

CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENTS ON WRITING SKILLS IN ESL CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

English is an international language and in demand today. Some of the challenges that are faced by the ESL students are lack of vocabulary, poor grammar, poor spelling, students' readiness and lack of exposure to books and reading materials. The challenges faced by the students' have made it challenging teachers to teach writing skills. English is by far the most widely used language around the world. However, English language writing has always been a challenge for second language students to master. Developing students' ability in writing is one of the major challenges faced by the ESL teachers in most schools nowadays. Nevertheless, writing has always been a major difficulty faced by students in English language learning, especially in elementary schools. Not only that, teachers are also facing some challenges in teaching writing skills for students in elementary schools. Thus, this study aims to explore the challenges faced by both the students and teachers in learning as well as teaching writing skills in elementary schools.

KEYWORDS: *Writing skills , Challenges*

1. INTRODUCTION

English is used in the world as a lingua franca among people from different cultures, ethnic, and social backgrounds (Dewi, 2015). The ability to teach writing effectively at elementary schools is one of the vital skills among English teachers. Writing is a major component in the teaching of English. The teaching of writing has been conducted as early as in the early years where students start to learn how to form letters correctly.

Many consequences could lead to major drawbacks in students' academic performance if they have a weak foundation in writing. Writing is not only vital in order to develop their academic performance, but also contributes to their social and emotional development. Moreover, in this competitive world, writing is also one of the skills that is necessary to excel. Their inability to write well, may affect their chances to secure a job in the future. Therefore, this issue needs to be tackled effectively.

However, teaching writing has become difficult because of the challenges faced by the students in learning writing skills. Some of the challenges that are faced by the ESL students are lack of vocabulary, poor grammar, poor spelling, students' readiness and lack of exposure to books and reading materials.

The challenges faced by the students' have made it challenging teachers to teach writing skills. The challenges that are faced by the teachers to teach writing skills are difficult to motivate their students, students of diverse levels, difficult materials and time constraints to teach the students. In order to improve a student's writing ability, more attention must be given by a teacher to teach writing such as giving guidance and feedback.

Therefore, a teacher needs to be aware of the challenges faced by other English teachers in teaching writing skills and ESL students' challenges in learning to write. This paper provides a literature review on the challenges faced by both teachers as well as students in teaching and learning writing skills.

2. Literature Review

Writing is one of the skills among speaking, reading and listening skills in English. Writing is a multiplex activity claimed by Ling (2016). Writing activities need to be conducted among students since elementary school so that the students can generate good pieces of writing in the future. Even though there are many subjects in elementary schools, writing is known as one of the most vital academic subjects for students.

The beating heart of English is "story". A "story" can take any form be it a journalistic article, a research documentary or a fantasy novel. It serves as a method of explaining and passing information intended for a specific objective. Thus, all writing may be taken in a form of story in a larger perspective.

2.1. Demand on Writing Skills

Writing is a crucial skill that will benefit the rest of the students' lives. Introducing and practicing writing with attractive activities in schools could increase students' confidence and they will fall in love with writing in a long run. Immediately, writing skills are vital for lower primary students to continue learning in all academic areas, communication and self-expression.

Writing exercises in schools promote the improvement of penmanship as well as overall academic development through troubleshooting and critical thinking. The writing process also is applicable to other areas such as Mathematics and Sciences, where the learned traits of planning, research and review is applied as well. General knowledge and vocabulary are also improved as a subsequent effect.

Through journals and personal story writing, students can discover themselves and work through their real-life problems. A report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services states that writing can provide a therapeutic outlet to help students cope when they are facing hard time in their life such as having problems with their parents or feeling sad. Writing assists students with their social development. Writing connects the students to be in tune with what happens in the world around them. Students need to consider the audience and purpose in writing. This will help the students with their verbal communication at the same time. Writing with friends' feedback, makes students to learn among themselves. As students' progress through their school years, they will need to be both literate and computer literate to succeed. While the two skills complement each other, some computer tools such as spelling and grammar checks, can prevent them from developing their writing skills. As an example, students who are not practicing their handwriting when they are writing with a keyboard. It is also important for the students to know that they need to use their own knowledge, not by replacing their knowledge with computers, because computers can make mistakes too. Today, due to the evolution of information technology, writers are in demand to create digital media content. A content writer is needed for digital marketing corporations. News websites, social media marketing corporations and other related and non-related IT corporations need writers to help them through writing for digital marketing channels such as brand quotes, advertisement, social media posts, blogs etc.

2.2. Purpose of Students' Writing by Using Different Writing Strategies

There are many ways to improve students' penmanship through writing exercises at elementary level. Students may use different writing methods at a time. There are various teaching writing strategies for examples pre-writing, writing warm-up, collaboratively write, using sentence starters, and guided writing. Not all the teaching of writing strategies can be used at the same time as they may have different teaching objectives. Employing various teaching techniques to teach writing will help the students improve their writing skills in English. As the students have interest and become active participants in learning, the learning process will fall on the right track. Besides, using various writing strategies will make the students think creatively. Students may use what they know by combining opinions and facts, thus, making a new piece of writing. According to Bloom's Taxonomy, this is high-level ability.

2.3. Challenges Faced by the Students in Learning Writing Skills

What are the challenges faced by learners when writing?

Attention Problem

- Difficulty getting started on writing assignments.
- Easy distractibility during writing tasks.
- Mental fatigue or tiredness while writing.
- Inconsistent legibility in writing.
- Uneven writing tempo.
- Many careless errors.
- Poorly planned papers and reports.

Each student may face different challenges in learning writing. All the students are special and unique in their own ways. These challenges will somehow pull back the students from moving forward to produce a good piece of writing. The following paragraphs are about challenges faced by students in writing.

Lack of vocabulary has caused the students to face challenges in acquiring writing skills claimed [Misbah et al. \(2017\)](#). Vocabulary is the fundamental element in constructing sentences, which is the core of effective writing skills [Asep \(2014\)](#). Students almost use spoken and written words every single day to communicate their ideas, beliefs and feelings with people around them. Good vocabulary repertoire can help students to speak or write to deliver their thoughts. Usage of electronic dictionary and more reading activities can help students with limited vocabulary. Some elementary school students are also having trouble with grammar. Grammar plays an important role in writing. Grammar provides information that helps the readers to understand its meaning

It is a structure that conveys the detailed meaning of the writer to the reader. Grammar also explains the forms and structure of words, called morphology and how they are arranged in sentences, called syntax. By having very limited knowledge in grammar, students will face anxiety to write sentences with correct grammar. According to [Muhammad Fareed et al. \(2016\)](#) students make mistakes in subject-verb agreement, pronouns, tenses, articles, prepositions and basic sentence structures. Grammar ability can be improved through reading activity and grammar related activities.

Poor spelling is another cause of anxiety for students in learning writing skill and this is supported by [Nyang'au Benard \(2014\)](#). Having good ability in spelling will lead to positive learning of writing skill. If the students are struggling with spellings, it will hold them back to move forward. The students have the habit to spell according to their pronunciation and this will lead to wrong spelling as mentioned by [Afrin \(2016\)](#). The students will either add or leave letters of the words. For an example "ballon" instead of "balloon." According to [Nyang'au Benard \(2014\)](#) memorization of the spelling will help the students to have good spelling.

Students' readiness is another challenge in learning writing and this was supported by [Foster \(2015\)](#). According to [Winarso \(2016\)](#) in order to complete a task successfully, readiness is very important. The readiness can either be physical readiness and mental preparedness. If this is not occurring, students will be having challenges in writing. Students will not be mentally prepared to learn in the classroom if they are not ready. It is very important for the students to be ready before they enter the classroom. According to [Foster \(2015\)](#) motivating and attracting the students' attention can help students' readiness in learning writing.

Lack of exposure to books and reading materials are other challenges for elementary school students in learning writing and this is supported by [Foster \(2015\)](#). According to [Muhammad Fareed et al. \(2016\)](#) many students find it very challenging to get enough and significant source of information. Lack of extensive reading will not help the students to write good sentences or paragraphs. This is because reading and writing are interrelated. If the students are not reading books or other reading materials, they are going to have lack of ideas and vocabulary to write. Their brain neurons will be connected to each other to come out with a good writing if they read more and connecting the ideas with their prior knowledge. [Foster \(2015\)](#) explained that exposure to different reading materials can help the students to be aware with language awareness explained.

Last but not the least, lack of motivation is another challenge faced by the students. If the students are not motivated, they might not be interested to proceed with their learning process. Motivation is important in improving students' learning results claimed [Gbolli & Keamu \(2017\)](#). Teachers could motivate the students by rewarding them with simple motivational phrases by saying "Good job!", "Good try!", "Keep it up" etc. Positive reward will make the students go further in their learning process.

2.4. Challenges Faced by the Teachers in Teaching Writing Skills

Teaching has always been the challenging part for teachers. Teaching English at primary level is naturally much more different from teaching in other levels of students such as secondary and tertiary levels. The challenge will somehow make the teachers' teaching ineffective. The following are the challenges faced by teachers.

Nowadays, teachers are having a hard time in motivating the students. Not because of the students' naughtiness, but the students are not interested in learning writing and this claim is supported by [Asep \(2014\)](#). The younger generation has the perception that they can do whatever they please since much freedom has been given to them by their parents. When students choose to feel reluctant in learning, it is a sign of lack of motivation ([Abrar, 2016](#)).

Having different levels of students in the classroom is another challenge faced by teachers to teach writing. In many elementary classrooms, students from different levels are placed in the same classroom. Different levels of students will result to difficulty to teachers in order to cater all of their levels simultaneously ([Asep, 2014](#)). Different levels of writing ability will require the teachers to use different approaches. As a result, the teachers feel difficult to plan their lessons and prepare appropriate activities for the students.

Parental indifference is another challenge. Lack of parents' support will make the teachers having a hard time to help the students. Students who feel lack of warmth and affection from their parents will draw them back from succeeding in their learning process ([Gündoğmuş, 2018](#)). This is due to little guidance, motivation and support from their parents.

Besides, lack of professional experience is another challenge faced by the teachers ([Gündoğmuş, 2018](#)). Having lack of professional experience will lead to stress and tension to teach at elementary school students especially among novice teachers. The multiple roles of teacher are also a challenge. The teachers' experience is depending on the level of their previous experience and training. It will take time for the novice teachers to adapt themselves with their students very well. Teachers can only prepare appropriate activities if they know well about their students' proficiency level, and interests. Not only that, longer time is needed for teachers to prepare new teaching materials, appropriate lesson plans, suitable activities, and provide comments or reflections.

Finally, according to [Anyiendah \(2017\)](#) lack of students' interest is another challenge. Developing writing skills is always challenging, however, it is always an interesting task. Especially when it comes to writing, some students zone out. Students feel lack of interest in writing because they need to know many aspects in order to produce a good piece of work. The students need to know punctuations, grammar, vocabulary, spelling and sentence structure in order to write a good piece of writing.

Writing has now become a huge part of every student's life, starting with the simplest content to the most complex writing pieces. At this point, students are asked to craft different types of essays, research papers and other kinds of creative writing tasks. The reason for this increase in variety of papers lies in the importance writing carries in students' lives during and after their education. Writing is a skill students will need for the future, which is why it is crucial to develop it to the proper level. Unfortunately, the majority of students still fail to develop their writing skills even after finishing school. The reasons for this are numerous, including:

- ***Improper development of analytical and cognitive skills***

Students need to develop their cognitive and analytical skills in order to improve their writing. This includes learning to understand and think better, which is something rarely implemented in high-school education.

- ***Lack of writing practice***

In order to become better in writing, one has to practice it. Without sufficient practice, students can never take their writing skills to a higher level.

- ***Insufficient word stock and writing mechanics***

Even the most talented students need to learn how to understand complex sentences, differentiate between different nouns, use proper punctuation and proofread their writing for errors.

- ***No feedback on their writing***

Many teachers assign writing tasks to students, but fail to provide them with comprehensive feedback. Giving a student a grade for their writing is simply not enough if one wants to teach them how to write better.

James Scott, an essay expert at UK Essay On Time says: 'Writing is not only important for a student when they want to get a good grade. After he leaves your classroom he should be ready to write his application, use writing at the job he'll acquire and craft comprehensible, correct content every day of his life'.

When high school ends, the time comes for students to write application essays, resumes and personal statements. If they do not develop sufficient writing skills, these few papers will immediately show all the weak points in their writing.

- ***Lack of Vocabulary***

Vocabulary is not something a child can learn in a day or by reading the dictionary. If you want to help your child enrich his vocabulary, you can always try having a conversation where you insert new words and phrases, giving your child books to read or simply helping them form content by using vocabulary they learned the same day at school.

- ***Weak Argumentation***

Argumentation is highly important in writing and will be necessary if your child wants to succeed. When in high school, students must learn how to argue their thoughts and ideas in order to be able to write important pieces of content later on, such as an admission letter or even their resume.

- ***Failing to Structure Ideas Effectively***

Writing structure is something a student learns by learning writing mechanism. However, student's time at school is limited and they often fail to learn the best way to structure their ideas in content. This is why parents must work with their children at home and help them communicate better. Put their argumentation ability to test by raising an issue and see how they cope with it, direct them when necessary till they feel how to be consistent.

- ***Poor Grammar and Syntax Skills***

You can easily notice the progress your child makes in terms of grammar and syntax if you listen to them and point out to the mistakes they make. Ask your child what he learned that day and have conversations often. While speaking to your child, pay attention to the sentences they form.

Hard/Unfamiliar Topics

The majority of students will feel lack of knowledge about a certain topic. When this happens, it is your job as a parent to help them understand the topic and teach them how to research to get the necessary information to form their opinions correctly.

High school is a key point in a student's education because of the importance it carries in terms of writing skills. It is crucial to develop these skills for the future, but students often encounter challenges in terms of writing. In order to help them, parents need to understand these challenges and learn the best way to face them in order to help their children.

3. Conclusion and Implications

This study is to explore the literature review on the challenges faced by both the students and teachers in learning and teaching writing skills. It can be concluded that school students are facing many challenges to learn writing skills and it is not easy for English teachers to teach them writing skills. The existing literature has identified demands on writing skills in English, purpose of students' writing by using various writing strategies, challenges faced by both the students and teachers in learning and teaching writing skills and past studies on the challenges faced by students and teachers to learn and teach writing skills among ESL school students.

By understanding both the students' and teachers' challenges in learning and teaching writing skills, the teachers could choose the best possible approach to teach writing skills by giving feedback and guidance. Besides, the school management should take necessary actions on the challenges faced by the teachers in order to facilitate the teachers to have effective teaching process. Finally, teachers may stress the importance of learning writing skills to the students in order to motivate them to learn writing skills.

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