

## Secondary-Level Teachers' Perceptions of Difficulties in Teaching Writing Skills in English

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### Abstract

The qualitative research, grounded in interpretivism, explored challenges in teaching secondary-level students writing skills in English. The study aimed to grasp English teachers' perspectives through interviews. Challenges encompassed limited vocabulary, incorrect pronunciation, and internet dependency. Interviews with six teachers (participants) highlighted the need to address diverse learning needs and maintain a balance between grammar, composition, and creativity. Motivation proved a hurdle, influenced by internet reliance and shyness. Parents' negligence impacted students' writing habits. Additionally, poor handwriting diminished students' confidence in presenting their work- a lack of professionalism among teachers and their inadequate skills added to the challenges. Therefore, recommendations included motivating students, boosting reading practices, reducing internet dependence, and improving teacher expertise. Addressing these challenges is crucial for nurturing proficient writing skills in students.

**Keywords:** interpretivism, encompassed, motivation, diverse, professionalism, nurturing

### Introduction

The rise of English as a global lingua franca has been remarkable. Its widespread use in international business, diplomacy, academia, and entertainment has cemented its status. Despite its popularity, learning and teaching English as a foreign or second language poses multifaceted challenges. Firstly, the intricacies of English grammar, irregular verbs, and nuanced tenses can be daunting for learners. The language's vast vocabulary and idiomatic expressions add further complexity. Additionally, English phonetics, with its diverse sounds and often inconsistent spelling, can prove perplexing. In the teaching process, educators face the challenge of catering

to diverse learning styles and levels of proficiency. Balancing grammar instruction with practical communication skills is crucial. Incorporating technology and interactive methods can help address these challenges.

Empathy, adaptable teaching strategies, and immersive language exposure can aid in overcoming those obstacles and promote effective English language acquisition in an increasingly interconnected world the prominence of English as a universal language is underscored by various scholars in the field. Putra (2022) highlights the multifaceted utility of English in contemporary society, ranging from education and business to politics and technology. The language's global prevalence cannot be underestimated, given its widespread use. Putra (2022) further emphasizes that beyond being a mere communication tool, English aids in adapting to diverse environments. This aligns with the view that English is not just a language, but also a skill that enhances versatility and adaptability (Putra, 2022; Harmer (1998) further reinforces the idea of English as a genuine lingua franca. He notes that by the late 20th century, English had already begun serving as a bridge between individuals with disparate first or second languages. The concept of English as a lingua franca indicates its pivotal role in global communication, enabling effective interaction among individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Harmer, 1998). This perspective is reinforced by Coleman (2011), who emphasizes the practical benefits of English proficiency. He argues that English proficiency is linked to increased employability, international mobility (encompassing migration, tourism, and studying abroad), unlocking developmental opportunities, and accessing vital information. He underscores English as an impartial language that transcends cultural and national boundaries, further contributing to its status as a global lingua franca.

These scholarly perspectives collectively highlight the multifaceted nature of English's prominence, from its practical applications to various sectors of global communication and personal development. The references offer valuable insights into the ongoing evolution of English as a universal language.

Generally, teaching the English language focuses on four skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Writing skill is known as one of the productive skills of students. Sarwat et al. (2021), view that English writing influences the educational system since it is the main source of global information and is essential for language development, intercultural dialogue, and knowledge understanding. A study conducted

by Walsh (2010), found that Writing is crucial for students in higher education and the workplace, as it is used extensively in various communication tasks such as proposals, memos, reports, and emails. So, through writing, students can express their emotions and if they do not have good communication skills in writing, it is difficult for them to express their views. The view is supported by:

Writing is a vital skill in education, particularly in English as a foreign or second language instruction. Yet, teaching this skill presents challenges. Both students and educators encounter difficulties in the process. The intricacies of language structure, vocabulary, and cultural nuances can hinder effective writing. Moreover, grasping the art of expressing ideas coherently and creatively is demanding. Teachers must navigate varied proficiency levels and learning preferences. Students, on the other hand, overcome language barriers and build confidence. Addressing these challenges requires a balanced approach that combines grammar instruction with creative expression, fostering a supportive environment that nurtures writing skills development.

### **My Context**

It was in March one year ago that I was teaching English in ninth grade. Naturally, it was very hot, so I felt bored. I thought to give some writing assignments to the students. Accordingly, I gave an assignment on essay writing on different topics. Some days earlier, I had taught them some basic techniques of writing essays but indeed of those 36 students, only 5 wrote a basic level essay meeting a few desired qualities.

So, at that time there were so many questions in my mind like how students were struggling with writing in English, especially free writing. Are teachers also facing challenges in teaching writing? Who is suffering more, the students or the teacher? Who has the weakness? What types of challenges and obstacles are the teachers facing in teaching writing skills? Do parents know about that? Are parents blaming the teacher for their children not learning writing skills? And I finally decided to study the problems of teaching writing skills in English to secondary-level students.

### **Multi-faceted Nature of the Challenges in Teaching and Learning Writing Skills in English**

There are several difficulties in teaching English as a foreign or second language, and these difficulties frequently cause pupils to avoid writing in English. This

reluctance to write, whether in free-form expression or activities under supervision, poses several challenging issues that warrant thought.

One of the main concerns is who is held accountable for the results of learning. Even though teachers have a crucial role in offering direction, information, and support, students also have an essential role to play. Their perseverance, effort, and regular practice all aid in their language learning development. The expectations of parents and guardians often get complicated by this relationship. Sometimes, parents' expectations for their writing skills are exaggerated or misinformed about the complexities of language learning. To close the gap between expectations and reality, instructors, students, and parents must communicate effectively with one another. All parties must understand the complex nature of language acquisition and the difficulties teachers have when attempting to teach students how to write in English.

The overarching is to unravel the intricacies and complexities that hinder or facilitate effective writing instruction and acquisition. Are aware of the teachers' challenges while teaching writing skills in English? Amalia et al. (2021), viewed these questions as, although teaching writing to junior high school children presents several difficult problems, writing is a complex skill that requires a wide range of information. By supporting this view, Harmer (2007) said that writing is a very complex activity because of its complicated components such as the development of ideas, syntax, grammar, organization, vocabulary, content, communication skills, and use of punctuation in the sentence. In the same way, Sapkota (2012) claimed that learners focus on passing exams for academic degrees, with writing skills being the most challenging in practice and examination. These skills are often assigned as homework in teaching-learning activities, with teacher-correct answers.

The insights made above provide light on how complex writing is, which shows up as a significant obstacle for pupils. This difficulty is exacerbated when teachers are faced with teaching writing skills to children for whom English is a second language, who face a variety of unique challenges. The difficulties don't end there, though; students frequently approach writing in English with a single emphasis on passing tests, without the true drive to interact with the language in a creative and meaningful way. A scenario where educators could unintentionally find themselves in the firing line for perceived shortcomings in their teaching techniques is created by this shift in viewpoint, which heightens the already high difficulty level. It is imperative to recognize that this

issue goes beyond surface-level accusations and necessitates a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play. The goal of this study is to inform the numerous stakeholders who have a direct or indirect role in developing English writing skills, and this is what motivates the study. To teach secondary school pupils the craft of writing in English, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers must navigate a complex web of difficulties. This is the focus of this study. The research seeks to close the gap between perceptions and realities by exploring these difficulties to provide a more comprehensive and sympathetic approach to writing in English. It is expected that via this investigation, a more nuanced understanding would emerge, permitting the creation of methods and systems of assistance that not only lessen the stresses that both instructors and students experience.

### **The Impact of Challenges in Teaching Writing Skills on Student Learning Outcome**

In the context of education, the interplay between instructors' demands and the difficulties they face when educating pupils may have a significant influence on the learning process. Teachers sometimes assume that their students will understand the material as intended when they convey guidelines. The difficult challenge of properly inspiring and encouraging pupils, however, might cause this conviction to falter. The desired learning outcomes may be compromised by such difficulties. Writing ability is just one of the many talents that children pick up, but it serves as a crucial and quantitative indicator of how well they can learn. Understanding and critical thinking are demonstrated by one's capacity for cohesive written expression. Teachers frequently negotiate a maze of challenges when students and instructors are unable to meet the expected learning goals.

This battle is highlighted by the crucial talent of writing. The teacher's passionate attempts to help pupils develop good writing skills may run afoul of issues like student disengagement, language obstacles, or a lack of motivation. To overcome this slew of obstacles, creative strategies are required. Unexpected challenges like a lack of resources, different learning styles, or shifting student enthusiasm levels may cause teachers difficulty. The teacher's commitment takes center stage in this complex dynamic. A dynamic classroom atmosphere that encourages creativity and self-expression is necessary for pupils to improve their writing abilities. This process calls for adaptable teaching methods. The possibility for transformational growth exists even

though the obstacles are still there and difficult. Educators are working to overcome these obstacles as they strive to provide children with the fundamental writing abilities they need. According to Fareed Bilal (2013), writing is crucial for language production, but challenging in ESL contexts due to factors like untrained teachers, ineffective teaching methods, lack of practice, large classrooms, low motivation, and lack of ideas.

So, the problem discussed in the paper was English teachers grapple with multifaceted challenges when instructing writing skills.

### **Role of English Language Writing Skills and its Issues**

The increasing popularity of using the English language worldwide made this skill more important to conveying information in the communication process. Lee and Schmidgall (2020) had the opinion that “we discuss the multi-faced role of English writing in the international workplace. We point out that English, as the main lingua franca, supports a variety of writing practices in the workplace, it presents both significant value and challenges for internationally operating individuals and organizations” (p. 4). Moses & Mohamad (2019) viewed, “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 ESL teachers in most of the schools nowadays”.

Nevertheless, writing has always been a major difficulty faced by students in English language learning, especially in schools about the importance of writing and the problems that arise from it. Asap (2014) mentioned that nowadays, teachers are having a hard time on motivating students. Not because of the students’ naughtiness, but because the students are not interested in learning writing and this claim is supported by.

Different theories discuss learning challenges, processes, and outcomes. The theory of constructivism talks about the reality that can be achieved through the experience of the learner. The theory is propounded by Jean Piaget. This theory helps to understand teachers and instructors to understand their students who are from different backgrounds and bring their own experience of learning. Saha (2019), mentioned that “Constructivism transforms the student from a passive recipient of information to an active participant in the learning process. Always guided by the teacher, students construct their knowledge actively rather than just mechanically ingesting knowledge from the teacher or the textbook”(p. 3). In the same manner, Thomas & Lila (2019),

claimed that "in constructivist classes, learning is more motivating, gratifying as well as challenging to students". Other studies demonstrated an increase in the memorability of knowledge, increased understanding, and ability to solve problems. Likewise, Ertmer & Timothy (2013), said that "a constructivist approach to learning and understanding: knowledge "is a function of how the individual creates meaning from his or her own experiences" (p. 55). So, Constructivism helps to motivate students, and motivation is the key to successful teaching and learning activities.

Mai Hoa (2016) found in their study that teaching English for specific purposes is facing many difficulties arising from subjective and objective factors. These difficulties have a direct impact on teaching ESP and students' ability to find jobs after graduation. For effective teaching, there should be a collaboration between students, teachers, and universities as well as the concerned authorities. Similarly, Keller discovered that "Writing, due to various intrinsic attributes and extrinsic factors, seems to be the most challenging skill for language learners, both as the first and/or as the second or foreign language, relative to other main skills of listening, reading and speaking" (p. 47). Likewise, in the study of Taibah university's students, Huwari and Khasawneh (2013), found that, "students declared the main themes behind their weakness of writing which were grammatical weakness, knowledge, and understanding, less practice, and educational background. Thus, teachers, as well as curriculum, should focus on these themes and pay more attention to these problems, to reduce the weakness of the writing" (p. 6). So, not only teacher should be focused, on reducing the weaknesses in the student's problem in learning skills, but the curriculum also should be designed well.

Going through the different thematic theoretical empirical and policy reviews, the study on the perception of secondary-level English teachers in teaching writing skills is underrepresented. So, this study focuses on the challenges and problems faced by secondary-level English teachers in teaching writing skills and their perceptions of these challenges along with some probable solutions.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research approach grounded in interpretivism to examine the challenges associated with teaching writing skills to secondary-level students. By embracing interpretivism, the research aimed to uncover the nuanced perspectives and subjective experiences of educators and students involved in the process. Through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, the study sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of the perceived issues hindering

effective writing instruction. The qualitative nature of the research allowed for a deep exploration of the multifaceted aspects influencing the teaching and learning of writing skills, shedding light on the intricate interplay between pedagogical strategies, student engagement, language proficiency, and cultural influences.

In this research, one of the objectives was of secondary-level English teachers about their experience of teaching writing skills and the problems and challenges that arise from teaching writing skills in English to secondary-level students.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Once the participants for the study were identified, an in-depth interview was adopted, involving the use of open-ended questions. This method allowed the participants to provide detailed insights into their personal experiences and perspectives regarding the obstacles encountered while instructing writing skills to secondary-level students. Through these interviews, participants were encouraged to share their firsthand encounters, shedding light on the practical intricacies and intricacies of the teaching process. Following the completion of the interviews, the recorded conversations were transcribed meticulously to ensure accuracy in capturing the participants' responses and narratives. The subsequent phase involved a rigorous analysis of the transcriptions, employing qualitative data analysis techniques. This process included identifying recurrent themes, patterns, and nuances in the participants' accounts. The interpretation of the data aimed to uncover underlying meanings, contextual factors, and potential implications that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced in teaching writing skills at the secondary level. This qualitative approach allowed for a rich exploration of the participants' perspectives, fostering a deeper comprehension of the multifaceted dynamics inherent to this educational context

### **Discussion of Results**

After studying the different thematic, theoretical, and empirical as well as taking the interview with the participants, the study found writing skills are one of the measurable skills to measure the competency and proficiency of the students. Ali & Ramana (2018) viewed that "as one of the language skills, writing is excelled only when the other three language skills are excelled. It is the combination of process and product. It involves mastery of grammar and vocabulary to present the message. It requires self-



knowledge to express the thought process" (p. 291). In this regard, Gautam (2019), claimed:

Proficiency in writing skills is essential for every university student, teacher, researcher, and freelance writer. All these jobs require advanced skills since their expertise is judged through the ability to write. Such institutions tend to prefer how they write to what they write for information. (p. 75)

The task of teaching English as a foreign language cannot be performed without difficulties; pupils run into roadblocks such as restricted vocabulary, incorrect pronunciation, and a major problem with their writing abilities. Six English instructors from secondary schools were interviewed to learn more about this topic. The revelations shed light on a variety of issues and difficulties that come with teaching writing to secondary-level pupils.

### **Challenges Found in Teaching Writing Skills in English**

Teaching writing skills in English presents a many-sided landscape fraught with challenges that educators must navigate. As English evolves into a global lingua franca, the ability to communicate effectively through the written word becomes increasingly vital. However, this endeavor is met with hurdles stemming from linguistic intricacies, diverse student backgrounds, and the complexities of nurturing creativity and coherence in compositions. In this educational terrain, a clear understanding of the challenges is essential to devise strategies that foster proficient writing among students.

#### **Lack of Vocabulary and Grammar**

Within the realm of teaching writing skills in English, a prominent obstacle arises from the limited vocabulary that students often grapple with. This deficiency in word selection can significantly impede the fluency and eloquence of their written expressions. When students lack a diverse range of words at their disposal, their ability to convey nuanced thoughts and ideas effectively becomes a strenuous endeavor. The process of transforming abstract concepts into tangible sentences is hampered, leading to a potential mismatch between their intended message and the words available to them. Another noteworthy concern that educators frequently encounter is the issue of incorrect pronunciation. While writing primarily involves the visual representation of words on paper, the auditory dimension of language cannot be overlooked. Mispronunciations not only hinder effective verbal communication but can also

influence a student's grasp of spelling and phonetics, potentially affecting their writing accuracy. Furthermore, a mispronounced word can impede comprehension, as it might be mistaken for a different term altogether.

The participants illuminated additional nuances. Better grapple with addressing diverse learning needs within the classroom, necessitating personalized approaches that can be resource-intensive. Furthermore, balancing attention between grammar, vocabulary, and composition skills poses an ongoing challenge. Instructors strive to cultivate an environment that fosters creativity and self-expression, while also adhering to prescribed curriculum and evaluation standards. A participant expressed his view as:

In the classroom, I often observe a persistent challenge in teaching writing skills—the students' lack of vocabulary. Their struggle to find the right words echoes through their sentences, inhibiting the flow of their ideas. I see their frustration as they reach for words that elude them, leaving their expressions incomplete. As an educator, I work to bridge this gap by encouraging vocabulary expansion activities, fostering their journey from limited lexicon to eloquent articulation.

If the students do not know the proper knowledge of parts of speech, tenses, and writing, among others they will not be able to write properly.

### **Lack of concentration**

Lack of concentration is found to be one of the major problems in teaching writing skills to secondary-level students. Suppose the students do not give concentration while teaching, it is very difficult for the teachers to make them understand the basic rules and structures. The lack of concentration presents a formidable challenge when it comes to teaching writing in English. As students grapple with the intricacies of crafting coherent sentences and engaging narratives, their minds often drift, besieged by distractions in an increasingly digital world. The struggle to maintain focus hampers their ability to absorb the nuances of language and structure, hindering the seamless flow of ideas onto the page. Without sustained concentration, the process of refining grammar, expanding vocabulary, and developing critical thinking becomes an uphill battle. Addressing this challenge requires not only imparting writing skills but also fostering strategies for enhancing mindfulness and attention, allowing

students to navigate the world of language with clarity and purpose. One of the participants experienced as,

In the heart of my classroom, where the journey of mastering English writing unfolds, I often find myself facing an intricate challenge- the elusive nature of concentration. As I guide my students through the art of constructing sentences and weaving stories, I can't help but notice the subtle tug of distractions that divert their focus. In an era, of a buzz with digital stimuli, their minds wander amidst the noise, making it an arduous task for them to immerse themselves fully in the process. The lack of sustained concentration becomes a barrier, obstructing the path to absorbing the language's intricacies and channeling their thoughts onto the paper.

### **Dependency upon the Internet and Lack of Motivation**

Other challenges found in teaching writing skills to secondary-level students are dependency upon the internet and lack of motivation towards writing. As mentioned by the participants after the pandemic, students have more exposure to the internet. They like to spend more time on social media and less time reading. As a result, they do their writing assignments by copying from the internet which makes them dull and less creative. Likewise, another challenge found by secondary-level teachers in teaching writing skills in English is the shyness of the students. Some students are very introverted and after trying a lot also the teacher is not able to find out what the main weakness of the student is for not being able to achieve good scores in writing. It is not a specific problem in writing only if the student is very shy and introverted it impacts teaching other skills too. But especially in writing, if the student is not able to speak about the difficulties, he/she is facing in learning, the teacher is hardly able to help the student. Participant 3 shed light by stating:

As I engage with my students in the realm of English writing, I can't help but notice the two formidable challenges that loom large—dependence on the internet and a prevailing lack of motivation. The digital age has fostered an environment where students lean heavily on the internet for information and communication, inadvertently affecting their ability to craft original written content. Moreover, a palpable lack of motivation often casts a shadow over the writing process, deterring them from diving into the art of self-expression. My role as an educator encompasses not only imparting the technical aspects of

writing but also igniting an intrinsic drive within them to wield words with purpose and passion.

### **Parents' Careless Nature**

Parents' careless nature is found to be another problem in teaching writing skills in English. Firstly, it seems surprising how parents' nature can impact or create problems but one of the participants explained:

Nowadays parents are remaining so busy that they only think they must pay the fees of the students. They do not have proper time to observe and monitor their children. They think school and subject teachers are solely responsible for their children's academic performance which is wrong. Many parents do not know in which area their children are weak in their studies. They provide facilities more than needed but they don't have time to observe their children which creates problems in teaching writing skills too.

### **Issues with Poor Handwriting**

Similarly, another surprising problem shared with participants was the issue of handwriting. The students who have very good handwriting like to learn writing skills and frequently present their writing in the classroom, however, students with poor handwriting do not give any interest to learn writing skills for fear that their handwriting will be criticized instead of their writing. One of the participants claimed:

Standing before my eager students in the bustling classroom, armed with the tools of language and a fervent desire to nurture their writing skills, I encountered an unexpected challenge. As I delved into the realm of crafting sentences and weaving stories, it became evident that the hurdle before us was not just mastering the nuances of expression, but also taming the unruly beast known as poor handwriting. The lines on their papers wavered and squirmed as if trying to break free from the confines of the page, and the letters lost their familiar shapes amidst the chaos. It dawned on me that my mission had expanded: not only did I need to cultivate their linguistic talents, but also bridge the gap between their thoughts and the paper.

If the students' handwriting is very good no matter how poorly he/she wrote any of the writing assignments they have the confidence to present them. However, Poor handwriting causes less confidence among the students to learn writing skills.

### **Lack of Skills among Teachers**

The participants discussed the instructors who might have great challenges in teaching writing skills, which is a lack of expertise and professionalism among teachers. Gundam (2018), claimed that “having a lack of professional experience will lead to stress and tension to teach elementary school students, especially among novice teachers.

So, the problems are not created from the side of students only, sometimes teachers are creating problems for themselves not focusing on their professional development. So, while teaching writing skills, a teacher’s lack of knowledge also challenges to teach the students. Participant 4 expressed his agreement in this way:

I find myself grappling with a significant hurdle— the lack of essential skills among teachers. As I guide my students through the intricacies of crafting coherent written expressions, I'm acutely aware that the effectiveness of their learning journey hinges on my proficiency. The art of teaching writing is multi-faceted, demanding a nuanced understanding of language mechanics, creativity, and effective instructional methods. My commitment to bridging this gap drives me to continually enhance my skills, ensuring that I can empower my students with the tools they need to navigate the world of written communication with confidence and clarity.

### **Conclusion and Implication**

From the above discussion, it is clear that secondary-level English teachers are facing many challenges like a lack of proper grammatical and vocabulary knowledge, dependence on the internet, low exposure to books, lack of motivation, shyness, and parents’ carelessness in teaching writing skills. After discussing the problems, the participants recommended some measures to minimize these challenges as stated below.

Students should be motivated and made aware of the necessity and importance of writing skills as well as the English language. Reading practice should be increased in school and at home too. Students should have more exposure to books which helps

them to increase their vocabulary knowledge. Dependency on the internet should be minimized. Parents are not monitoring their children and how they are utilizing the internet. Students have access to the internet and they are misusing it. Copying from Google should be discouraged in the classroom. Students should be motivated towards writing and for that, they should practice vocabulary, and sentence structures practically and correctly rather than theoretically. It is difficult to achieve more at a time.

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