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A Study of Writing Difficulties and Writing Stages among Undergraduates

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Abstract

Writing proficiency is critical in academic settings, yet many students encounter significant challenges throughout the writing process. This study examines writing difficulties and perceptions among 267 undergraduate students in higher educational institutions in Malaysia. The investigation focuses on identifying obstacles and experiences across various stages of the writing process, including pre-writing, drafting, and revising. Data were collected using a Likert-scale survey administered to academic writers, capturing their perceptions of writing difficulties and experiences at different writing stages. The findings reveal the challenges faced by students, with notable variations across different stages. Difficulties related to goal setting, clarity of instructions, topic familiarity, and confidence in grammar and vocabulary usage were identified. Additionally, respondents exhibited varying attitudes towards the importance of thorough revision and adherence to assignment requirements. These findings underscore the need for tailored instructional approaches to address writing difficulties effectively. By enhancing writing proficiency among academic writers, students can better navigate the writing process and overcome challenges at various stages. Further research is proposed to explore the efficacy of specific instructional strategies and interventions designed to improve writing skills and support academic success.

Keywords: Writing Difficulties, Writing Stages, Academic Writing

Introduction

Background of Study

Proficiency in writing is a crucial aspect of language learning for learners of all levels. The capacity to effectively communicate information through written language is indispensable, particularly in various forms of communication. Moreover, strong writing skills

are invaluable in professional settings where conveying information accurately and persuasively is paramount.

Learning to write in Malaysia is not alien to Malaysian students, as writing skills have been embedded in education syllabuses from primary school until tertiary education. Writing is regarded as an important means of communication, especially in sharing ideas and information. Azizi (2018) states that mastering academic writing is crucial for undergraduates, which is fundamental to success in their respective disciplines.

Hence, to cultivate a generation adept at written communication, it is imperative to understand their perceptions at every stage of the writing process and identify the challenges they encounter. The insights from such inquiries will undoubtedly inform future educational practices, particularly in teaching writing.

Statement of Problem

Writing has garnered significant attention in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research owing to its pivotal role in academic and professional contexts. However, despite its importance, a noticeable research gap exists in understanding the intricacies of writing, particularly in light of the constantly evolving educational landscape. Factors such as diverse learner backgrounds, varied teaching pedagogies, and emerging technological advancements contribute to the complexity of writing instruction. Writing is challenging, particularly for ESL learners, who must develop a range of linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural skills to master it (Hussain, 2017). Uba and Souidi (2020) found that most participants in their study reported difficulties with generating and organising ideas. Alavi et al (2023) in their findings revealed that the EFL participants faced difficulties in their academic writing in terms of lexico-structural (insufficient English vocabulary, making more spelling and grammar mistakes), logical organisation (making coherent and cohesive writing, making outlines and expressing their own ideas clearly), content (writing a clear thesis statement and topic sentence, and difficulty in using examples for illustration), and finding-and-citing (finding related sources and making in-text citation).

As we progress into the year 2024, it becomes imperative for language educators to go deeper into this research gap. It is essential for educators to thoroughly comprehend their students' individual learning difficulties in writing and gain insight into their perceptions of each stage of the writing process. By addressing this research gap, educators can tailor their instruction to effectively meet learners' diverse needs, ultimately enhancing writing proficiency and promoting student success in both academic and professional domains.

Research Gap

Many studies have investigated the difficulties academic writers face in writing. Aldabbus and Almansouri (2022) studied 36 students majoring in English at the Faculty of Education, University of Benghazi. They found that both graduate and undergraduate students have problems with academic writing, such as choosing the appropriate academic words, developing a thesis statement, organising ideas, and writing coherent paragraphs.

Many studies have examined writing difficulties among ESL students, particularly within the same institution. However, there is a lack of research comparing these difficulties across different institutions. Investigating the writing challenges at various stages among academic writers from different institutions and education levels could provide a more comprehensive

understanding of how students from diverse educational backgrounds perceive and address these issues.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore perception of learners on their use of learning strategies. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

RO 1: How do academic writers perceive their writing difficulties?
RO 2: How do academic writers perceive the before writing stage ?
RO 3: How do academic writers perceive the while writing stage ?
RO 4: How do academic writers perceive the when revising stage ?
RO 5: Is there a relationship between writing difficulties and all writing stages ?

Literature Review

Difficulties in Academic Writing

Navigating the writing process often presents formidable challenges for writers, encompassing linguistic, cognitive, and affective dimensions. Among the most prevalent difficulties encountered are grammatical errors, lexical limitations, and struggles with coherence and organisation. Al Fadda (2012) found that the most challenging aspects of writing for ESL students include differentiating between written and spoken language, using correct grammar, and linking sentences to create cohesive paragraphs. This indicates that writers may grapple with inappropriate word choices, incorrect verb tense usage, or challenges maintaining logical flow and coherence within their compositions. Another study by Muniruzzaman & Afrin (2024) revealed that Bangladeshi undergraduates studying English often faced significant barriers in writing, including poor grammatical competence, limited brainstorming skills, insufficient vocabulary, inadequate knowledge of mechanics and writing style, and interference from their mother tongue. Additionally, socio-cultural factors, individual differences in language proficiency and prior writing experiences, and motivational and self-efficacy beliefs can further compound these difficulties. Addressing writing difficulties requires targeted interventions and support mechanisms, including explicit instruction, feedback, peer collaboration, and opportunities for revision and reflection. By acknowledging and actively addressing these challenges, writers can cultivate greater proficiency and confidence in their writing endeavours.

Writing Stages

Understanding the stages of the writing process can provide insights into how writers, particularly those for whom English is a second language (ESL), develop their skills and produce coherent, well-structured texts. Numerous studies have explored the writing process from different theoretical perspectives, offering a detailed examination of the strategies and cognitive processes involved in writing. This section reviews the writing stages of ESL studies (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Rahmat & Whanchit, 2024; Mahapatra, 2024; Nguyen, 2024; Fajrina et al., 2023).

Planning Stage

The planning stage is universally acknowledged as the foundation of the writing process. Flower and Hayes (1981) emphasise that this stage involves generating ideas, organising thoughts, and setting goals. During this stage, writers form an internal representation of the knowledge that will guide their writing. Nguyen (2024) adds that this stage includes

understanding task requirements, reviewing class notes, reading sample essays, and discussing ideas with peers or teachers. Rahmat and Whanchit (2024) highlight the importance of metacognitive and cognitive strategies in planning, which help writers gather and organise content effectively. During this stage, working with an outline is also beneficial in producing more coherent paragraphs (Rizqiyani, 2023).

Translating/Writing Stage

The translating or writing stage is where the actual composition takes place. According to Flower and Hayes (1981), this stage involves converting planned ideas into written text while ensuring coherence and structure. Mahapatra (2024) notes that this stage requires writers to balance the demands of syntax, vocabulary, and overall text organisation. Nguyen (2024) observes that students frequently use strategies such as using background knowledge, checking online sources, and focusing on essay structure and idea development during this stage. This stage is critical as it involves the active creation of the text, which necessitates a high level of cognitive engagement.

Reviewing/Editing Stage

Reviewing or editing is a crucial stage for refining and enhancing the text. Flower and Hayes (1981) describe this stage as involving evaluating and revising the text to improve clarity, coherence, and overall quality. Mahapatra (2024) highlights the role of reviewing as an ongoing process that includes both planned reviews and spontaneous revisions. Nguyen (2024) points out common strategies in this stage include reading the text silently, checking if it meets the requirements, and making revisions based on feedback. Rahmat and Whanchit (2024) emphasise the importance of social strategies during reviewing, as feedback from peers and teachers can significantly improve the quality of the writing.

Feedback Integration Stage

The integration of feedback is essential for improving writing quality. Mahapatra (2024) highlights the importance of receiving and integrating feedback from peers, instructors, or AI tools like ChatGPT. This stage involves making substantive revisions based on feedback, which helps identify and address improvement areas. Giving feedback as a distinct stage highlights its critical role in writing, especially in educational settings where personalised feedback can significantly enhance learning outcomes.

Post-Writing Stage

The post-writing stage focuses on the final proofreading and polishing of the text. Nguyen (2024) explains that this stage involves making final grammar, punctuation, and overall presentation adjustments to ensure that the text is error-free and effectively communicates the intended message. Rahmat and Whanchit (2024) add that this stage is less frequently utilised than the other stages but remains essential for producing a high-quality final product. This stage ensures that all aspects of the writing meet the desired standards before submission or publication.

Past Studies on Difficulties in Academic Writing

Lin and Pua (2024) conducted a study investigating the academic writing difficulties among university undergraduates in Malaysia, with a specific focus on second language learners. Through administering questionnaires to 150 participants and semi-structured

interviews with nine undergraduates, the researchers identified prevalent challenges primarily related to vocabulary, coherence, and paraphrasing. These obstacles were attributed to factors including limited English proficiency, interference from the mother tongue, insufficient writing practice, teaching methodologies, and the medium of instruction. Thadphoothon (2019) investigated the challenges English-major undergraduates face in Thailand when paraphrasing, identifying vocabulary, syntax, and text comprehension as the primary obstacles. The study revealed that undergraduates struggle to rephrase sentences when they lack a full understanding of the text. Similarly, AlMarwani (2020) discovered that undergraduates' low motivation towards writing is often attributed to a lack of vocabulary knowledge, hindering their ability to articulate ideas effectively. Furthermore, Ashraf et al. (2020) highlighted that undergraduates' limited vocabulary range is largely due to inadequate reading habits. They emphasise the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing, advocating for undergraduates to engage in extensive reading to enhance their academic writing skills. This perspective is supported by Atayeva et al. (2019), who argue that reading plays a crucial role in vocabulary enrichment by exposing individuals to new words and demonstrating their usage in context.

Past Studies on Writing Stages

Many studies have been conducted in relation to writing stages and the process of writing. For instance, the studies by Rahmat and Whanchit (2024); Mahapatra (2024) examine the writing process from different perspectives, focusing on how external tools and feedback can improve writing skills. Rahmat and Whanchit (2024) explore writing using social-cultural theory, highlighting the importance of language use, the zone of proximal development (ZPD), and social interaction. They surveyed 109 students with a questionnaire that measured strategies for language use, effort regulation, social strategies for ZPD, and affective strategies for social interaction. Their findings suggest that writing instruction should include social and cultural elements to help students develop better writing strategies. Meanwhile, Mahapatra (2024) studies the impact of ChatGPT as a feedback tool for ESL students. This study used a mixed methods design with undergraduate ESL students, involving pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test assessments and focus group discussions (FGDs). The results showed significant improvements in students' writing skills. Both studies emphasise the importance of collaborative and interactive approaches in writing, suggesting that incorporating social engagement and technological tools like AI can significantly enhance writing outcomes.

Moreover, the studies by Nguyen (2024); Fajrina et al (2023); Flower and Hayes (1981) look at the cognitive and strategic aspects of writing, focusing on both native and non-native English speakers. Nguyen (2024) studies the essay writing strategies of 105 English-majored sophomores at Hanoi Law University using a questionnaire based on the Writing Strategies Inventory by (Petrić and Czárl, 2003). The study finds that students use while-writing strategies most frequently, emphasising planning and revising. Conversely, Fajrina et al (2023) compare the writing strategies of Indonesian EFL students with English L1 students using a writing strategies questionnaire and protocol analysis. They find that EFL students often write in their native language first and then translate it into English, highlighting the need for better planning and revising strategies. On the other hand, Flower and Hayes (1981) present a cognitive process theory of writing based on protocol analysis, identifying planning, translating, and reviewing as key stages in a non-linear, recursive process. These studies show

that the writing process is complex and requires tailored strategies to address the different challenges faced by ESL and native English writers.

Conceptual Framework

Writing is often seen as difficult because the stages in writing involve several related tasks. Writers are constantly making decisions to proceed to the next stage of writing. According to Rahmat (2020), writers perform problem-solving skills when they go through all stages of writing. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. This study explores how academic writers perceive their writing difficulties and the writing stages that they go through. The stages are before writing while writing, and when revising.

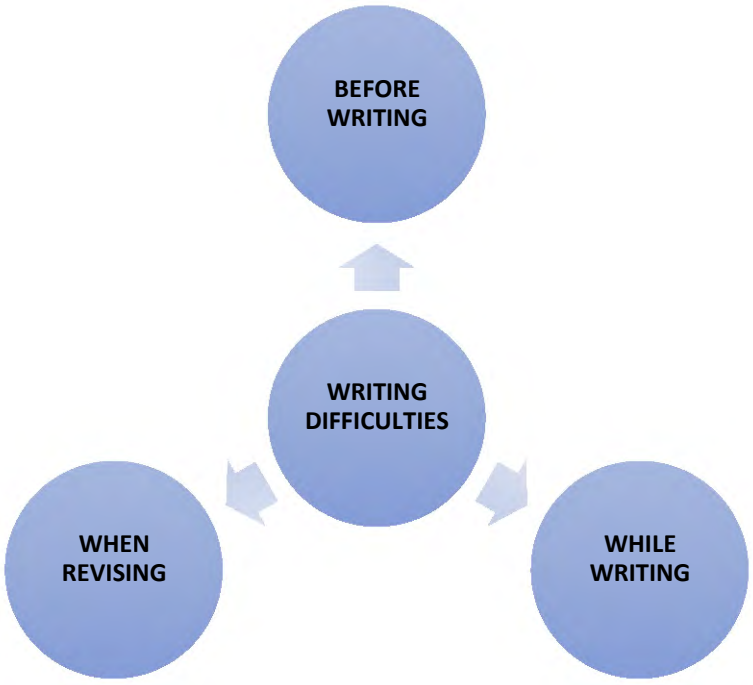


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study
Writing Difficulties and Writing Stages

Methodology

This quantitative study explores motivation factors for learning among undergraduates. A purposive sample of 267 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey rooted from Flower and Hayes (1981); Pedric & Czalr (2003) to reveal the variables in Table 1 below. The survey has 4 sections. Section A has items on the demographic profile. Section B consists of items on writing difficulties, Section C has items on before writing, Section D focuses on while writing, and Section E is on the revising stage.

Table 1
Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECTION	WRITING STAGE	NO OF ITEMS
B	Writing Difficulty	7
C	Before Writing	8
D	While writing	14
E	When Revising	12
		41

Table 2
Reliability of Survey

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.864	41

Table 2 shows the survey's reliability. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .864, revealing the instrument chosen/used's good reliability. Further analysis using SPSS presents findings to answer the research questions for this study.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

Table 4.1
Respondents' demographic profile

Respondents' Discipline	Percentage
Science & Technology	54%
Social Sciences	20%
Business	26%
Level of Study	**Percentage**
Matriculation/Foundation/Pre-U	49%
Diploma	23%
Bachelor	28%

Table 4.1 demonstrates the demographic profile of the respondents. The respondents come from three main disciplines: science and technology (54%), Social Sciences (20%), and business (26%). The respondents also come from various different levels of study: matriculation/foundation/pre-university (49%), Diploma (23%), and Bachelor (28%).

Findings for Difficulties in Writing

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do academic writers perceive their writing difficulties?

Table 8
Mean for WRITING DIFFICULTY

ITEM	Mean
Rhetorical situation WDQ1I find writing difficult because I am not familiar with different types of writing	2.9
Goal setting WDQ2I find writing difficult because the goal for the essay writing is sometimes hard to achieve	2.9
Teaching instruction WDQ3The teacher's instruction on what to do is sometimes not clear and that makes the essay writing difficult	2.1
Teacher explanation WDQ4Sometimes the teachers explanation makes me feel that writing is difficult	2
Long term memory WDQ5Writing essays are difficult because I do have background knowledge of the topic given	2.5
Individual paragraph WDQ6Writing essays are difficult because I have to know what to write in each paragraph	2.7
Writing Process WDQ7I find the writing difficult because I am unsure of the writing process	2.7

Based on the findings presented in Table 8, it is evident that respondents perceive various writing difficulties, with differing levels of agreement across different items. The highest mean scores, recorded for items 1 and 2 (Mean=2.9), suggest that respondents are somewhat neutral regarding the challenges associated with unfamiliarity with different types of writing and achieving writing goals. These findings indicate a need for targeted support and instruction to enhance students' confidence and competence in writing tasks. Conversely, the lowest mean score, observed for item 4 (Mean=2), suggests that respondents generally disagree that teacher explanations contribute to their perception of writing as difficult.

Findings for Before Writing

This section presents data to answer research question 2- How do academic writers perceive the before-writing stage?

Table 9
Mean for -BEFORE WRITING (BW)

ITEM	Mean
BWQ1 I make a timetable/schedule for the writing process	2.6
BWQ 2 Before I start writing, I revise the requirements of the assignment	3.9
BWQ 3 I look at a model written by a proficient writer	4.0
BWQ 4 I start writing without a written or mental plan	2.4
BWQ 5 I think about what I want to write and have a plan in my mind, but not on paper	3.2
BWQ 6 I note down words and short notes related to the topic	3.8
BWQ 7 I write an outline of my paper	3.4
BWQ 8 I write notes or an outline in my native language	3.1

Table 9 presents the mean scores for the items in the before-writing section. Academic writers reported that they looked at a model written by a proficient writer, which received a mean score of 4.0, the highest score in this section. Other than that, items 2 and 6 each received high mean scores of 3.9 and 3.8, respectively, where academic writers admitted that they revised the assignment requirements before they started writing and noted down words and short notes related to the topic. Items 7, 5, and 8 each received moderate mean scores of 3.4, 3.2, and 3.1, respectively, where the academic students wrote an outline, thought about what they wanted to write and had a plan in their mind, and took notes or an outline in their native language. Item 1 and 4 received low mean scores in this section, 2.6 and 2.4, respectively, where the academic students admitted that they made a timetable for the writing process and started writing without a written or mental plan.

Findings for When Writing

This section presents data to answer research question 3- How do academic writers perceive the when writing stage?

Table 10
Mean for WHILE WRITING (WW)

ITEM	Mean
WWQ1 I start with the introduction	4.6
WWQ 2I stop after each sentence to read it again	4
WWQ 3I stop after a few sentences or a whole paragraph , covering one idea	3.7
WWQ 4I reread what I have written to get ideas to continue	4.3
WWQ 5I go back to my outline and make changes in it	3.5
WWQ 6I write bits of the text in my native language and then translate them in English	3.2
WWQ 7I am very confident with my grammar and vocabulary	2.8
WWQ 8I simply what I want to write if I don't know how to express my thoughts in English	3.6
WWQ 9If I don't know a word in English, I write it in my native language and later try to find an appropriate English word	3.6
WWQ 10If I don't' know a word in English, I find similar English word that I know	4
WWQ 11If I don't' know a word in English, I stop writing and look up the word in a dictionary	3.5
WWQ 12I use bilingual dictionary	3.2
WWQ 13I use a monolingual dictionary	2.6
WWQ 14I ask somebody to help out when I have problems while writing	3.8

Table 10 shows the respondents' view towards the while-writing stage. The highest mean recorded on item 1 indicates agreement towards starting the writing with the introduction (Mean = 4.6). The lowest mean is item 13 (Mean = 2.6), indicating a neutral view on using a monolingual dictionary.

Findings for While Revising

This section presents data to answer research question 4- How do academic writers perceive the when revising stage?

Table 11

Mean for WHEN REVISING (WR)

ITEM	Mean
WRQ1 I read my essay aloud	2.8
WRQ 2I only read what I have written when I have finished the whole paper	3
WRQ 3When I have written my paper, I hand it in without reading it	1.9
WRQ 4I use a dictionary when revising	3.
WRQ 5I make changes in vocabulary	3.3
WRQ 6I make changes in sentence structure	3.4
WRQ7 I make changes in the structure of the essay	3.2
WRQ 8I make changes in the content or ideas	3.3
WRQ 9I focus on one thing at a time when revising (eg. content, structure)	3.4
WRQ10 I I drop my first draft and start writing again	3
WRQ 11I check if my essay matches the requirements	4.1
WRQ 12I leave the text aside for a couple of days and then I can see it in a new perspective	3

Table 11 shows the mean for revising writing. The highest mean is 4.1, which indicates agreement to check if the essay matches the essay requirements (item 11). Meanwhile, the lowest mean is on item 3, which indicates disagreement towards not checking the essay upon submission (Mean = 1.9).

Findings for the Relationship between Writing Difficulties and all Stages

This section presents data to answer research question 5- Is there a relationship between writing difficulties and all writing stages?

To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between metacognitive, effort regulation, cognitive, social, and affective strategies, data is analysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 below.

Table 12

Correlation between Writing Difficulties and Before Writing

Correlations

		WRITINGDIFFICULTY	BEFOREWRITING
WRITINGDIFFICULTY	Pearson Correlation	1	.193**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
	N	267	267
BEFOREWRITING	Pearson Correlation	.193**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	267	267

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 12 shows there is an association between writing difficulties and before writing. Correlation analysis shows that there is a low significant association between writing difficulties and before writing. (r=.193**) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. A weak positive correlation would be between 0.1 to 0.3, a moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and a strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means there is also a weak positive relationship between writing difficulties and before writing.

Table 13
Correlation between Writing Difficulties and While Writing

Correlations

		WRITINGDIFFICULTY	WHILEWRITING
WRITINGDIFFICULTY	Pearson Correlation	1	.073
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.237
	N	267	267
WHILEWRITING	Pearson Correlation	.073	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.237	
	N	267	267

Table 13 shows there is no association between writing difficulties and while writing. Correlation analysis shows no significant association between writing difficulties and while writing. (r=.073) and (p=.000). Jackson (2015) states that a coefficient is significant at the .05 level, and a positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. A weak positive correlation would be between 0.1 to 0.3, a moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and a strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means there is also no relationship between writing difficulties and while writing.

Table 14
Correlation between Writing Difficulties and When Revising

Correlations

		WRITINGDIFFICULTY	WHENREVISING
WRITINGDIFFICULTY	Pearson Correlation	1	.030
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.628
	N	267	267
WHENREVISING	Pearson Correlation	.030	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.628	
	N	267	267

Table 14 shows there is no association between writing difficulties and when revising. Correlation analysis shows no significant association between writing difficulties and when revising. (r=.030) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), a coefficient is significant at the .05 level, and a positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. A weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, a moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and a strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means there is also a no relationship between writing difficulties and when revising.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussions

The findings reveal insights into the perceived writing difficulties among academic writers across different stages of the writing process. Generally, respondents view writing challenges positively and display confidence in their writing skills, such as goal setting, understanding writing requirements, and recognising different types of essays. However, a deeper analysis of the writing stages shows that in the pre-writing stage, writers commonly employ strategies to overcome difficulties by examining samples of proficient writers, revising essay requirements, noting relevant words and short notes, and creating outlines. These techniques have proven important in helping writers produce more organised work (Riziqiyani, 2023). During the writing phase, challenges persist, particularly with unfamiliar vocabulary. Confidence in grammar and vocabulary fluctuates, with some writers resorting to translating or simplifying their thoughts. Referring to dictionaries has been identified as the best way to overcome these difficulties, supporting the notion that word choice is a major problem for ESL academic writers (Al Fadda, 2012). In revising, writers use diverse strategies, including reading aloud and changing vocabulary, sentence structure, and content. They take precautions by rereading their essays before submission to ensure they meet the requirements and maintain quality. This finding supports Lu et al.'s (2023) studies on the importance of revisions in writing quality.

Most of the mean scores indicated medium difficulty, suggesting a conducive learning environment that offers students a zone of proximal development. This environment challenges students to improve their writing skills, aligning with Vygotsky's (1978) learning theory. Additionally, the analysis highlights a weak positive association between writing difficulties and the pre-writing stage, suggesting that planning and goal setting challenges may influence overall writing difficulties. Conversely, no significant associations were found between writing difficulties and the writing or revising stages, indicating that difficulties in these stages may not directly impact overall writing difficulties.

In conclusion, the study provides valuable insights into the perceived writing difficulties faced by academic writers at various stages of the writing process. While respondents generally exhibit confidence in their writing skills and view challenges positively, specific stages reveal particular areas of struggle. Effective strategies such as examining proficient writing samples, revising requirements, and creating outlines are crucial for overcoming difficulties in the pre-writing stage. During the writing phase, vocabulary limitations and fluctuating confidence in grammar are significant challenges, best addressed through dictionaries. The revising stage emphasises the importance of thorough review and revision to ensure quality.

The findings suggest that while the pre-writing stage notably influences overall writing difficulties, the writing and revising stages do not significantly impact the overall difficulty level. This highlights the importance of targeted support and interventions, particularly in the planning and goal-setting phases, to enhance the writing skills of academic writers. The study also underscores the role of a supportive learning environment, which aligns with Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development, in fostering improvement and confidence among ESL writers.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The findings from this study offer valuable pedagogical implications and suggest avenues for future research in addressing writing difficulties among academic writers. Firstly, educators

should recognise the importance of providing clear instructions and guidance, particularly during pre-writing, to alleviate goal-setting and planning difficulties. Incorporating instructional strategies that scaffold the writing process, such as providing model essays and encouraging outlines, can enhance students' preparedness and confidence. Additionally, interventions to foster metacognitive awareness and self-regulation skills may help students better navigate the writing process and overcome challenges at various stages. Moreover, given the weak positive association between writing difficulties and the pre-writing stage, future research could explore the effectiveness of targeted interventions, such as goal-setting workshops or planning exercises, in mitigating writing difficulties among academic writers. Furthermore, longitudinal studies tracking students' writing development over time could provide insights into the factors contributing to persistent difficulties and inform the design of comprehensive writing support programs. Additionally, investigating the impact of individual differences, such as language proficiency and prior writing experiences, on writing difficulties could contribute to the development of personalised interventions tailored to students' needs. Overall, by addressing writing difficulties through targeted pedagogical interventions and advancing our understanding of the underlying factors, educators can better support academic writers in achieving writing proficiency and academic success.

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