadiani & Permata, 2019). Therefore, it is recommended that teacher give explicit teaching and more exercises to students in order to minimize their grammatical errors.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

**Research Design**

A mixed-method approach was used, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. By using this approach, we can capture clearly the various factors that influence the essay writing skills of college students, including motivation, literacy, cognitive abilities, and language proficiency.

**Participants**

This study involved the participation of 120 college students who were enrolled in the English Education Study Program at Pattimura University. All participants were in their second year of study and had registered for the Essay Writing course during the second semester of the academic year 2022/2023, which spanned from January to July 2023. The study was conducted at the conclusion of the semester, at which point all participants had submitted their written essays for grading by their instructors, rendering them eligible for data collection. Furthermore, the interviewees were selected using a random sampling method from the total number of participants who had completed the questionnaire. Ten (10) participants were selected for the interview, during which they were invited to respond to the questions in their preferred language, be it English or Indonesian. The researcher translated all the answers obtained in order to ascertain the writing difficulties experienced by the participants.

**Instruments**

Two instruments were used to collect data: a questionnaire and an interview. Students’ responses are grouped into three categories (i.e., Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree) and presented in percentages. The questionnaire used in the survey has 42 items in total, while the interview questions consist of 11 items. The questionnaire and the interview questions were categorized into four categories: motivation, literacy, cognitive ability, and language ability. The interview guideline was developed according to the factors contributing to EFL deficient writing skills (Kucuk, 2023; Laiche & Nemouchi, 2023; Farooqui, 2023).

**Data Analysis**

Quantitative data gathered through the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data achieved through interview were coded based on the four categories. From the interview results several theme or focus were
determine to identify and decide the factors contributing to deficient EFL students’ writing skills.

Table 1. List of interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors contributing to EFL deficient writing skills</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Motivation                                          | Are you confident when you write your essay?  
Do you feel anxious when you write your essay?   
Do you feel overwhelm when you write your essay? |
| Literacy                                            | Do you read before you write your essay?      
Is it easy for you to find information from different sources to develop your essay? |
| Cognitive Ability                                   | Is it easy for you to organize ideas for your essay?   
Is it easy for you to critically write your essay? |
| Language Ability                                    | Do you have writing difficulties because lack of linguistic competence?   
Do you recognize your grammatical weaknesses?      
How can you improve your grammatical weaknesses?   |

Ten (10) out of 120 questionnaire participants participated in the interview. Thematic analysis was used to determine the major themes that arose from the responses to the semi-structured interviews. The results of the interview were transcribed to find students’ obstacles in writing essays. Four themes were identified as obstacles to students’ essay writing; lack of confidence, lack of planning, lack of grammatical knowledge, and lack of critical thinking skills. In addition to the questionnaire findings, the results of the interview are also described in the results section.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are classified into four sections based on the four factors that is motivation, literacy, cognitive ability, and language ability.

Students’ Motivation in Essay Writing

Motivation is crucial in accomplishing a task including writing an essay. Statements on the questionnaire about motivation were focused on aspects that triggered students to write. The results regarding students’ motivation to write essays are described in the following table.
Table 2. Students' Questionnaire Results about Their Motivation in Essay Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Items on Motivation</th>
<th>Disagree %</th>
<th>Agree %</th>
<th>Strongly Agree %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Writing is an enjoyable task for me</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I write to learn and to improve my English</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I write because of my interest</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I write to achieve my goal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I always try my best to write an essay given by my instructor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I write the essay given to me after class</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I wait until the last day to write the essay and submit it to the instructor</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I am demotivated to write if I get many feedbacks from the instructor</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I will look for more sources if I get difficulties in writing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I will ask the teacher for solution if I have difficulties in writing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questionnaire results showed that more than 90% of the students’ enjoy writing because it is their interest. In addition, they also admitted that they write to achieve their goal. The students also acknowledge that they will seriously write their essay after class. However, 46% of the students admitted that they will write their essay at the last day and submit it to the instructor. Meanwhile, more than 50% students are demotivated if they get many feedbacks from the instructor. The students admitted that they will ask solution from the instructor if they encounter difficulties in writing. Besides, they will also look for more sources to overcome writing difficulties.

When interviewing the students it was found that lack of confidence was one of the obstacles faced by students. Lack of confidence is characterized by anxiety and feeling burdened with the essay writing task given to students.

Excerpt 1: Interviewee 6

“sometimes, I am a bit doubt about the product of my writing. I am anxious if my writing is too wordy and there is gap between paragraph.”

Excerpt 2: Interviewee 9

“I am not very good at managing my time. I used to write my essay close to the due date. The reason is the lack of my knowledge about what I am going to write about.”

Excerpt 3: Interviewee 2

“I lack of confidence because I do not have many vocabulary”
Excerpt 4: Interviewee 8
“I lack of grammar, that’s make me uncomfortable”

Excerpt 5: Interviewee 3
“I am not very good at writing due to lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge.”

Excerpt 6: Interviewee 5
“I feel anxious and do not enjoy writing the essay if I write about a topic that is hard to find information about. I change my topic several times.”

The students stated that they did not have a high level of confidence in writing. They feel there is uncertainty or doubt about the ability to write and present the results of the writing. They feel that they have limitations in terms of vocabulary, grammar, or the ability to convey ideas effectively in writing. This low self-esteem may also stem from comparisons with others or high expectations of what they write.

**Students’ Literacy in Essay Writing**

Literacy has a prominent role in writing. Therefore in this section the statements are designed to find out students' reading habits. From student responses, information can be obtained about students' reading skills which will later support their writing skills. Students’ responses are described in table 3 below.

**Table 3. Students’ Questionnaire Results about Their Motivation in Essay Writing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Items on Literacy</th>
<th>Disagree %</th>
<th>Agree %</th>
<th>Strongly Agree %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I spare my time to read everyday</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I write notes and highlight the important points I read</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I write comments about what I read</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I read books and journal articles related to my essay before I write</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I know that in order to write well I have to read</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I never read at home</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I never learn something from what I read</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Lack of my reading skills is a problem for my writing skill</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I lack of competency in writing</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I need guidance from the instructor while writing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Writing skills and reading skills can not be separated because both of them have the same cognitive aspect. Data in the table shows that 66% of the students spare their time to read every day while 34% of them does not spare their time to read. Vast majority of the students admitted that they read books and journal articles.
related to their essay, highlight important points they read, and write comments on what they read. All of the students realize that in order to write well they have to read. Unfortunately, more than 80% of the students acknowledge that lack of reading skill is a problem for their writing skill. The students also admitted that they still lack of writing skills and therefore they need guidance from their instructor.

Data from the interview revealed that before writing some students search for accurate information based on the topic. They realize that their writing should be supported by reliable information.

Excerpt 7: Interviewee 6

“Before I write, I usually search for my essay topic. Normally, I look for journal articles or other sources related to the topic”.

Excerpt 8: Interviewee 9

“I search for a topic and search for information about the topic.”

Excerpt 9: Interviewee 10

“First, I determine my topic, I look for journal articles, write the outline, and write the paragraph.”

Excerpt 10: Interviewee 3

“Not all reading materials I read provide me with necessary information.”

Excerpt 11: Interviewee 5

“It is hard for me to search for sources I need. Sometimes the reading materials do not provide adequate information for my topic. To find good reading materials I have to upgrade to premium level or I have to pay.”

Students’ Cognitive Ability in Essay Writing

Cognitive ability is essential in writing. The statements about cognitive ability are focused on the process of developing their essay writing. Data about students’ cognitive ability in writing essay are displayed in the following table.

Table 4. Students’ Questionnaire Results about Their Cognitive ability in Essay Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Items on Cognitive Ability</th>
<th>Disagree %</th>
<th>Agree %</th>
<th>Strongly Agree %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>It is easy for me to choose a topic to write my essay</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I know how to make an outline based on the topic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I can write a thesis statement for my essay</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I can develop every paragraph based on the thesis statement</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I lack knowledge about the content of the topic</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on data in the table it is obvious that more than 50% of the students can choose a topic for their essay writing. However, there are still more than 40% students who have difficulties in choosing their essay topic. More than 80% of the students can make outline, write a thesis statement, and develop the essay based on the thesis statement. Only 56% of the students admitted that they can cope with the content of the topic while 45% of them are still lack of knowledge about the content of the topic. Most of the students agree that they can search for suitable articles for their writing, critical in developing the content of the essay, and able to organize their writing in a coherent way. Besides, more than 80% of the students admitted that they know types of essay writing. However only 60% of them can write well in every type of essay. 98% students understand that before submit the essay they have to read and improve the essay.

Planning is one of the steps in writing. Lack of planning may cause gap in the structure of the essay and lack of information as well.

Excerpt 12: Interviewee 4

“I feel that I still lack of developing a paragraph in my essay because sometimes I put unnecessary information and do not use standard English.”

Excerpt 13: Interviewee 2

“My main difficulty in writing essay is formulating a topic, searching for sources related to the topic and to develop it.”

Excerpt 14: Interviewee 3

“I found it difficult to determine an interesting topic for reader. Besides, I cannot use appropriate words that can make readers like to read my essay.”

Excerpt 15: Interviewee 1

“I feel that my writing is not well developed because I get stuck in certain sentences. I am weak in critical thinking to that is why my writing is not reach with ideas.”

Excerpt 16: Interviewee 7

“I have difficulties in organizing my essay such as organizing the flow of my ideas, to make sure that every paragraph is well connected.”

Excerpt 17: Interviewee 5

“I still have difficulties in developing a coherent essay, and organizing the ideas in my essay.”
Excerpt 18: Interviewee 9

“Yes, I acknowledge that I still have low critical thinking ability. This has impact on my writing. Sometimes the message I want to express can not be well expressed.”

Students’ Language Ability in Essay Writing

Students may not write well in English without an excellent language ability. In order to know students language ability, the statements in this section are focus on students linguistics and discourse competence.

Table 5. Students’ Questionnaire Results about Their Language Ability in Essay Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Items on Language ability</th>
<th>Disagree %</th>
<th>Agree %</th>
<th>Strongly Agree %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I can write simple sentence for my essay</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I can write complex sentences using connector</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I can use connectors to connect ideas in my essay</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I can use transition words to mark transition between section of the text or essay</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I can paraphrase sentences for my essay</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I can summarize sources for my writing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I can use appropriate words based on the topic of my essay</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I can synthesize different sources for my essay</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I can use appropriate tenses in my writing</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I can use active sentence in my writing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I can use passive sentence in my writing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data in the table shows that more than 80% of the students are able to construct simple and complex sentences, using active and passive sentence, and using appropriate tenses in their writing. In addition, most of them can use sentence connectors and transition words in their essay. Besides, a vast majority of the students are able to paraphrase, summarize, synthesize sources, and use appropriate words based on the topic of the essay.

The natural flow of ideas in students’ writing depends on students’ grammatical ability. In fact, students are still struggling with their grammar when they engage in writing essay. From the results of the interviews it is known that most of the students still experience difficulties in grammar. They stated that they had difficulty in constructing clear and effective sentences. Apart from that, they also found difficulties in using the right words to convey their intentions clearly. They
worry that the wrong choice of words could obscure the written message. Some of the students stated,

Excerpt 19: Interviewee 2
“Yes, I have writing difficulties because lack of grammatical knowledge”

Excerpt 20: Interviewee 1
“Yes, I have to know correct English grammar in order to convey the messages of my writing to the reader and that is the difficulty that I have.”

Excerpt 21: Interviewee 7
“I sometimes have difficulty in writing because lack of vocabulary knowledge and I have low grammatical ability.”

Excerpt 22: Interviewee 3
“It is difficult for me to write complex sentences and use appropriate vocabulary.”

Excerpt 23: Interviewee 6
“My difficulty is lack of grammar and vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, it is hard for me to develop my idea in my essay.”

The students also acknowledged that their limited ability of using variety of words in their writing have caused a poor writing product.

Motivation

The data presented offers valuable insights into students' attitudes and challenges related to writing. The findings suggest a multifaceted relationship between motivation, obstacles, and confidence. The high percentage of students (over 90%) who enjoy writing due to their interest is promising. This reflects intrinsic motivation, indicating that students are drawn to writing as an engaging and personally fulfilling activity. This aligns with research suggesting that intrinsic motivation positively impacts writing outcomes (Zumbrunn & Brunning, 2023).

The majority of students express writing as a means to achieve their goals. This aligns with the concept of extrinsic motivation, where students are driven by external rewards or achievements. Incorporating goal-oriented strategies into writing instruction could capitalize on this motivation (Mahmud et al., Moybeka et al., 2023). However, the high percentage of students (46%) who admit to writing essays on the last day indicates a need for time management improvement. This links to self-regulation theory, where procrastination can hinder achievement due to poor time management skills. Interventions targeting time management could help students distribute their writing efforts more effectively (Azari et al., 2024; Ferraz et al., 2023). In addition, it was found that more than 50% of students are demotivated by excessive feedback, which aligns with research on feedback sensitivity. While feedback is crucial, an overwhelming amount can lead to discouragement. Educators could consider providing balanced and targeted feedback to maintain motivation (Ravichandran & Mahapatra, 2023; Lin, 2023).
The interview excerpts highlight a recurring theme of low confidence due to vocabulary and grammar limitations. These challenges resonate with studies indicating that language barriers can hinder writing self-efficacy. Addressing language skill gaps through targeted interventions and support resources could enhance students’ confidence. The data reveals a strong intrinsic motivation among students, aligning with the notion that genuine interest positively impacts writing outcomes. However, balancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivations is crucial for sustained engagement. Educators can tap into students' goal-oriented behavior while addressing time management challenges.

Literacy

The data emphasizes the interdependence of writing and reading skills, with a focus on students' reading habits, strategies, and challenges. The integration of recent sources will help strengthen the analysis. The data underscores the connection between writing and reading skills, highlighting their shared cognitive aspect. This aligns with research emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing skills. The ability to comprehend and synthesize information from reading is vital for effective writing (Anaktototy, 2023; Castells et al., 2023).

A significant portion of students engage in daily reading, indicating a positive reading habit. Students who read books and journal articles related to their essays, highlight key points and write comments demonstrate active reading practices. This aligns with research promoting active reading to enhance comprehension. The students' recognition that reading is integral to good writing is supported by research that highlights how reading enhances vocabulary, exposure to different writing styles, and idea generation (Quinonez-Beltran et al., 2023; Ikhtiyorovna, 2023). This corroborates their understanding that writing proficiency is closely linked to reading. Despite the importance of reading, a significant percentage acknowledge a lack of reading skill as a hindrance to writing. This echoes research that suggests deficiencies in reading skills can impact writing abilities. The students' admission of needing guidance from instructors underlines the need for targeted support.

Interview excerpts illustrate how students employ research-driven strategies in their writing process. They recognize the necessity of accurate and reliable information to support their essays. This approach aligns with effective writing practices that emphasize evidence-based content (Philippakos, 2023; Zhai & Razali, 2023). Some students face challenges in sourcing relevant and adequate information. This resonates with the challenges posed by the abundance of information online and the need to critically evaluate sources. Additionally, the mention of needing to pay for premium content highlights potential financial barriers. The interconnectedness of reading and writing skills is evident, with active reading practices enhancing writing outcomes. While students recognize the significance of reading, addressing challenges in information sourcing and critical evaluation is essential. Supporting students in developing their reading skills can contribute to improved writing abilities.
Cognitive Ability

The data provided highlights various aspects of students' essay writing skills and challenges. These findings illuminate the strengths and areas of improvement in their writing processes. Over half of the students can choose a topic for their essay, suggesting a level of engagement and autonomy. However, more than 40% experiencing difficulty in topic selection indicates a need for support in generating ideas. This aligns with research that emphasizes the importance of topic selection as a crucial step (Alzubi et al., 2024; Sudirman et al., 2023). The majority of students can create an outline, write a thesis statement, and develop their essays accordingly. This demonstrates an understanding of foundational essay structure. Research suggests that a strong thesis statement contributes to the clarity and coherence of an essay.

There is a gap in content handling. While a significant portion can cope with the content, nearly half lack sufficient knowledge about their topics. This aligns with studies that highlight the need for thorough research to provide accurate and informed content. Students recognize the importance of searching for suitable articles, critical thinking in content development, and organizing their writing coherently. These practices resonate with research that emphasizes evidence-based writing and logical organization (Lee et al., 2024).

The majority of students understand various types of essays, but only 60% feel confident in writing well in every type. This suggests that while students are aware of the essay types, they may require more practice and guidance to master them. The consensus among students that reading and improving essays before submission is essential reflects good writing practices. Engaging in revisions and seeking opportunities for improvement aligns with research on the writing process. Students exhibit competence in structuring essays, but challenges persist in content handling and topic selection. Aligning these skills with writing objectives is essential, and strategies for effective content development and organization should be emphasized. Awareness of essay types is present, but further guidance may be needed to master them.

Language Ability

The data provided underscores students' capabilities in various aspects of writing, particularly their proficiency in constructing sentences, using sentence connectors, and employing advanced skills like paraphrasing and synthesis. However, a persistent challenge arises in the form of grammatical proficiency. The data portrays students' high level of competence in constructing different types of sentences, utilizing active and passive voice, and applying appropriate tenses. This aligns with research emphasizing sentence variety and correct verb usage as markers of writing competence (Siregar et al., 2023; Nazir et al., 2023). Most students display the ability to use sentence connectors and transition words, indicating an understanding of cohesive writing. Their aptitude for paraphrasing, summarizing, and synthesizing sources highlights their skills in incorporating external material effectively.

The interviews reveal that grammar remains a significant challenge for students, impacting their writing fluency and clarity. This aligns with research
suggesting that grammatical accuracy is crucial for clear communication (Zakirovich, 2023; Shokirovna, 2023). It also emphasizes the role of grammar in conveying the intended message accurately. Students' admissions of struggling with vocabulary and grammar are consistent with the interdependence of these aspects in writing. A lack of vocabulary can hinder their ability to convey precise meanings, while grammatical errors may impede clarity.

Interview excerpts indicate that students' challenges with grammar and vocabulary hinder their ability to develop and express their ideas effectively. This echoes research that emphasizes grammar's role in conveying ideas logically. Students' acknowledgment that limited vocabulary leads to poor writing quality resonates with studies that highlight the correlation between lexical variety and writing proficiency. A varied vocabulary is essential for engaging and persuasive writing. Students demonstrate adeptness in constructing sentences and employing writing techniques, yet the recurring challenge of grammatical proficiency remains. A balanced focus on grammar and vocabulary is crucial for conveying ideas effectively. Addressing grammar-related obstacles supports logical idea development and fosters writing quality through varied vocabulary.

**CONCLUSION**

The data analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of students' writing abilities, challenges, and the interplay between various factors influencing their writing proficiency. Students' motivation, literacy, cognitive skills, and language ability are crucial factors. Creating a supportive environment that fosters confidence, offering targeted support, and guiding effective time management could lead to improved writing outcomes. The data also highlights the symbiotic relationship between reading and writing skills. Enhancing students' reading skills and providing strategies for evidence-based writing could improve writing outcomes. Challenges in topic selection, content handling, and coherence are evident. Targeted interventions are necessary to address the complex interplay between various factors influencing students' writing abilities and challenges. The data analysis shows the challenges and factors affecting students' writing abilities. Intrinsic motivation, goal-oriented behavior, and reading proficiency lead to better writing outcomes. Addressing obstacles like procrastination, feedback sensitivity, and language gaps is crucial. Supporting students in enhancing their reading skills, information sourcing, and evidence-based writing could lead to improved outcomes. Finally, while students show proficiency in foundational writing skills, challenges related to topic selection, content handling, and coherence are evident.

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