



An Investigation into the Challenges of Writing in the EFL Classroom from the Perspectives of University Students at the English Department, Faculty of Languages, Benghazi University

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Abstract

Writing is often one of the hardest skills for learners of English as a foreign language to develop. This paper looks at the difficulties university students encounter when writing academically in English. It focuses on second-semester students at the Faculty of Languages, University of Benghazi, and draws on data from a Likert-scale questionnaire completed by 63 students. The findings point to recurring problems with grammar, vocabulary, and organisation, along with low confidence in writing. Based on these results, the paper offers practical suggestions for improving instruction and supporting student writers.

Keywords: academic writing, writing difficulties, instructional practices, EFL, Benghazi University

1. Introduction

Proficiency in English has become increasingly important for both academic study and future employment. For students in non-English-speaking contexts, however, developing writing skills remains especially challenging. Academic writing needs more than basic language ability; students need control over grammar, a sufficient range of vocabulary, and the ability to organise ideas clearly while following accepted academic conventions. These demands often affect not only students' performance but also their confidence.

Relatively little attention has been given to how linguistic, cognitive, and instructional factors interact in the Libyan university context, although EFL writing has been widely studied. At the Faculty of Languages, University of Benghazi, students are expected to develop strong writing skills, but many continue to struggle. This study focuses on second-semester students in the English Department and examines the specific difficulties they face. A structured questionnaire was used to identify both the challenges students encounter and their views on writing instruction.

Understanding these issues may help improve learning outcomes and support students in developing better writing skills.

The study addresses the following questions:

1. What difficulties do EFL students face in academic writing?
2. How do students perceive the writing instruction they receive?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Writing as a Cognitive, Social, and Academic Endeavour

Writing brings together thinking, communication, and organised expression. It works both as a cognitive activity and as a social practice (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Vandermeulen et al., 2024; Tarchi, 2024). To write effectively, learners need more than grammar and vocabulary. They also need to understand context. Writers adjust their language, structure, and tone depending on the audience and the expectations of a discipline (Bazerman, 2015; Inouye & McAlpine, 2023; Routarinne, Juvonen, & Pentikäinen, 2023). Clear organisation, concise expression, logical flow, and supported arguments all matter. Careful referencing is equally important, as it supports credibility and academic integrity (Wired, 2023).

Writing also plays a broader role. It helps learners explore ideas, solve problems, and develop understanding. Through writing, they can organise thoughts, examine evidence, and present arguments in a structured way (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Bazerman, 2015). Strong writing skills open access to academic and professional communities. They allow individuals to share knowledge, influence discussions, and take part in different contexts (Inouye & McAlpine, 2023; Routarinne et al., 2023). Over time, writing supports continued learning and professional growth. It encourages reflection, strengthens expression, and improves the ability to argue and persuade (Tarchi, 2024; Vandermeulen et al., 2024). In this sense, writing is not a single skill but a set of connected practices that support learning and communication.

2.2 Challenges in EFL Writing

For many university students, writing in a second or foreign language remains one of the most difficult skills to master. It requires attention to grammar, vocabulary, organisation, and coherence at the same time. This makes it more demanding than receptive skills such as listening, and often more challenging than speaking (Hyland, 2019; Nation, 2009). In many contexts, exposure to authentic English is limited. Writing practice is also restricted and often tied to assessment tasks. As a result, students struggle with recurring issues such as grammatical errors, limited vocabulary, and weak sentence construction (Al Badi, 2015; Akhtar et al., 2019).

These difficulties are not only linguistic. Psychological and cognitive factors play an important role. Students with low confidence tend to avoid risk-taking, and they may hesitate to develop their ideas fully. Writing anxiety can also reduce fluency and limit expression. Essays then become shorter and less developed (Alharbi, 2021; Zhang, 2011). Motivation and emotional readiness therefore shape writing outcomes just as much as language proficiency.

Research across contexts shows similar patterns. Pakistani learners often struggle with verb tense, sentence structure, and word choice (Fareed et al., 2016). Saudi learners report ongoing problems with grammar and vocabulary, and their writing may become repetitive or unclear (Al-Khairi, 2013). These issues also appear among postgraduate students, where they are sometimes linked to teaching practices that focus heavily on accuracy rather than development (Zakaria et al., 2024; Al Fadda, 2012).

Beyond grammar and vocabulary, many students face difficulties with organisation and coherence. Studies on Moroccan learners, for example, show problems with cohesion and logical flow, as well as limited engagement with critical thinking (AlMarwani, 2020). Anxiety can further shape writing style. Some students simplify their sentences to avoid making mistakes, which reduces the overall quality of their work (Jawas, 2019). Together, these findings suggest that writing problems develop from a mix of limited instruction and emotional factors.

Hyland (2019) notes that academic writing requires both language control and familiarity with disciplinary conventions. Nation (2009) highlights the importance of integrating reading and

writing. Taken together, these perspectives show that EFL writing is shaped by several interacting factors, not by language ability alone.

2.3 Writing Challenges in the Libyan Context

In Libya, EFL students face many of the challenges reported in other contexts, but local conditions add further pressure. Limited resources and inconsistent instructional support affect the learning environment. Studies show that anxiety and low confidence continue to influence writing performance (Alsied & Ibrahim, 2018). At the same time, students struggle with grammar, vocabulary, and essay structure (Hadia, 2020; Algwil et al., 2022).

Translation from Arabic remains a common strategy, and it often leads to errors in expression. In addition, many students receive little guidance in academic writing conventions. As a result, introductions may lack focus, and analytical sections remain underdeveloped (Al-Mokhtar, 2022). More recent research points to further concerns. Students sometimes rely on unreliable online sources, and they do not always follow academic conventions in research writing (Dweni, 2023).

Across universities, researchers have reported serious weaknesses in grammar, vocabulary, and organisation (Rabiah & Lawej, 2021; Khalifa & Salem, 2024). Similar patterns appear at the secondary level (Mehdi, 2018), which suggests that these issues begin early and continue into higher education. At the same time, some teachers face challenges in teaching writing effectively (Aiblu & Madanu, 2023), which adds another layer to the problem.

Several responses have been proposed. These include classroom-based interventions and more structured observation of writing practices (Hadia, 2023). Other studies recommend establishing writing centres and strengthening support systems within institutions (Al-Mokhtar, 2022). Improving both teacher training and student awareness of academic conventions is also seen as essential (Dweni, 2023). Together, these suggestions point to the need for a more systematic and context-sensitive approach.

2.4 Synthesis of EFL Writing Challenges

Across different settings, EFL writing difficulties tend to follow similar patterns. Students struggle with grammar and vocabulary, and they also face challenges in organising ideas and maintaining coherence. At the same time, factors such as anxiety, low confidence, and limited motivation shape how they approach writing tasks. Instructional limitations and lack of resources often make these problems more difficult to resolve.

In Libya, these global challenges intersect with local constraints. Translation practices, resource limitations, and teaching conditions all influence student performance. Addressing these issues requires more than isolated solutions. A broader approach is needed, one that combines effective instruction, emotional support, and institutional resources.

2.5 Improving and Developing Writing Skills in Arab EFL Contexts

Improving writing in Arab EFL contexts requires changes in both teaching methods and learning practices. Process-oriented approaches offer one way forward. These approaches treat writing as a series of stages, including planning, drafting, revising, and editing. This contrasts with product-based approaches, which focus mainly on the final text (Hyland, 2019). Process writing allows students to develop ideas gradually, and it encourages reflection and independence. Teachers play a guiding role, helping students shape and refine their work (Alkodimi & Al-Ahdal, 2021).

Feedback also plays a central role. When it addresses both language and ideas, it supports steady improvement and deeper thinking (Ferris, 2018; Algburi & Razali, 2022). Peer feedback can add another dimension, as it encourages interaction and shared learning (Lee & Mohebbi, 2020). Technology offers additional support. Digital tools and AI-based systems can provide

immediate feedback and flexible practice opportunities, especially in contexts where resources are limited (Song & Song, 2023; Aldossary, 2024). However, technology cannot replace effective teaching. Without proper training, teachers may rely too heavily on error correction, which can limit creativity and reduce confidence (Alkodimi & Al-Ahdal, 2021). For this reason, professional development and curriculum reform remain essential. Instruction should combine process writing with genre awareness and meaningful use of digital tools. Writing tasks should also feel purposeful. Activities such as reflections, research papers, and digital compositions can help students see writing as an active and relevant process. When these elements come together, they address not only language issues but also cognitive, emotional, and institutional barriers.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an integrated perspective to explain EFL writing challenges. It brings together four complementary frameworks and treats them as parts of a single system. Writing development is not shaped by one factor alone. Instead, it emerges from the interaction of input, output, cognitive processes, and self-efficacy.

3.1 An Integrated Model of EFL Writing Development

This model views writing development as the result of four connected processes: input (Krashen, 1985), output (Swain, 1985), cognitive processing (Zamel, 1983), and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). These elements influence each other continuously. A weakness in one area often affects the others, and this interaction helps explain the range of difficulties observed in EFL writing.

Krashen (1985) emphasises the importance of comprehensible input that slightly exceeds the learner's current level. In contexts where exposure to English is limited, students do not receive enough input to build strong grammatical and lexical knowledge. This limits what they can produce in writing.

Swain (1985) highlights the role of output. Producing language helps learners notice gaps in their knowledge and refine their understanding. Writing, in particular, creates opportunities for reflection and feedback. However, when input is limited, output also suffers. Reduced writing practice further weakens this process, and learning slows down.

Zamel (1983) focuses on writing as a process. Writing develops through stages such as planning, drafting, and revising. In many classrooms, however, the focus remains on the final product. Students concentrate on correctness rather than development, and they receive little guidance on how to build and organise their ideas.

Bandura (1997) adds an affective dimension through the concept of self-efficacy. Students who lack confidence tend to avoid writing tasks. This reduces practice and limits improvement. Over time, this creates a cycle in which low confidence leads to weak performance, and weak performance reinforces low confidence.

3.2 Theoretical Synthesis and Research Hypotheses

The integrated model leads to a set of clear expectations:

1. Input Hypothesis prediction: Limited exposure to English input will show itself as grammar and vocabulary difficulties (the most frequently reported challenges).
2. Output Hypothesis prediction: Low writing practice frequency will connect with persistent linguistic errors and limited lexical range.
3. Process Writing prediction: Students in product-oriented instructional contexts will report organisational and idea-generation difficulties.
4. Self-Efficacy prediction: Students with low confidence will be less likely to ask for help and more likely to question the adequacy of the instruction they receive.

Taken together, these predictions frame writing difficulties as interconnected rather than isolated. The model assumes that limited input, weak output, insufficient process-based instruction, and low self-efficacy interact and reinforce each other. In this view, the challenges reported by students at the University of Benghazi reflect a broader systemic issue. Addressing only one aspect is unlikely to bring meaningful improvement. More balanced interventions are therefore needed, and this has direct implications for the recommendations proposed in this study.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study follows a quantitative design and uses a descriptive survey approach. It focuses on second-semester students in the English Department at the Faculty of Languages, University of Benghazi. The aim is to examine how these students perceive the difficulties they face when writing in English.

4.2 Population and Sample

The target population includes all second-semester students enrolled in the English Department during the Spring 2024 semester. From this group, 63 students were selected. The sample includes both male and female participants. Convenience sampling was used because it allowed access to participants within the time limits of the academic semester.

4.3 Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to capture key aspects of writing difficulties. The instrument includes both multiple-choice and Likert-scale items. It focuses on several areas:

- Common writing challenges such as grammar, vocabulary, and structure
- Students' confidence in their writing ability
- How often students seek help from instructors
- Their views on the effectiveness of writing instruction
- How frequently they practice writing outside class
- The resources they use to improve their writing

Before full distribution, the questionnaire was tested with a small group of ten students. This step helped identify unclear wording and led to minor revisions. Reliability was then assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which produced a value of $\alpha = 0.82$. This indicates a good level of internal consistency.

4.4 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed during regular class sessions. This made it easier to reach students and collect responses efficiently. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and they were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. Each participant completed the questionnaire within 10 to 15 minutes.

4.5 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Frequency counts were used to identify the most common writing challenges. Mean scores helped measure confidence levels and perceptions of instructional adequacy. Standard deviations were calculated to examine variation in responses. The analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26, and the results were presented in tables and charts for clarity.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

All participants gave informed consent before taking part in the study. They were made aware of their rights, and participation was voluntary. Anonymity and confidentiality were

maintained throughout the research process. The study followed the ethical guidelines for research involving human participants at the University of Benghazi.

5. Results

5.1 Main Challenges in Writing

The study collected data from 63 second-semester students at the Faculty of Languages, University of Benghazi. The results provide a clear picture of the main difficulties students face when writing in English as a foreign language. Vocabulary and grammar emerged as the most common challenges, and each was reported by 20.6% of the participants. Other difficulties were less frequent but still notable. Some students reported problems with generating ideas, while others pointed to issues with structure and organisation. A smaller group described more complex challenges, including the combined effect of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.

The model predicts that the writing difficulties observed among Benghazi University students are not independent problems but symptoms of a systemic dysfunction in which limited input, insufficient output, inadequate process instruction, and low self-efficacy reinforce one another. Addressing any single component without attending to the others will likely produce limited results—a prediction with direct implications for the recommendations derived from this study.

Table 1: Main Challenges in Writing (N = 63)

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
Grammar	13	20.6%
Vocabulary	13	20.6%
Structure/Organisation	7	11.1%
Finding ideas	4	6.3%
Making it clear and connected	3	4.8%
Arabic getting in the way	3	4.8%
Spelling and punctuation	3	4.8%
Not enough practice	12	19.0%
Anxiety and lack of confidence	5	7.9%
Cultural differences	1	1.6%
Lack of motivation	2	3.2%
Not enough support from teachers	3	4.8%

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100% because participants could select multiple options.

The data indicate that grammar and vocabulary are the most frequently reported challenges, together accounting for 41.2% of all responses. Notably, 19.0% of students identified "not enough practice" as a primary challenge, suggesting that insufficient opportunity to write may underlie the linguistic difficulties reported. Anxiety and lack of confidence were reported by 7.9% of students, while organisational concerns (structure/organisation plus making it clear and connected) accounted for 15.9% of responses.

5.2 Confidence in Writing Skills

When asked to rate their confidence in writing on a scale from 1 to 5, the average score was 2.65 (SD = 1.21). This indicates moderate to low confidence levels among the majority of students. Specifically, 34.9% of students rated their confidence at 2, while 14.3% rated it at the lowest level, 1. Only 9.5% of students felt very confident in their writing abilities, giving

themselves a 5. This suggests that the majority of students are not fully secure with their English writing skills.

Table 2: Confidence in Writing Skills (N = 63)

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
1 (Not confident at all)	9	14.3%
2 (Slightly confident)	22	34.9%
3 (Moderately confident)	15	23.8%
4 (Confident)	8	12.7%
5 (Very confident)	9	14.3%

The distribution is negatively skewed, with 49.2% of students rating themselves at 2 or below, compared to only 27.0% rating themselves at 4 or above. This pattern is consistent with the theoretical prediction that low self-efficacy would be prevalent in this population.

5.3 Seeking Help from Instructors

Regarding the frequency with which students ask for help from instructors, half of the respondents (50.8%) reported that they ask for assistance sometimes, while 15.9% said they often ask for help. However, 12.7% rarely ask for assistance, and 6.3% never do. This indicates that while many students take the initiative in addressing their challenges, there is still a significant portion that does not reach out for support on a regular basis.

Table 3: Frequency of Seeking Help from Instructors (N = 63)

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Always	5	7.9%
Often	10	15.9%
Sometimes	32	50.8%
Rarely	8	12.7%
Never	4	6.3%

The data reveal that 23.8% of students (rarely + never) are disengaged from instructor support, which may limit their access to the formative feedback necessary for writing improvement.

5.4 Sufficiency of Writing Instruction

In terms of writing instruction, 49.2% of students were uncertain whether they receive enough guidance, answering "maybe" to the question. A further 30.2% felt they did receive enough instruction, while 20.6% believed they did not. This uncertainty and feeling of dissatisfaction with writing instruction could contribute to the low confidence and writing difficulties reported by students.

Table 4: Perceptions of Instructional Sufficiency (N = 63)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes, definitely	12	19.0%
Yes, somewhat	7	11.1%
No, not really	13	20.6%
No, not at all	0	0.0%
Maybe	31	49.2%

Note: The original questionnaire used a different response format; these categories were recoded for analysis.

The high proportion of uncertain responses (49.2%) is particularly noteworthy, as it suggests that students lack clear criteria for evaluating instructional quality or that instruction is inconsistent across courses.

5.5 Frequency of Writing Practice

The frequency with which students practice writing was varied. Over 30% of respondents reported practicing writing rarely, and 12.7% stated they never practice. Only 17.5% of students practiced writing daily, while 14.3% wrote two to three times per week. This lack of writing practice may be contributing to the challenges students face in developing their writing skills.

Table 5: Frequency of Writing Practice (N = 63)

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	11	17.5%
Two to three times a week	9	14.3%
Once a week	15	23.8%
Rarely	20	31.7%
Never	8	12.7%

Combined, 44.4% of students practice rarely or never, while only 31.8% practice at least twice weekly. This pattern supports the theoretical prediction that output opportunities are insufficient for effective writing development.

5.6 Resources Used to Improve Writing Skills

In terms of resources used to improve their writing, 42.9% of students rely on online lessons. Other resources, such as textbooks, were used by 12.7% of students, while 12.7% reported using no resources at all. A small portion of students (9.5%) mentioned receiving help from friends or family. The reliance on online resources suggests that students may not have access to diverse writing aids or guidance, emphasizing the need for structured, in-class writing support.

Table 6: Resources Used to Improve Writing (N = 63)

Resource	Frequency	Percentage
Textbooks	8	12.7%
Online lessons	27	42.9%
Help from friends and family	6	9.5%
Other	17	27.0%
None	8	12.7%

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100% because participants could select multiple options.

The dominance of online resources (42.9%) and the substantial proportion using no resources (12.7%) or only informal help (9.5%) indicate that students lack systematic, guided support for writing improvement.

6. Discussion

6.1 Linguistic Challenges: Grammar and Vocabulary

The findings confirm that grammar and vocabulary issues remain the most significant challenges for EFL students in this sample, consistent with Fareed et al. (2016) and Alharbi (2021). Grammar and vocabulary were each identified by 20.6% of respondents as primary difficulties, together representing the largest category of reported challenges. This aligns with the prediction derived from Krashen's Input Hypothesis: limited exposure to comprehensible English input in the Libyan context constrains the acquisition of grammatical structures and lexical knowledge. Without sufficient input, students cannot develop the implicit knowledge base necessary for accurate and varied writing.

The finding that 19.0% of students explicitly identified "not enough practice" as a challenge further supports the integrated theoretical model. From the perspective of Swain's Output Hypothesis, insufficient practice means fewer opportunities for the noticing, hypothesis-

testing, and metalinguistic reflection that drive linguistic development. The combination of limited input and limited output creates a compounded deficit that shows itself as persistent grammar and vocabulary problems.

6.2 Organisational and Cognitive Challenges

Organisational concerns, such as essay structure and idea generation, were raised by fewer but still notable numbers of students (structure/organisation: 11.1%; finding ideas: 6.3%; making it clear and connected: 4.8%). This aligns with AlMarwani's (2020) observation that students unaccustomed to English academic writing conventions experience difficulty producing coherent texts. However, compared to studies in Egypt and Morocco that highlighted organisation as a dominant issue, the present data indicate that Libyan students at Benghazi University place relatively greater emphasis on grammar and vocabulary as their main concerns.

This pattern is consistent with the prediction from Process Writing Theory. If instruction at Benghazi University is product-oriented—focusing on final text correctness rather than the recursive process of planning, drafting, and revising—students would naturally prioritise surface-level accuracy (grammar, vocabulary) over deeper structural concerns. The lower reporting of organisational issues may thus reflect not their absence but students' lack of awareness of organisational problems, stemming from inadequate process-based instruction.

6.3 Affective Factors: Confidence and Anxiety

Confidence in writing was found to be low, with a mean score of 2.65 out of 5. This mirrors Zhang's (2011) observations on writing anxiety and Alharbi's (2021) findings regarding low writing self-efficacy among EFL learners. The finding that only 9.5% of students reported high confidence highlights the need for strategies to improve writing self-efficacy, as predicted by Bandura's theory.

The integrated model suggests that this low confidence is not merely an emotional state but a causal factor in the observed pattern of behaviour. Students with low self-efficacy are less likely to practice writing (consistent with the 44.4% who rarely or never practice), less likely to seek instructor help (consistent with the 19.0% who rarely or never do so), and more likely to rely on easily accessible but potentially unreliable online resources (consistent with the 42.9% who use online lessons). This creates a self-reinforcing cycle in which low confidence leads to avoidance behaviours that prevent the development of competence, which further erodes confidence.

6.4 Instructional Perceptions and Help-Seeking

For instructional support, students were ambivalent regarding whether they receive enough writing instruction, with 49.2% responding "maybe." This uncertainty is consistent with the theoretical prediction that inconsistent or unclear instructional practices would leave students unable to evaluate the adequacy of their instruction. The 20.6% who explicitly reported insufficient instruction, combined with the high uncertainty rate, suggests that writing instruction at Benghazi University may lack the systematic, process-based structure that would enable students to recognise and evaluate instructional quality.

The help-seeking data reveal that while 74.6% of students ask for help at least sometimes, 19.0% rarely or never do so. This pattern may reflect the interaction of self-efficacy and instructional climate: students with low confidence may avoid seeking help due to fear of judgment, while an instructional environment that does not normalise help-seeking may reinforce this reluctance.

6.5 Practice Patterns and Resource Use

Practice in writing was low, with 44.4% of students writing rarely or never outside class assignments. This supports Nation's (2009) argument that insufficient practice holds back the development of writing fluency. The integrated model suggests that this low practice frequency is not merely a matter of student motivation but is linked to the full system of constraints: limited input reduces what students can write, low confidence reduces their willingness to write, and unclear instruction reduces their understanding of what or how to practice.

The reliance on online resources (42.9%) suggests that students are actively seeking solutions to their writing problems, which reflects initiative. However, the fact that only 12.7% use textbooks and 9.5% seek help from friends or family indicates that students lack structured, guided support systems. Online resources, while useful, may not provide the personalised, formative feedback necessary for efficient academic writing development, particularly for students who lack the metalinguistic awareness to evaluate the quality of online advice.

6.6 Integrated Interpretation

The findings of this study are best understood through the lens of the integrated theoretical model proposed in Section 3. Rather than viewing grammar problems, low confidence, insufficient practice, and instructional uncertainty as separate issues, the data suggest they are interconnected manifestations of a systemic dysfunction:

1. Limited English input in the Libyan context (Krashen) constrains the development of grammatical and lexical knowledge.
2. Insufficient writing practice (Swain) prevents students from noticing gaps, testing hypotheses, and receiving feedback.
3. Product-oriented instruction (Zamel) fails to develop students' awareness of organisational and process dimensions of writing.
4. Low self-efficacy (Bandura) leads to avoidance behaviours (reduced practice, limited help seeking) that perpetuate the cycle.

This interpretation suggests that effective intervention must address multiple components of the system simultaneously. Targeting grammar instruction alone, for example, without increasing practice opportunities, improving process instruction, and building confidence, is unlikely to produce sustained improvement.

7. Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings and generalising the results.

7.1 Sample Limitations

The sample consisted of 63 second-semester students from a single department at one university, selected through convenience sampling. This limits the generalisability of findings to other populations, including students at different proficiency levels, students in other departments, or students at other Libyan universities. The small sample size also limits the statistical power to detect relationships between variables. Future research should employ larger, randomly selected samples across multiple institutions.

7.2 Instrument Limitations

The questionnaire relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to response bias, social desirability effects, and inaccurate self-assessment. Students may over- or under-report their difficulties, confidence levels, or practice frequencies. The instrument measured perceptions rather than actual writing performance; objective measures of writing quality (e.g., essay ratings) were not included. Additionally, while the questionnaire demonstrated acceptable

internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.82$), its construct validity would be strengthened by confirmatory factor analysis in future studies.

7.3 Design Limitations

The cross-sectional design captures data at a single point in time, preventing conclusions about causal relationships or developmental trajectories. The study cannot determine whether low confidence causes reduced practice or vice versa, nor can it track how writing challenges evolve as students progress through their degree program. Longitudinal designs would provide stronger evidence for the cyclical relationships proposed in the integrated theoretical model.

7.4 Contextual Limitations

The study was conducted during the Spring Semester of 2024 at the University of Benghazi, a specific institutional and temporal context. Conditions at this university—including curriculum design, instructor training, resource availability, and student demographics—may differ from those at other institutions. The findings should be interpreted as descriptive of this specific context rather than representative of all Libyan or Arab EFL contexts. Caution is advised in generalising to post-conflict educational settings, which may have unique challenges not captured in this study.

7.5 Theoretical Limitations

While the integrated theoretical model provides a coherent framework for interpreting the findings, it remains a conceptual synthesis rather than an empirically tested model. The interactions between input, output, process instruction, and self-efficacy proposed in the model require direct empirical testing through structural equation modeling or experimental intervention studies. The present study provides correlational support for the model's predictions but cannot establish the directionality or magnitude of causal effects.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

8.1 Conclusion

This survey of second-semester students at the University of Benghazi Faculty of Languages indicates that these students experience significant difficulties in writing in English as a foreign language. The main difficulties are grammar and vocabulary (each reported by 20.6% of students), with other difficulties including insufficient practice (19.0%), structure and organisation (11.1%), and anxiety and lack of confidence (7.9%). Most students have low to moderate confidence in their writing skills (mean = 2.65), and few are highly confident (9.5%). While some students ask teachers for help (74.6% at least sometimes), 19.0% rarely or never do so, suggesting that more encouragement or established support systems might be needed. Close to half of the students (49.2%) are uncertain whether the writing instruction they receive in class is adequate, which could contribute to their struggles. Irregular writing practice is another issue: 44.4% of students practice rarely or never, which prevents them from improving. Finally, although students use online resources to assist with writing (42.9%), the data suggest they are not exploiting other potentially useful resources such as textbooks (12.7%) or peer support (9.5%).

8.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this survey and the integrated theoretical framework, the following recommendations are proposed specifically for the context of the Faculty of Languages, University of Benghazi. These recommendations are derived from the data collected from the 63 participants and are intended to address the interconnected challenges identified in this study.

Recommendation 1: Increase Comprehensible Input Opportunities

Given that 20.6% of students identified vocabulary as a primary challenge and 20.6% identified grammar, and considering the theoretical importance of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985), the Faculty should increase students' exposure to authentic English texts. Specific actions based on student needs include:

- Integrating extensive reading assignments into writing courses, with texts selected to match students' current proficiency level ($i + 1$).
- Establishing a departmental reading list of academic articles, essays, and model student papers that demonstrate effective grammar, vocabulary, and organisation.
- Creating a digital repository of annotated sample texts that highlight effective linguistic and rhetorical features.

Recommendation 2: Mandate Regular Writing Practice with Feedback

The finding that 19.0% of students identified "not enough practice" as a challenge and 44.4% practice rarely or never indicates a critical need for structured practice opportunities. Drawing on Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis:

- Writing courses should include weekly writing assignments beyond major essays, such as journals, reflections, or short response papers.
- Instructors should provide formative feedback on drafts rather than summative comments on final products alone, enabling students to engage in the recursive revision process.
- A writing portfolio system should be implemented, requiring students to compile, revise, and reflect on their work throughout the semester.

Recommendation 3: Implement Process-Oriented Writing Instruction

The finding that 11.1% of students struggle with structure and organisation, combined with 6.3% reporting difficulty finding ideas, suggests that students lack training in the recursive writing process. Based on Process Writing Theory (Zamel, 1983):

- Instructors should explicitly teach and scaffold the stages of writing: brainstorming, outlining, drafting, peer review, revising, and editing.
- Class time should be allocated for in-class writing workshops where students work through multiple drafts with instructor guidance.
- Graphic organisers and planning templates should be provided to support students in generating and organising ideas before writing.

Recommendation 4: Build Writing Self-Efficacy Through Structured Success Experiences

The low mean confidence score (2.65) and the finding that only 9.5% of students feel very confident indicate a need for confidence-building interventions. Consistent with Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory:

- Assignments should be sequenced from simpler to more complex tasks, ensuring that students experience mastery at each level before progressing.
- Instructors should provide specific, constructive feedback that identifies strengths as well as areas for improvement, rather than exclusive error correction.
- Public recognition of writing improvement (e.g., showcasing revised drafts that demonstrate progress) should be incorporated to build vicarious confidence.

Recommendation 5: Establish Clear Help-Seeking Channels and Normalise Support-Seeking

The finding that 19.0% of students rarely or never ask instructors for help suggests barriers to support-seeking that should be addressed:

- Instructors should explicitly encourage questions and schedule regular office hours dedicated to writing support.

- A peer tutoring system should be established, training advanced students to provide writing support, which may reduce the intimidation some students feel about approaching instructors.
- Anonymous question boxes or digital forums should be created for students who are hesitant to seek help publicly.

Recommendation 6: Provide Structured Guidance on Resource Use

The finding that 42.9% of students rely on online lessons while only 12.7% use textbooks and 12.7% use no resources at all suggests that students need guidance in selecting and using writing resources effectively:

- Instructors should provide a vetted list of reliable online resources (e.g., Purdue OWL, Cambridge Grammar resources) and demonstrate how to use them.
- Required textbooks should include guided writing exercises and self-assessment checklists.
- Library orientation sessions should introduce students to academic databases and writing guides available through the university.

Recommendation 7: Clarify and Evaluate Instructional Practices

The finding that 49.2% of students are uncertain whether they receive adequate instruction suggests a need for greater transparency and consistency:

- Course syllabi should explicitly outline the writing skills to be developed, the instructional methods to be used, and the criteria for assessment.
- Mid-semester feedback surveys should be conducted to identify student perceptions of instructional adequacy while adjustments are still possible.
- Departmental coordination meetings should ensure consistency in writing instruction across different course sections.

Recommendation 8: Foster Peer Collaboration in Writing

Given that only 9.5% of students currently seek help from friends or family, structured peer collaboration could expand students' support networks:

- Peer review workshops should be integrated into writing courses, with clear protocols and evaluation rubrics to guide constructive feedback.
- Writing groups or partnerships should be formed, requiring students to meet regularly to discuss drafts and revision strategies.
- Collaborative writing assignments should be included to develop students' ability to negotiate meaning and refine arguments together.

By implementing these recommendations in an integrated manner—addressing input, output, process instruction, and self-efficacy simultaneously—the Faculty of Languages at the University of Benghazi can create a more supportive and effective environment for EFL writing development.

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Appendix A: Survey on Writing Difficulties Among EFL Students

Description: This survey aims to gather information about the challenges faced by students in learning writing in English. Your responses will help improve instructional practices. Please answer the following questions honestly. Your participation is voluntary, and all responses will be kept confidential.

Instructions for Participants: Please complete this survey by selecting the appropriate responses. Your input is valuable for understanding the challenges faced by EFL students and will help in improving the educational experience at the Faculty of Languages, University of Benghazi. Thank you for your participation!

1. What are the main challenges you face when writing in English? (Select all that apply)

- Grammar
- Vocabulary
- Structure/organisation
- Finding ideas
- Making it clear and connected
- Arabic getting in the way
- Spelling and punctuation
- Not enough practice
- Anxiety and lack of confidence
- Cultural differences
- I don't feel that it's important (lack of motivation)
- Not enough support from teachers
- Other (please specify):

2. On a scale from 1 to 5, how confident do you feel about your writing skills in English?

- 1 (Not confident at all)
- 2 (Slightly confident)
- 3 (Moderately confident)
- 4 (Confident)
- 5 (Very confident)

3. How often do you ask for help from your instructors when facing difficulties in writing?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

4. Do you feel that you get enough writing instruction in your English classes?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, somewhat
- No, not really
- No, not at all
- Maybe

5. How often do you practice writing?

- Daily
- Two to three times a week
- Once a week
- Rarely
- Never

6. What resources do you use to improve your writing skills? (Select all that apply)

- Textbooks
- Online lessons
- Friends and family
- Other (please specify):
- None