

Problems faced by ESL Learners in Developing Writing Proficiency, and designing 'Writing Practice Plan'



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Abstract: *Writing is considered as one of the main pillars in learning English Language. Sadly, ESL learners are struggling hard to achieve competency in writing. This study looked into the writing problems faced by ESL undergraduates in achieving writing proficiency. The researcher opted a mixed method to analyze the difficulties. 100 ESL undergraduates and 10 ESL teachers participated in this study. Data was collected through questionnaire from students and through interviews from teachers. The results of the questionnaire revealed that the students were making errors in grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, cohesion and coherence. The students were seen weakest in grammar followed by vocabulary. These weaknesses resulted into demotivation and confusion among ESL university pupils. The researcher after analyzing all the problems provided a writing practice plan in which the problems regarding grammar, punctuation, and organizing ideas are addressed. This study entails a 4 week practice plan. In this plan, objectives, tasks, activities, and helping material has been provided week by week. The learners need to start from sentence building and then move to paragraph writing, which eventually help them to write an essay. This study can be prove beneficial to the students and teachers to improve the writing skills of ESL learners. The syllabus designer and teachers need to modify their course and method of teaching respectively.*

Keywords: Writing proficiency; Writing problems; Writing Practice Plan; ESL teaching

1. Introduction

English is widely spoken and used all around the world for communication, business and trade. With the advancement of modern technology and the use of internet, the people from different countries and cultures connect easily with each other, which has eventually increased the demand of effective communication skills (Akram et al., 2022). So, the people who are able to communicate effectively in English are considered the most successful people in today's globalized world. The effective communication requires not only the comprehension of grammar or syntax but also one must be able to express his or her thoughts clearly with the aid of

writing. Because of its international scope, English is used as a medium of instruction, a need for employment, and official language in education among countries, which regard English as a second language or foreign language.

There are four main skills listening, reading, writing and speaking which need to be efficiently learn in order to master the English language. Writing is one of the main productive skill which cannot be expertized without having the expertise in listening, speaking and reading. Writing makes a significant contribution in learning a language. It helps the students to learn new words, new sentence building ideas and to

self-correct themselves by looking at their progress. Because of its utmost importance, writing proficiency requires cohesion and coherence in developing ideas, usage of grammatical devices and a peculiar style of the use of syntax, vocabulary and grammar. Out of these, coherence is the most important component of an effective writing because an incoherent text fails to deliver the meaning despite of having the correct syntactical, morphological and grammatical composition (Rico, 2014). Hence, the selection of appropriate structure and the usage of appropriate connecting devices can lead to the achievement of writing proficiency. In teaching the writing skills, the students are devised to learn how to write with coherence, using correct grammatical structure and spellings. In achieving the writing command, the learners especially the ESL learners commit errors and mistakes. As learning cannot be proceed or happens if there are no errors.

In ESL or EFL context, the learning of English language is greatly affected because of the lack of direct exposure to language. Among the receptive (listening and reading) and productive skills (writing and speaking) in learning of English language, the latter ones are highly impacted. This is because learners can listen and speak English Language by watching news and documentaries. Moreover, they can read books and magazines yet there is a lack of direct communication through writing. To achieve the writing proficiency, the students must learn grammar rules, memorize new words of vocabulary and other activities. Therefore, ESL students are subjected to make frequent errors and mistakes while writing which causes difficulties. Ali and Ramana (2018) in their study defined the reasons that why ESL or EFL students dislike writing which are as given below:

- a) Writing taken as a threat because it leaves a written record of their proficiency level so they feel that they may be acknowledged bad or poor more visibly.
- b) As writing turns your thoughts into words, so the students may feel that they

lack that concept or thought.

- c) The consciousness of making grammatically correct sentences makes them feel less confident.
- d) The hesitation of making mistakes on the very first attempt as they feel to achieve writing proficiency on the very first try.

In Pakistan, English is the medium of instruction in all the educational platforms and the ESL students are often incapable of writing in a comprehensible manner. They only memorize the answers and write them in examination. Sadly, in the real life situations they are unable to write a single sentence with grammatical accuracy on any random topic. Despite of having good grades and marks, they are unable to attempt a random writing task. There are five main levels of education in Pakistan i-e primary, secondary, higher secondary, graduate and post graduate level. At the undergraduate level, the students are expected to write proficiently. This problem is not only observed on the secondary or higher secondary level rather than it is surprising to see the undergraduates commit the same mistakes on the university level. The competence of writing an academic text of undergraduate students is not up to the mark where it is actually required. Apart from learners' problems regarding writing, it is also very challenging for the teachers to how to teach writing skills. From the development of learning materials to the deliverance of lecture and the provision of feedback at the end also require proper attention and time. It can also be felt as a dry exercise for instructors as well as the learners. This is because choosing appropriate teaching materials, teaching styles, activities, and lesson planning according to the need of the learners can be very challenging.

1.1 Rationale of the Study

Academic writing which is regarded as one of the pillars of productive skills can be a challenging task if it is not in your native tongue. It is considered a dry exercise as the majority of the students find it a difficult task, therefore, they commit a lot of mistakes while doing it. It is very surprising to see that at the undergraduate

level where the students are supposed to have mastered the academic writing proficiency as being cleared the HSSC and SSC levels, are facing problems. The most common reasons are ESL learners take writing as pressure not as a challenge, a necessity not a choice, and being studying English as a second language. There have been a lot of researches conducted to determine the reasons, factors, difficulties and solutions of writing skills. Mumtaz (2021) in his exploratory studies determined the academic writing challenges of EFL learners. As a result of analysis of focus group discussions, he concluded that the undergraduates mainly lack creativity and the use of appropriate vocabulary in their writings. Similarly, Taye and Mangesha (2024) analyzed the common writing errors in Ethiopian context. They found out that vocabulary and grammar were the main errors. Moreover, this study also revealed some reasons behind these errors like insufficient time to write and interference of L1. Mehmood (2019) analyzed the mistakes in the writings of undergraduate at a university in Pakistan. The results of an open ended questionnaire showed that the students were having issues regarding spelling, punctuation, and grammar. The present research shed light on the writing difficulties, factors, and solution in the form of an effective writing practice for the ESL students.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the writing challenges faced by ESL learners?
2. What significant factors are causing writing problems among ESL learners?
3. What appropriate writing practice plan can be made to resolve writing difficulties of ESL learners?

1.3 Significance of the Study

For an English language learner to ace in academic writing is a crucial endeavor. The researcher was aimed to determine the writing problems faced by ESL students while doing writing tasks and how could these difficulties overcome by implementation of a practice plan. It is predicted that the results from this study would be beneficial for the ESL course

instructors to design an effective course outline, syllabus designers to include all the essential features to address writing difficulties and the ESL students to identify the common mistakes they commit while writing an academic text.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Writing Skills

Writing is a crucial skill for all the language learners. It is a medium of communication through which people convey experiences, convince others, share feelings, and ideas. It does not only involves the factual depiction but also reveal deeper truths. Similarly, an effective writer not only just state the facts, but it also engage the readers emotionally and intellectually. Writing is not a skill that is genetically acquired. It is learned through consistent practice and experience. It generates critical thinking, builds up vocabulary and organize thoughts and ideas (Abdulkareem, 2013). A good writer is able to express, organize, define, and communicate his ideas clearly and comprehensibly according to the given topic. In an academic context, it defines how much someone knows about a particular topic. Academic writing involves writing class assignments, term papers, examinations, and thesis. Students use academic writing to complete their course requirements. Writing is considered as a source of learning enhancement. Apart from educational benefits, it enhances the cognitive abilities of the learners. It is considered as an important vehicle to measure student's performance on all educational levels (Afrin, 2016). Writing skills are necessary to learn because you can convey your ideas without being physically present.

There are two main reasons to teach writing skills to the students. One is writing-for-learning and other one is writing-for-writing. The first one deals with teaching writing for educational purposes. The students must be able to write in the class to fulfill their degree requirements. They are asked to work upon the language they use and promote practicing. In writing-for-learning, the main focus of attention is building up language. For example, in the class, the teacher may ask the students to write a short

paragraph having 5-7 sentences. Writing for learning is further differentiated into Reinforcement writing, preparation writing, and activity writing. In Reinforcement writing, the focus is on grammar. The students are asked to write a story or describe something using correct grammar and vocabulary. In preparation writing, the learners are made to sit in groups or pairs. They have to discuss on a topic and come up with ideas. Activity writing tends to follow a practical approach where students have to write dialogues and then have to act on it. The second one deals with teaching writing for professional purposes. The writing skills of the students are enhanced by asking them to write emails, letters, or reports. In this context, the focus is not solely on language but also text construction, style, and organization is considered. In the same manner, the different types of writings serve different purposes which in turn require different type of feedback.

Writing skills play an important role in second or foreign language learning. It is a gateway of representing thoughts, ideas, or emotions in the target language by the learners. Writing efficiently in second language does not only validates academic success but also open doors for future success. This is because competency in L2 writing is the need of the hour. L2 learners are required to write not only in their academic life but also in real life situations such as writing for blog, composing an email for a job, and many more. ESL writing targets at developing the writing proficiency of ESL learners. A survey to investigate the perspectives of ESL learners regarding the importance of academic writing showed that ESL learners regarded writing as a starting point to polish their work as well as to demonstrate their ideas and interests to others (Chou, 2011).

2.2 What is Writing Proficiency?

The development of a language requires competency, which is the individual ability to learn anything. In the context of ESL, Academic literacy demands the mastering of four basic skills i-e listening, speaking, reading and writing. Above all these skills, writing is considered to be the most difficult one to achieve. Writing proficiency requires mastering

the rules of grammar. It includes grammatical, stylistic, intellectual, and hypercritical components. Farouq (2012) regarded grammar as the most challenging area in learning English as a second language. To overcome these problems, ESL students are required to do practice. Many scholars have defined proficiency differently. Some regards it as a goal or an objective while others associate proficiency with a standard to measure the ability. So, writing proficiency is a way to measure the linguistic ability of a learner. In general, writing proficiency defines how skilfully and aptly one writes. It is responsible for creating skilled writers. In ESL/EFL context, it measures how a person communicate his ideas in the target language. It is one of the main pillars of learners' academic success. The success of a proficient writer goes beyond his writing ability and he may extend it further for professional purposes. A person who is proficient in writing has the competencies in grammar, lexicon, and syntax. A considerable amount of literature is available on writing skills yet writing proficiency has been overlooked. According to Read (2000) writing proficiency is an important element of linguistic proficiency which is manifested in the form of vocabulary. Other elements may include interference of L1, grammar or syntax.

For undergraduates, proficiency in writing skills is crucial. Despite of its utmost importance, the undergraduates in Pakistan are still lacking in writing competency. This is because through writing, students express their ideas and jot down different concepts which eventually develop their critical thinking skills. This writing competency also aims to ensure not only academic as well as professional or future success.

2.3 Writing Problems among ESL Learners

Writing is considered as a vital yet a challenging skill to achieve. This is because of the absence of morphophonemic and prosodic features in writing, the writer has to do self-efforts by clearly communicating the ideas through appropriate sentence structure. The writer needs to make sure to work on the following features: choice of vocabulary according to the context,

comprehensible grammatical structure and devices, and coherence. This is what makes writing a difficult task to achieve because writer has to focus not only on the mechanics of writing but also on the transformation of those ideas into a readable text. Therefore, common linguistic problems subject-verb agreement, verb-tense agreement, choice of words, vocabulary, sentence structure, and diction emerge.

Writing style of every ESL learner is distinctive which in turn get into the different writing obstacles. There are two main arenas where ESL students face problems while writing. The first one refers to technicalities of writing like errors in punctuation, spelling, errors related to syntax or morphology. The second one is the organization of ideas which is called coherence. The students may have a considerable amount of knowledge regarding to the topic but they cannot pour their thoughts into meaningful words. The ESL learners are in great trouble while writing as they fail to express and organize the ideas clearly, relevancy to the main topic and above all, lack of self-confidence and expectations from the readers.

For ESL students, writing is a challenging endeavor to do especially at high school or undergraduate level. This is because at this level a considerable amount of writing tasks are assigned to the students such as term papers, assignments, article writing, critical analysis etc.

Moreover, competency in writing skills is very much important because it does not only promises academic success but also paves bright future prospects. Despite of having a lot of importance and usage of writing skills, it is least developed among ESL learners (Uddin, 2014). The undergraduates fell into different types of problems ranging from technicalities of writing to organizing ideas and content. The writing problems are associated with linguistic, psychological, social, and cognitive factors. Fareed et al. (2016) pointed out in his study that failure to attain language competency, anxiety while writing, reliance on L1, and lack of cohesion and coherence were the main obstacles undergraduates faced while writing. Another study by Singh et al. (2017) found that ESL students were weak in subject-verb agreement

and tenses upon doing content analysis. Lack of grammatical competence can be regarded as the main reason of above mentioned problems. In the same manner, Pratiwi (2016) conducted a descriptive study on 79 ESL university students and came out with conclusion that the students were found weak in verb-tense agreement, vocabulary, and diction. There are seven main characteristics of writing in which students may feel difficulty. Ibanian (2017) investigated the writing challenges faced by EFL students These are cohesion and coherence, appropriate word choice, spelling, punctuation, grammatical competency, capitalization, and conceptualization.

2.5 Designing a Writing Practice Plan for ESL learners

Despite of being writing since elementary levels of education, the ESL students are still struggling to achieve proficiency. There are a lot of problems and reasons regarding writing have been mentioned already yet one area that needs to be highlighted here is the lack of consistent writing instructions and guidelines. For the improvement of writing skills, the students are needed to get on some writing strategies and plans to overcome hindrances.

As the trends of teaching and learning have been shifted from teacher centered to student based learning, the students must be subjected to do self-efforts. The students must be given the authority to perform independently. For this the students must be given assistance through scaffolding. Just as Vygotsky (1978)'s developmental theory suggests that the best performance a child can depict lies in his independent performance. The teachers should aid the student first and then let them draw their own by creativity and conceptualization.

A writing practice plan is an instructional strategy provided by the teachers and lesson planners. It aims to improve writing skills of the students over a span through guidance and strategies. The strategies and the level of guidance vary with respect to the level of education. As this study is concerned with UG, a writing practice plan would be focusing on the areas which may help to improve students'

critical thinking skills. It can build up their educational and professional writing skills. At the undergraduate level, the students need to

indulge in complex tasks through the use of appropriate grammatical structure and the argumentative style.

Table 1. Review of previously conducted studies

No.	Authors	Year	Topic	Methodology	Findings
1	Umar et. al	2023	Academic Writing Problems Faced by ESL Learners in Higher Education Institutions.	Quantitative	Insufficient teaching methods were one of the major problems stated by ESL students which cause writing difficulties.
2	Fareed et. al	2016	ESL learners' writing skills: Problems, factors and suggestions.	Mixed Method	One of the major problem in developing writing skills among ESL learners is the lack of motivation and difficulty of teachers to provide feedback because of the saturation of students in one class.
3	N Mehmood	2020	Error analysis of English writing problems at GC university Lahore	Mixed	ESL students were facing problems regarding spelling, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization.
4	Marya et. al	2022	Undergraduate's view on the most difficult aspect of academic writing	Quantitative	The study revealed that the most difficult aspect of writing was summarizing passages followed by vocabulary and creative writing.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design, population, Sampling

This study employed a mixed-method research. In mixed-method research, both quantitative and qualitative methods are used. According to Doyle et.al (2009), mixed method research is a dynamic approach which aims to address multiplex and multifaceted research problems. It is considered as an ideal method among qualitative and quantitative approaches. It improves the reliability and validity of the study. The researcher selected a descriptive as well as an exploratory method to collect the data from the participants. To answer the research question regarding the writing challenges among ESL

students, questionnaire was used. To collect the data from students, questionnaire and Writing Proficiency Test (WPT) were used. The students were subjected to take WPT first. Then, questionnaire was administered among them to collect the data. The data was collected from teachers in the form of an interview. A population includes all the individuals upon whom you want to conduct a study. The researcher selected all the undergraduate ESL students from the universities of Bahawalpur. To determine the writing problems, all the ESL undergraduate students served as a population unit. A sample is a subset from a whole population. The ESL undergraduate students from The Women University, Bahawalpur and

The Islamia University of Bahawalpur participated in this study. Total 100 students took the writing proficiency test and solved the questionnaire. All the students belonged to the English departments of these universities.

3.2 Data Collection Tools

To determine writing challenges among ESL learners and teachers, the researcher selected three tools to collect the data from the participants. The selection of tools were done in accordance with the research questions. To collect data from ESL students, two tools were

used in two steps. At first, writing proficiency test (WPT) was taken. After that, the students were given a questionnaire regarding writing challenges. The data was taken from the English teachers in the form of an interview.

3.3 Framework of Analysis

The data was collected, processed and then subjected to analysis in a synchronous manner. A concept map was made to show the process smoothly.

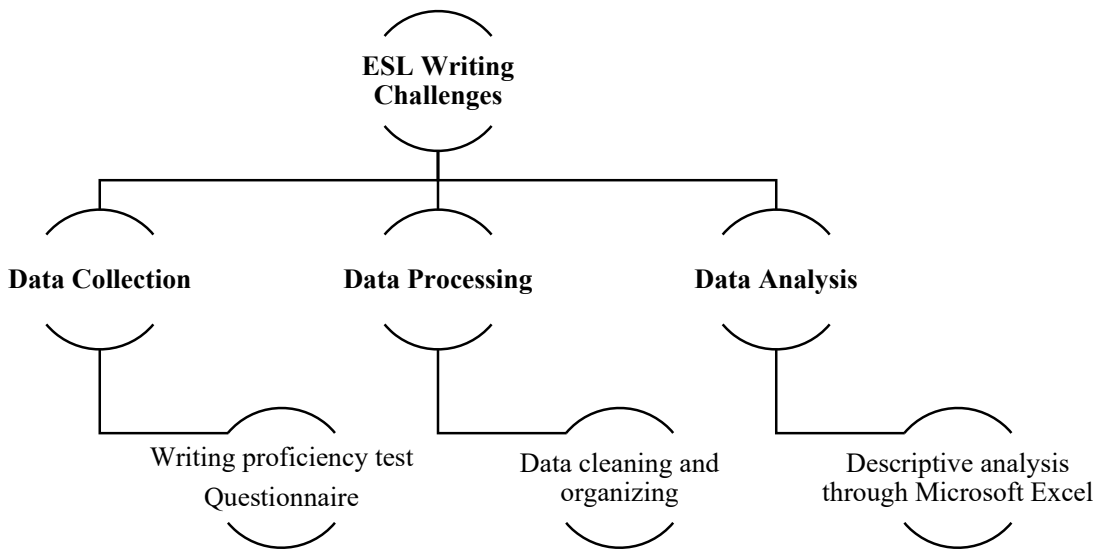


Figure 1. Framework of Analysis

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Results of Questionnaire obtained from ESL Learners

To obtain data from ESL leaners, the students were given a questionnaire to fill. The

questionnaire was designed by using adapt strategy. Some of the questions were taken from Afrin (2016)’s study and modified according to the context of this study. A major portion of the questions were designed by the researcher herself. In the first portion, the students were asked to rate their own writing ability. They were given options from excellent to very poor.

Table 2. Rating scale of components of writing

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
5	4	3	2	1

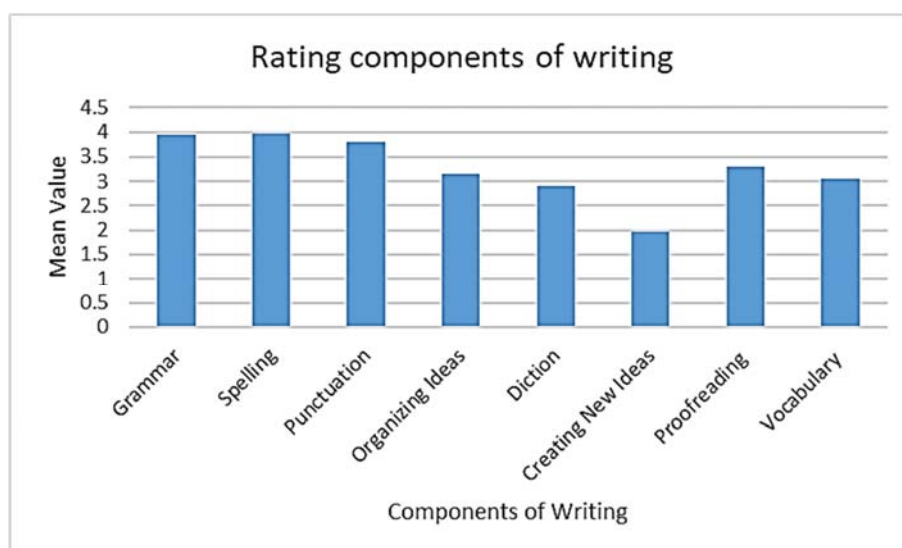


Figure 2. Rating components of writing

In the second phase, they were asked about how often they need help in components of writing.

They were given option from always to never. The participants responded according to their expertise that how often they need help in writing. The rating scale is given below:

Table 3. Rating scale of help needed in components of writing

Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
5	4	3	2	1

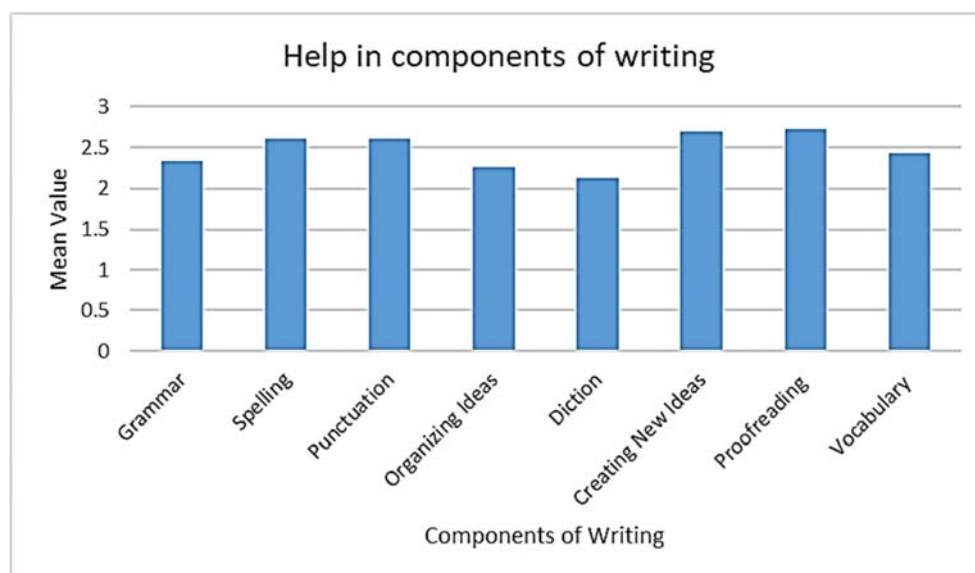


Figure 3. Help in Writing process

In the third section, the students were asked about problems faced by them while writing regarding developing content, ideas, and organization. The researcher adopted a 5 point

Likert scale by providing options from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

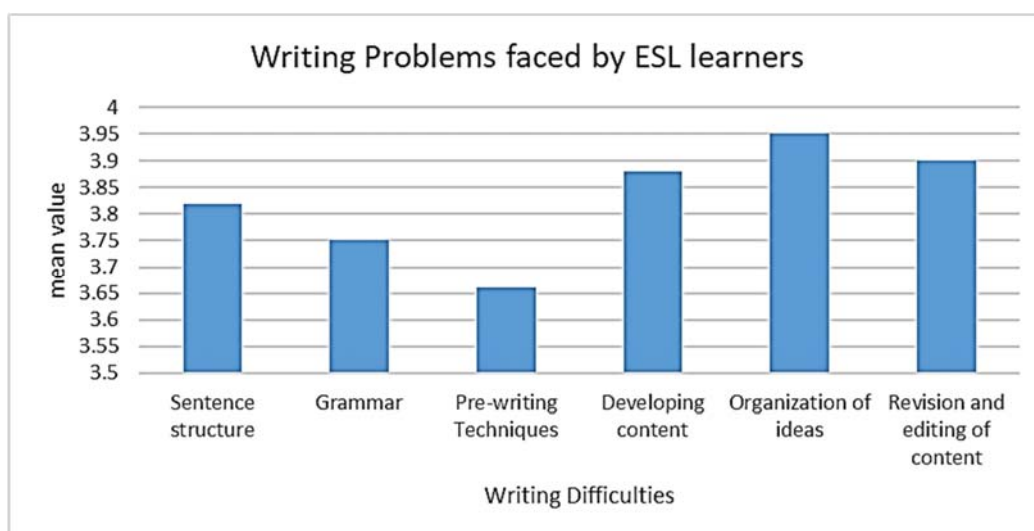


Figure 4. Writing problems faced by ESL learners

5. Summary of the Findings

5.1 Summary of the findings obtained from Writing Proficiency Test

To look into the details of writing incompetency among her selected sample, a writing proficiency test was taken. The contributors were given three topics. They were asked to choose a topic by themselves. Among descriptive, argumentative, and discursive essay, the majority of the participants chose descriptive essay. It shows that they were better writers in terms of describing rather than giving opinions or justifications. As in descriptive essay, you just have to narrate an incident so it was easy for them to do that task. They were made aware of the assessment criteria and period. As far as time management is concerned, only few of the participants completed the task in 20-25 minutes and rest of the respondents asked for extra time. It shows that they were confused and hesitated about responding to a question therefore took more time than allotted. In comparison between male and female, 55% females chose descriptive while male 57% male selected argumentative essay. After taking a test, checking of the tests started. The researcher was amazed after looking at the writing mistakes committed by the participants. There were grammatical, syntactical, organizational and spelling mistakes. In grammar, verb-tense

agreement, subject-verb agreement, and articles related mistakes. For instance, one of the student wrote in a descriptive essay 'I could not imagine that I will celebrate my birthday like this.' Here, 'could' and 'will' does not correspond with each other. The spelling mistakes were numerous. It may be infer that they were confused and hesitated to write responses. Males were found weaker in spelling than females. The issues regarding organization of ideas sky rocketed among those who chose argumentative essay. The paragraphs were incomplete and the checker could not understand to which stance they are advocating. The ideas were presented vaguely. It depicts that the participants were found weak in cohesion and coherence. Further demonstration of how to represent ideas is needed. Overall, the weaknesses and mistakes overweighed the positive outcomes. It can be concluded that females are better writers than males in spelling, descriptive writing, and writing complete response. Meanwhile, males are good at grammar, building up a stance on a given topic and content creation. But, there still remains a gap which needs to be addressed. This gap is the writing incompetency and inefficiency among the human subjects.

5.2 Summary of the findings obtained from questionnaire

The researchers analyzed the writing difficulties faced by undergraduates and came up with results that the majority of the ESL learners were facing grammatical, syntactical and vocabulary

related problems.

At first, the ESL undergraduates in the study were asked to rate their writing ability. The findings of the study revealed that the ESL learners regarded grammar as their weakness with mean score 2.94. It shows that the learners regarded their grammatical competency as less good and near to fair which is below average. The highest problem was seen in organization of ideas. Around 55% of the participants regarded it as fair, which is not remarkable. It indicates that apart from mechanics of writing, the major problem was seen in cohesion and coherence. Moreover, the ESL students are better in creating new ideas and proofreading. It can be infer that they are good at creating content yet writing and organizing this content is problematic which are needed to be addressed.

In the second section they were asked about how often they need help in learning grammar, spelling, punctuation, proofreading, diction, vocabulary, and organizing ideas. In between theses, the highest mean value 2.18 was recorded in grammar with diction standing on second with mean value 2.16. The mean value was seen lowest in proofreading as 2.83 followed by help in creating new ideas. The highest mean value in grammar indicated that the ESL undergraduates were in dire need of help in grammar. As in grammar all the parts of speech were included, the researcher looked into the details of making errors by the undergraduates in the form of WPT. As the researcher took the writing proficiency test from ESL participants, the same trend was recorded. The participants were found weakest in grammar. ESL participants have always found less competent in case of grammar. Despite of knowing, no strategies, tasks, or activities have been devised for the students for improvement. In Pakistan, the same curriculum have been taught to the students since ages. That is why we have not seen any incredible improvement over the years. Therefore, the syllabus designers and teachers must have look into this problem regarding improving the grammatical competency of the students. Moreover, with regard to diction the students needed help the most after grammar. In vocabulary, the mean

value came out 2.43 which indicated that the majority of the participants needed help very often in vocabulary. Furthermore, in proofreading and creating ideas, the participants showed that they did not need very often help. It shows that ESL undergraduates are better in creating ideas and proofreading as compared to mechanics of writing in which they are found weak. In comparison between males and females, females had shown better results with regard to the help required in various aspects of writing.

Moreover, the participants were asked about the difficulties they might face while writing in general. The statements were ranging from difficulty in command over sentence structure, organization of ideas, creating new ideas, practicing writing, and building up motivation. All the participants highlighted that they were having difficulty in command over sentence structure with mean score 3.82 which indicates that they all were agreed to the statement. With regard to difficulty in practicing writing at home, 3.70 mean value indicates that they all were agreed. This shows that the participants may be not given writing tasks or assignments before. Therefore, at university level they were facing problems. The participants were also found confused about their writing ability showing a mean score of 3.44. It showed that their responses were ranging from somewhat agree to agree. As the participants were seen having challenges in writing, it would be considered as confused about what they have written. The undergraduates in this study were not confident about their writing capability. This in turn leads to demotivation which was also shown by the researcher in another question about motivation in learning writing.

ESL undergraduates were also asked about their strategies and behavior while writing. Again, the results of data analysis shows that the writing on any random topic, organization of ideas, revising and editing content was a challenge. The bachelor students at universities are weak on these aspects of writing. From the analysis of the data obtained through questionnaire from students, it can be infer that still at the undergraduate level students are facing

problems on various aspects of writing. They had not been expected to show grammatical incompetency but the problem is still there. Teachers have to take action and devise some strategies to address those problems. The syllabus and curriculum designers need to do some modifications in the existing course outline. The institution must assist to teachers and students that may help them to facilitate teaching and learning process effectively.

5.3 Justification of Research Questions

5.3.1 What are the writing challenges faced by ESL learners?

The ESL students in universities are weak in vocabulary, organizing ideas, grammar, and punctuation. Errors in grammar were seen the highest among ESL undergraduates followed by the organization of ideas. The students did not know how to pen down ideas properly. For some, process based writing was a challenge. The majority of the students did not even know about stages of writing. That's why revision and editing of the written content was seen as a difficulty. Apart from Mechanics of writing, the students were lacking interest in learning writing. It means that the students are demotivated and do not want to learn effective writing skills. They were only learning writing for professional purposes. This study shows that the challenges are not only linguistic but also include cognitive, psychological, pedagogical, and assessment related problems.

5.3.2 What significant factors are causing writing problems among ESL learners?

The factors causing writing problems are numerous like linguistic, cultural, psychological and time-related problems. In linguistics, students are seen weak in grammar, syntax, influence of mother tongue, and inefficient writing instruction. Grammar has been a challenge for the students in Pakistan from primary level to master level. The incompetency of students in writing is directly related to grammatical incompetency. Moreover, with an over emphasis on grammar, other aspects of writing have been ignored. The organization of paragraphs and content have been overlooked. The cultural problems are like students with

varied writing styles due to influence of culture hinder to attain the grammatical competency. The students with strong cultural background sometimes are not ready to accept English cultural norms. Psychological problems include fear of making mistakes, lack of creativity, and lack of practice. Furthermore, the students are not giving extra time to do practice at home. They are also not exposed to helping materials in addition to syllabus due to limited time and resources.

5.3.3 What appropriate writing practice plan can be made to resolve writing difficulties of ESL learners?

In the light of challenges faced by undergraduates, this study provides a writing practice plan which can be checked, used, and implemented by the ESL teachers in Pakistan. The researcher has suggested that apart from using this plan, teachers and students can devise their own plan to improve their writing skills but it must be structured. The researchers devised the following structured plan through using a systematic approach to address the writing problems the students are facing.

Writing Practice Plan

The first and foremost thing is to make aware of the students about the purpose and the possible outcome from this plan. By following this structured approach, the learners would be able to:

1. Improve their grammatical competency by focusing on grammar, sentence structure, and organization of ideas.
2. Address organizational problems of writing like cohesion and coherence.
3. Foster cognitive and critical thinking skills in developing a meaningful and relevant content.
4. Help building up confidence in writing by erasing confusion and fear of making various writing errors.

Aspects of Writing Practice Plan

This plan is going to include and cover all the major aspects or components of writing. Every

component is going to address a difficulty face by ESL undergraduates. The researcher has

devised a flow chart showing each part with detailed explanation after.

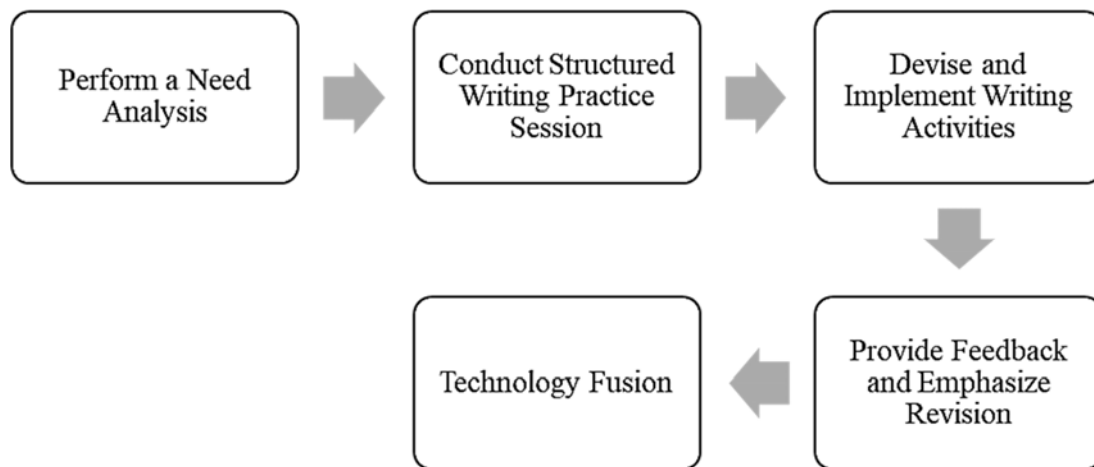


Figure 5. Writing practice plan

Need Analysis

The first and foremost step before designing a writing practice plan is to conduct a need analysis. It can be performed by using a questionnaire. As the researcher at first performed a need analysis through which she addressed the current weaknesses of the undergraduates in writing. Moreover, the specific lacking of students writing was also assessed through taking a writing proficiency test. This analysis serve the following functions:

- Address the current needs of students.
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of targeted audience.
- Helps to target the exact goal.
- Makes the process of assessment and identification of errors easier.

The researcher analyzed the current problems of undergraduates. The study also investigated the current weaknesses in writing. The ESL students are found weak in grammar, organization of ideas, and punctuation. In the light of challenges faced by ESL learners, this study suggests a writing practice plan.

Conduct structured Writing practice session

The conduction of structured writing practice session is recommended by the results of this

study. It means that moving from basic components of writing to advanced one. Each component of writing must be elaborate correctly and clearly. This session can be divided into various steps depending upon the need and implementation.

Week 1 to 4

The students are exposed to learn the basics of writing. In this week the students are taught basic grammar rules. After demonstrating parts of speech, the students are given error correction exercises. By pointing out mistakes, students are able to know how to write grammatically correct sentences.

In the second week, the students are made to focus on paragraph writing. The basics of paragraph are taught by pointing out how to write topic sentence, thesis statement, supporting details, and conclusion. In this week, students are given paragraph samples and exercises. The exercises include incomplete passages where students have to put in information according to the given instruction. The third week is confined to vocabulary building. The students are taught synonyms, antonyms, and words meaning. They are asked to use dictionaries to know meaning. The usage of flashcards is also recommended. In fourth week, reading prompts are given to the students. This activity is fostered by

The possible outcomes of this week

The students will be able to learn the rules of grammar, which help them to write grammatically correct sentences. By giving them paragraph to write, the students would be able to know how to build a topic sentence, thesis statement, and supporting details followed by conclusion. This would help them to write paragraphs, which eventually make it easier for students to write essays. Vocabulary building can be facilitated by using flashcards and reading paragraphs. The students must be given sticky notes in the class and every day five new words must be assigned them to learn. On the next day, those assigned words must be used to write in paragraphs. In this week, the students must be given following helping notes to perform tasks.

- Error correction exercises include separate exercises for each part of speech. The students are given incorrect sentences. For example: I goes to school every day. (incorrect version) Sometimes they are given multiple choice questions.
- Flashcards can be given in the form of one word being written on one card. Upon learning each new word, students have to write it on card along with definitions.
- Sample paragraphs are provided with missing lines. Sometimes, one paragraph is given without supporting details and students have to write.

Week 5-8

In this week, the focus is on cohesion and coherence. The students after learning about writing a paragraph are asked to start using transition words to connect paragraphs to one another. This week the tasks are given to write on a topic in two paragraphs. They are given template essays to make outline highlighting topic sentence, thesis statement, supporting details, and conclusion. The students must have to suggest a topic to each paragraph. They have to determine how these paragraphs are connected by marking the use of cohesive devices and transition words.

Possible outcomes of this week

The students at the end of this week are able to make outline of an essay, understand the concept of cohesion and coherence in writing and learn to know how to write an essay. In this week, students are going to be provided with the following material:

- Sample paragraphs are provided to students. In the first phase, students are given complete paragraphs. They only have to underline the aspects of paragraphs. In the second phase, one of the aspect is missing like thesis statement is given and they only have to write supporting details. In the final phase, they have to write a complete paragraph.
- Sample essays are provided to students to show how to write them. In this week, students are shown and taught the technicalities of writing an essay. The different types and purposes of essay is given.
- Comprehension exercises are shared with students to teach the organization of writing. The questions associated with comprehension paragraph are in a sequence which helps to teach how to organize and formulate writing.

Week 9-12

After knowing about the technicalities of writing and devising a writing template, this week lead students to write on their own. The students are given free writing task as the last week was confined to guide writing. So, there is a transition from guided writing to free writing. Here students are given real life topics to write on. The types of essays given to write must have follow a sequence:

- **Descriptive writing**

In descriptive writing, the students are given a pictorial representation of a scenario or a flow chart showing a process or a graph representing statistics. The students have to define those in words. As this study also claimed that university students were preferred to perform descriptive essays.

- **Argumentative writing**

The topics for argumentative essays must be logical, and ethical. There must be given clear instructions. The teachers need to select topics, which excite the learners to write. This type of essay writing can be facilitated in the form of a group activity in which one group have to justify the one portion of the essay and other group to second portion.

- **Report writing**

The students write reports after conducting an interview or survey and doing an observation. They are asked to write their findings in the form of report. Report writing can be done by assigning tasks to students in the form of taking an interview, observing behavior of students and taking opinion of students on a topic. After that, students have to represent their opinions, views, and behavior in the form of a report. This task is facilitated in the form of a group activity. This can promote collaborative learning and increase writing efficiency.

- **Creative writing**

In creative writing, the students are given any topic to write upon. This requires not only developing content on their own but also

organizing and writing that content correctly. This would help them to write on the given content at first and then moving to write on their own concept or ideas. In these weeks, the learning is done by using the following helping materials:

- Notes on demonstration of types of essays can be given in the form of online templates. Sample essays should be given which represent proper structure of an essay. Moreover, students should be provided with word banks.
- The teachers to teach organization of ideas and paragraphs for learners can devise mind maps and flowcharts.
- Apart from descriptive material, checklists can be provided. In checklists, there are two types pre-writing and post writing. For instance, in pre-writing students are taught how to brainstorm ideas and develop content. In post-writing, the emphasis is given on editing and revision. The summary of all the weeks is represented in the form of table.

Table 4 Writing practice plan week by week

Week	Objectives	Activities	Technology integration	Outcomes
1-4	• Grammar improvement • Vocabulary build up	• Flash Cards • Error correction exercises	• Grammarly App • Electronic dictionaries	Learners will be able to formulate grammatically correct sentences. Able to learn new words
5-8	• Paragraph writing	• Peer review • Collaborative tasks • Pair work	• Online paragraphs prompts	Able to know about the parts of a paragraph Able to write a well formed paragraphs
9-12	• Essay writing	• Sample essays • Group discussion	• Grammarly App • Hemingway App	• Able to differentiate between different types of essay • Able to write essays moving from descriptive to

6. Conclusion

Writing incompetency is observed among students belonging to various educational levels in Pakistan. The main reason is being an ESL learner. Lack of interest and lack of direct exposure to language are the root causes. Yet, learners are struggling to achieve writing proficiency. These things instigated the researcher to determine the areas where there are lacking. This hypothesis investigated the mistakes, factors, and come up with a writing practice plan. The findings of the data obtained through questionnaire, interviews, and writing proficiency test reveals striking facts and statistics about the writing competency of the undergraduates. The findings of the study revealed that ESL undergraduates are struggling with respect to grammar, vocabulary, spellings, organization of ideas, and practicing. They also rate their writing ability regarding different components as fair or average. This study has also observed the comparison between males and females. It has shown that females are better in creation and organization of content whereas males are good at grammar. In case of creative writing as a difficult skill to achieve. The students are hesitant to write other than examination purposes. Therefore, they become demotivated and confused about the writing ability. With the struggling learners, teachers are also not alone. Managing students with diverse skill levels, addressing frequent grammatical mistakes, conducting activities without any institutional support, and giving detailed feedback is considered an exigent job. ESL teachers are in great trouble, as they have to manage the whole class with overcrowded students. They have to teach not only the syllabus but also conduct diverse activities and methods. In 40 minutes lecture, it is tiring to manage everything. Findings from the interviews showed that teachers also have problems with institutions. The institution is not supportive in terms of providing helping material and technological tools.

After looking into the main weak points, a writing practice plan was suggested. The scenario was made in accordance with the writing problems. A 12 week structured practice session by devoting 15 minutes daily in the lecture is recommended by the researcher. The writing problems can be addresses by following this plan. Learning writing can be made easier for the students if they are provided with clear objectives, writing instructions, and interesting activities. Furthermore, the future researchers can check its efficiency and apply it on the undergraduates. By applying, it can be checked that how much writing errors have been improved. This research concludes with the remarks that ESL learners at university level are not proficient in writing as they should be. Surprisingly, at every educational level, they are encountered with writing essays, paragraphs, etc yet no improvement has been seen. It means that their issues has not been looked properly. This research is going to be proven informative to know about students' lacks in writing. There is a dire need of taking steps toward writing improvement because at the undergraduate level, ESL students are supposed to master the mechanics of writing but still they are not. Syllabus designers, curriculum developers, and instructors along with institutional management need to inquire about lacking of students in English language writing. Without these, students cannot be excelled in their educational and professional life, as this is the last stage of their learning. The impact of inadequacy in writing might goes in their professional life stacking economic and financial problems.

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