



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.

الملخص

تعتبر الكتابة إحدى أصعب المهارات عند تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية أو كلغة أجنبية. يستكشف هذا البحث الصعوبات التي يواجهها طلاب الجامعات في الكتابة الأكاديمية في سياق تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL). تدرس هذه الدراسة التحديات المتعلقة بالكتابة التي يواجهها الطلاب في الفصل الدراسي الثاني ببرنامج اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بكلية اللغات، جامعة بنغازي، من خلال استبيان قياسي على مقياس ليكرت تم تطبيقه على 63 مشاركاً. تكشف النتائج أن القواعد النحوية والمفردات والتنظيم تمثل الصعوبات الرئيسية، إلى جانب انخفاض الثقة بالنفس في الكتابة. تختتم الدراسة بتقديم توصيات تربوية تهدف إلى تحسين تعليم الكتابة وتحفيز المتعلمين. الكلمات المفتاحية: الكتابة الأكاديمية، صعوبات الكتابة، الممارسات التعليمية، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، جامعة بنغازي.

1. Introduction

Proficiency in English has become increasingly more 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 organize 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 confidence.

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 Endeavor

Writing brings together thinking, communication, and organized 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, & Pentikainen, 2023). Clear organization, 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 organize 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, organization, 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 knowledge.

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 organization 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 pressure.

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, 2023).

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 organization (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 centers 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 organizing 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 address.

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 development.

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 factors.

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-belief.

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) emphasizes 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 organize 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, testable expectations

1. Input Hypothesis prediction: Limited exposure to English input will manifest as grammar and vocabulary difficulties (the most frequently reported challenges).

2. Output Hypothesis prediction: Low writing practice frequency will correlate with persistent linguistic errors and limited lexical range.

3. Process Writing prediction: Students in product-oriented instructional contexts will report organizational 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 analyzed 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 organization. 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.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using a descriptive survey approach to explore the challenges faced by second-semester students in the English Department at the Faculty of Languages, University of Benghazi. The survey aimed to collect data on the students' perspectives regarding their writing difficulties in English.

4.2 Population and Sample

The target population for this study was all second-semester students enrolled in the English Department at the Faculty of Languages, University of Benghazi in the Spring Semester of 2024. A sample of 63 students, representing a mixed-gender group, was selected through convenience sampling. This method was chosen due to its practicality in reaching participants within the limited time frame of the academic semester.

4.3 Data Collection Instrument

A questionnaire was developed to collect data on the aspects of writing difficulties encountered by EFL students. The questionnaire consisted of multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions designed to gather information about:

1. Main Challenges: Identification of specific writing challenges (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, structure).
2. Confidence Levels: Self-assessment of writing confidence on a Likert scale.
3. Help-Seeking Behavior: Frequency of asking for assistance from instructors.
4. Perceptions of Instruction: Evaluation of the adequacy of writing instruction received.
5. Practice Frequency: Regularity of writing practice outside class assignments.
6. Resource Utilization: Types of resources used to improve writing.

The questionnaire was pre-tested with a small group of students ($n = 10$) to ensure clarity and reliability. This pilot testing led to minor adjustments in wording before administering the full survey. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.82$, indicating good reliability for the instrument.

4.4 Data Collection Procedure

The survey was distributed during regular class sessions, which facilitated efficient distribution and collection of responses. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would be confidential and anonymous. Each student was given approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

4.5 Data Analysis

Data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The analysis included:

- Frequency Counts: To determine how often specific challenges were reported.
- Mean Scores: To measure confidence levels and perceptions regarding adequacy of writing instruction.
- Standard Deviations: To understand the variation in responses among participants.

Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26, which facilitated interpretation through visual representations such as tables and charts.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, ensuring that they understood their rights and that participation was voluntary. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout all stages of the research process. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for research involving human participants at the University of Benghazi.

5. Results

5.1 Main Challenges in Writing

Data were collected from sixty-three second-semester university students at the Faculty of Languages, University of Benghazi, to examine the challenges they face when writing in English as a foreign language. The results indicate that **vocabulary (47.6%)** and **grammar (46.0%)** are the most frequently reported difficulties, with nearly half of the respondents identifying each as a major challenge. A substantial proportion of students also reported difficulty in **generating ideas (25.4%)**, while **19.0%** indicated that **lack of practice** is a key issue.

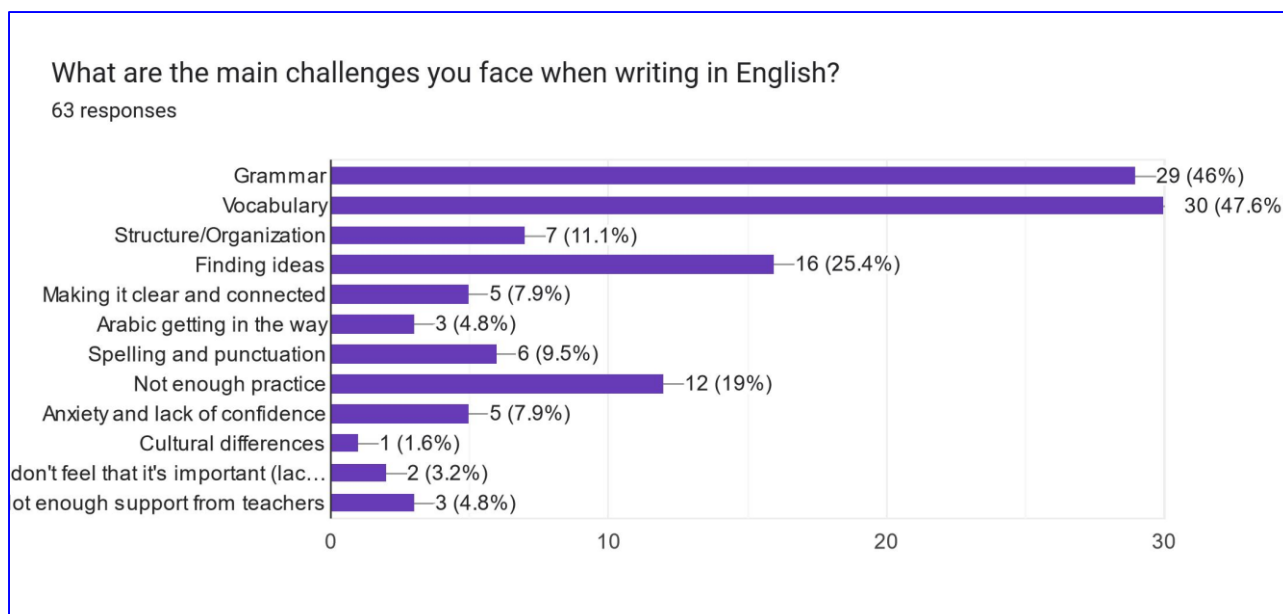


Table 1: Main Challenges in Writing (N = 63)

Other challenges were less frequently reported, including structure and organization (11.1%) and spelling and punctuation (9.5%). A smaller but notable proportion of students mentioned issues related to clarity and coherence (7.9%) and anxiety or lack of confidence (7.9%). Factors such as first language interference (4.8%), limited teacher support (4.8%), lack of motivation (3.2%), and cultural differences (1.6%) were reported by relatively few participants.

Overall, the findings suggest that linguistic challenges (grammar and vocabulary) dominate, but cognitive (idea generation) and practice-related factors also play a significant role in students' writing difficulties.

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
Vocabulary	30	47.6%
Grammar	29	46.0%
Finding ideas	16	25.4%
Not enough practice	12	19.0%
Structure/Organization	7	11.1%
Spelling and punctuation	6	9.5%
Making it clear and connected	5	7.9%
Anxiety and lack of confidence	5	7.9%
Arabic getting in the way	3	4.8%
Not enough support from teachers	3	4.8%
Lack of motivation	2	3.2%
Cultural differences	1	1.6%

Note: Percentages exceed 100% because participants could select multiple responses.

Percentages are calculated based on the total number of participants (N = 63), and multiple responses were permitted.

5.2 Confidence in Writing Skills

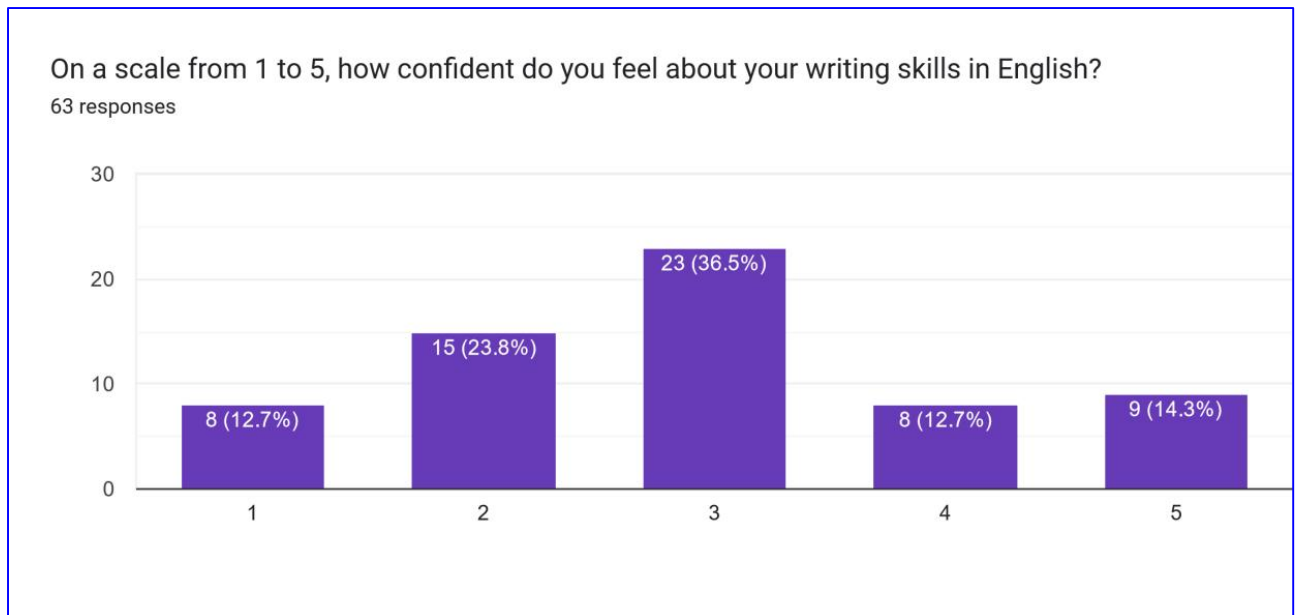


Table 2: Confidence in Writing Skills (N = 63)

When asked to rate their confidence in writing on a scale from 1 to 5, the mean score was **2.92 (SD = 1.21)**, indicating a **moderate level of confidence** among the students. The most frequently selected rating was **3 (36.5%)**, suggesting that a substantial proportion of respondents perceive their writing ability as average rather than low or high. Lower confidence levels were also evident, with **12.7%** of students rating themselves at 1 and **23.8%** at 2. In contrast, **27.0%** of participants reported higher confidence (ratings of 4 or 5), including **14.3%** who considered themselves very confident. Overall, the distribution is centered around the midpoint, indicating that while extreme lack of confidence is not widespread, relatively few students demonstrate strong confidence in their English writing abilities.

5.3 Seeking Help from Instructors

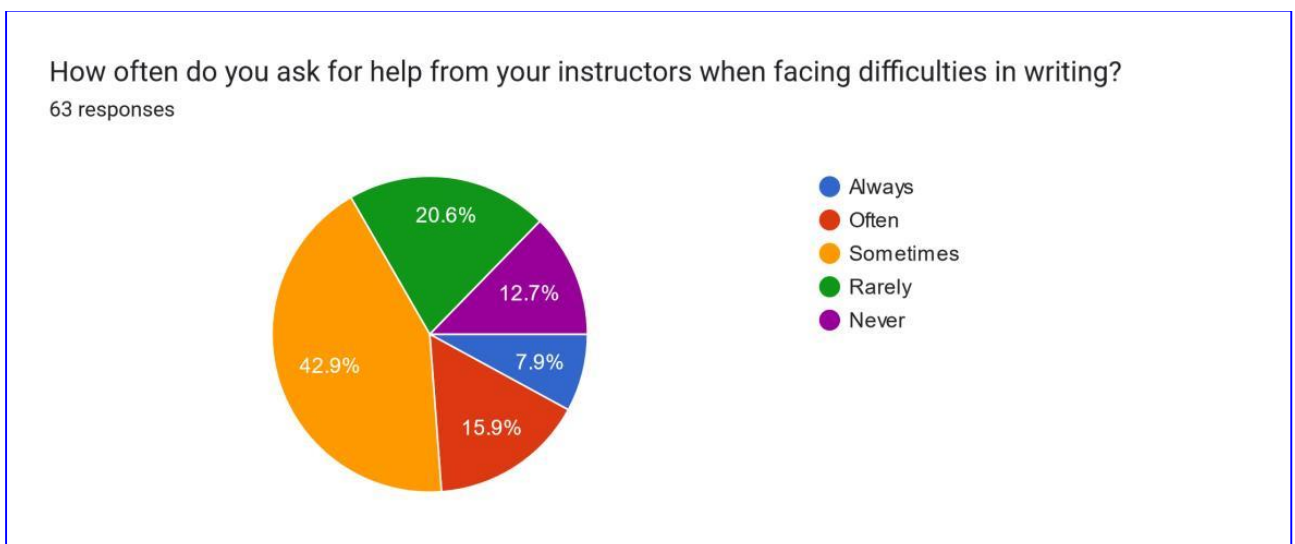


Table 3: Frequency of Seeking Help from Instructors (N = 63)

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Always	5	7.9%
Often	10	15.9%
Sometimes	27	42.9%

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Rarely	13	20.6%
Never	8	12.7%

Regarding how often students ask for help from instructors when facing difficulties in writing, the largest proportion of respondents (42.9%) reported that they sometimes seek assistance, indicating a moderate but inconsistent pattern of help-seeking behavior. A smaller proportion of students reported more proactive engagement, with 15.9% stating that they often ask for help and only 7.9% indicating that they always do so. In contrast, a notable segment of the sample reported limited engagement with instructor support, with 20.6% stating that they rarely seek help and 12.7% indicating that they never do so.

Overall, the findings suggest that while many students are willing to seek assistance when needed, help-seeking is not a consistent practice. Importantly, 33.3% of students (rarely and never combined) demonstrate low levels of engagement with instructor support, which may restrict their access to formative feedback and hinder the development of their writing skills.

5.4 Sufficiency of Writing Instruction

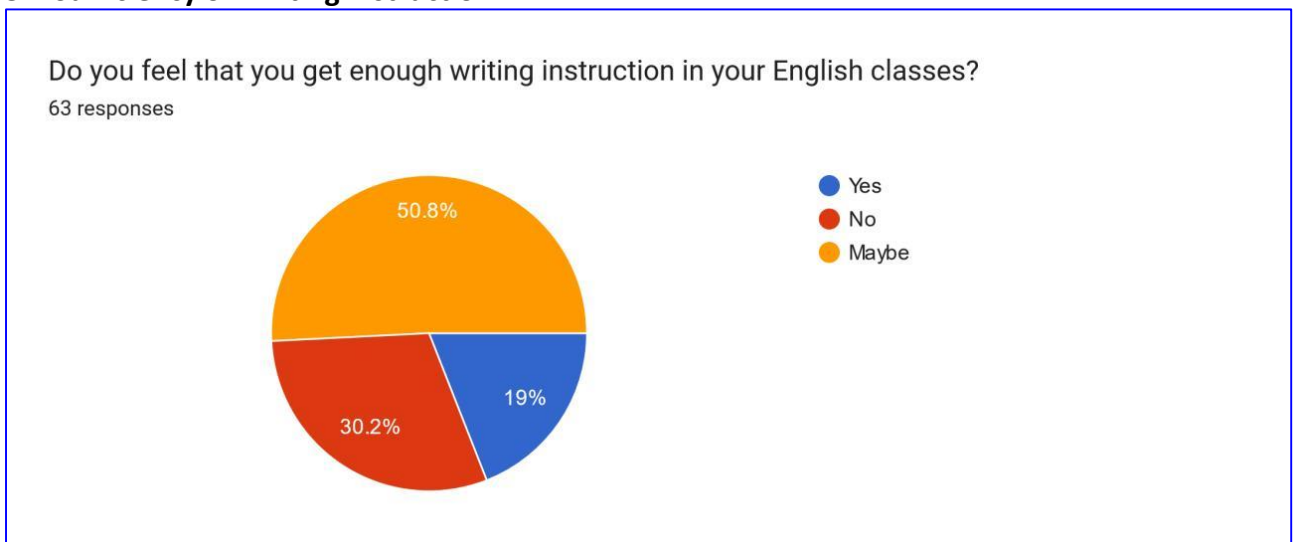
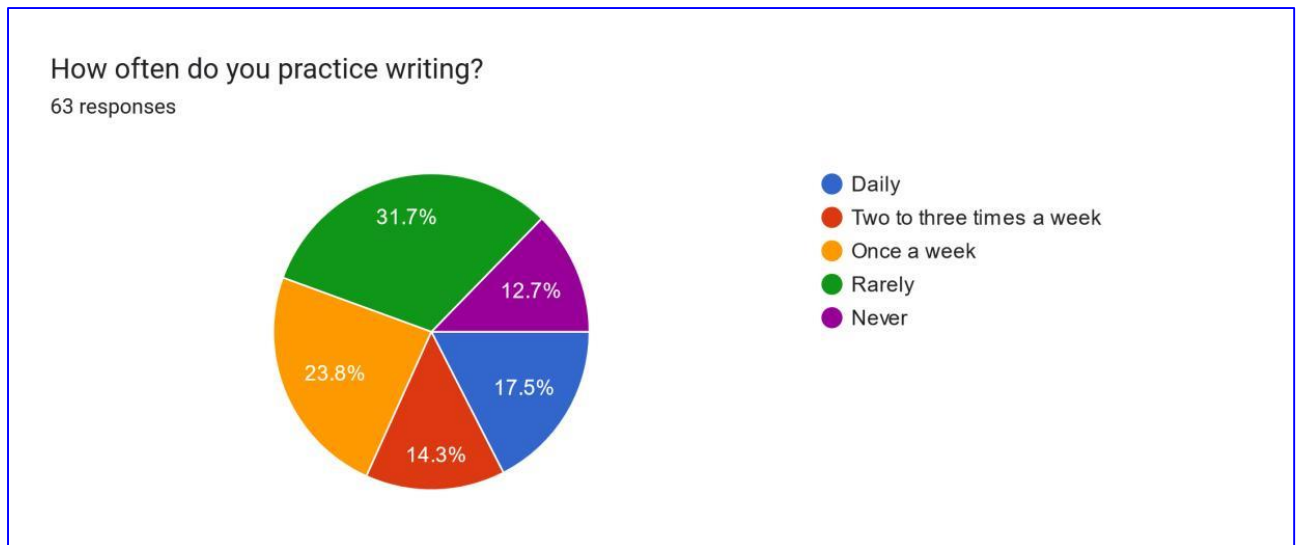


Table 4: Perceptions of Instructional Sufficiency (N = 63)

A majority of students (50.8%) expressed uncertainty about whether they receive sufficient writing instruction. Additionally, a substantial proportion (30.2%) reported that they do not receive enough instruction, while only 19% believed that the instruction provided is adequate. This distribution suggests not only uncertainty but also a tendency toward dissatisfaction. The relatively low percentage of positive responses indicates that writing instruction may not be meeting students' needs effectively. The high level of uncertainty may reflect inconsistent teaching practices, unclear expectations, or a lack of explicit feedback, which can hinder students' ability to evaluate the quality of instruction.

These findings may help explain students' low confidence and reported difficulties in writing. The high proportion of uncertain responses is particularly noteworthy, as it suggests that students lack clear criteria for evaluating instructional quality or that instruction is inconsistent across sections.

5.5 Frequency of Writing Practice



Students' writing practice habits are generally infrequent and inconsistent. A significant proportion (44.4%) reported practicing writing rarely or never, indicating minimal engagement with writing activities. In contrast, only 31.8% of students practice writing regularly (at least twice per week), while 23.8% write only once a week, which may not be sufficient for meaningful skill development.

This imbalance suggests that most students lack sustained and frequent opportunities to practice writing, which is essential for developing fluency, accuracy, and confidence. The relatively low proportion of daily practice (17.5%) further highlights limited immersion in writing activities.

These findings support the argument that insufficient output practice is a key factor contributing to students' writing difficulties.

5.6 Resources Used to Improve Writing Skills

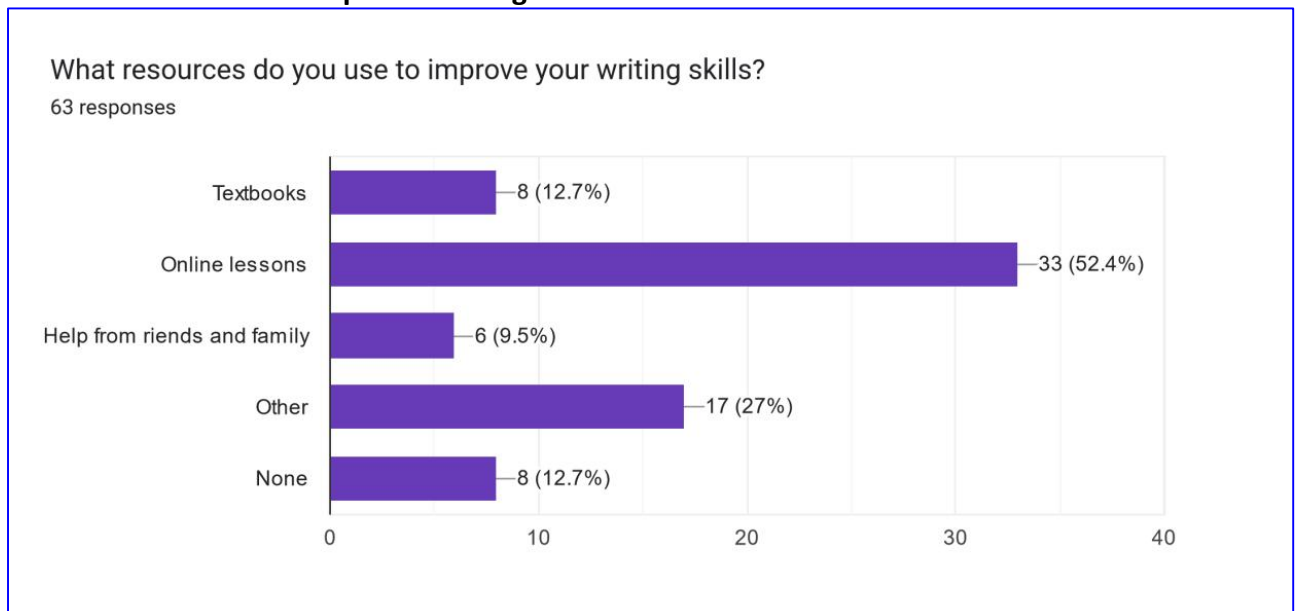


Table 6: Resources Used to Improve Writing (N = 63)

In terms of resources used to improve writing skills, a majority of students (52.4%) reported relying on online lessons, making it the most commonly used resource. Other resources were used less frequently: 27% selected "other" resources, while only 12.7% relied on textbooks.

Additionally, 9.5% reported receiving help from friends and family, and 12.7% indicated that they do not use any resources at all.

The strong reliance on online resources suggests that students may be compensating for gaps in formal instruction by seeking external support. However, the relatively low use of textbooks and limited reliance on interpersonal support indicate a lack of diverse and structured learning inputs.

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

6. Discussion

6.1 Linguistic Challenges: Grammar and Vocabulary

The findings indicate that grammar and vocabulary are the most prominent challenges faced by EFL students in this sample, with 46.0% and 47.6% of respondents respectively identifying them as areas of difficulty. These results are consistent with previous studies (e.g., Fareed et al., 2016; Alharbi, 2021), which highlight linguistic competence as a central obstacle in EFL writing. The prominence of these issues can be interpreted through Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which posits that language acquisition depends on sufficient exposure to comprehensible input. In the Libyan context, where opportunities for meaningful exposure to English may be limited, students may struggle to internalize grammatical structures and expand their lexical repertoire.

Additionally, 19.0% of students identified lack of practice as a challenge. From the perspective of Swain's Output Hypothesis, this is particularly significant, as writing practice provides opportunities for learners to notice gaps in their knowledge, test hypotheses, and refine their linguistic accuracy. The coexistence of limited input and insufficient output practice may therefore contribute to persistent difficulties in grammar and vocabulary.

6.2 Organizational and Cognitive Challenges

Although less frequently reported, organizational and cognitive challenges remain relevant. Difficulties related to structure and organization (11.1%), idea generation (25.4%), and clarity and coherence (7.9%) indicate that a subset of students struggle with higher-level writing processes. These findings align with AlMarwani (2020), who notes that students unfamiliar with academic writing conventions often experience difficulty producing coherent texts.

However, compared to linguistic issues, these challenges were reported less frequently. This may reflect a tendency among students to focus on surface-level concerns such as grammar and vocabulary, potentially due to instructional practices that emphasize accuracy over process. From a Process Writing perspective, if instruction is primarily product-oriented, students may have limited awareness of planning, drafting, and revising strategies. As a result, organizational difficulties may be underreported rather than absent.

6.3 Affective Factors: Confidence and Anxiety

Students' confidence in writing was found to be moderate, with a mean score of 2.92 out of 5. While this suggests that extreme lack of confidence is not widespread, only 27.0% of students reported high confidence levels, indicating that strong self-efficacy is limited. These findings are consistent with Zhang (2011) and Alharbi (2021), who link writing anxiety and low confidence to difficulties in EFL writing.

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory provides a useful framework for interpreting this result. Students with moderate or low confidence may be less likely to engage actively in writing tasks, particularly those that require sustained effort or risk of error. This is reflected in the behavioral patterns observed in the data: 44.4% of students practice writing rarely or never, and 33.3% rarely or never seek help from instructors. At the same time, 52.4% rely on online

resources, suggesting a preference for independent and potentially less demanding forms of support.

Together, these patterns indicate that confidence is closely linked to engagement. Limited confidence may reduce students' willingness to practice and seek feedback, which in turn may slow skill development and maintain existing difficulties.

6.4 Instructional Perceptions and Help-Seeking

Students' perceptions of writing instruction reveal a high level of uncertainty. A majority (50.8%) reported being unsure whether they receive sufficient instruction, while 30.2% believed that instruction is insufficient and only 19% considered it adequate. This distribution suggests that students may lack clear criteria for evaluating instructional quality or may experience inconsistencies in teaching practices.

Such uncertainty may be associated with the nature of instructional delivery. If writing instruction lacks explicit goals, structured feedback, or consistent methodology, students may find it difficult to assess its effectiveness. This may also influence help-seeking behavior. Although most students (74.6%) seek help at least sometimes, a notable proportion (33.3%) rarely or never do so. This pattern may reflect both individual factors (e.g., confidence) and contextual factors (e.g., classroom environment and accessibility of support).

6.5 Practice Patterns and Resource Use

The findings indicate that writing practice among students is limited and inconsistent. While 31.8% of students practice writing at least twice per week, a larger proportion (44.4%) reported practicing rarely or never. This imbalance suggests that many students do not engage in writing frequently enough to develop fluency and accuracy. As noted by Nation (2009), regular practice is essential for language development, particularly in productive skills such as writing.

In terms of resource use, the majority of students (52.4%) rely on online lessons, making them the most commonly used source of support. In contrast, relatively few students use textbooks (12.7%) or seek help from friends and family (9.5%), and 12.7% do not use any resources at all. This distribution suggests that writing development is largely self-directed rather than supported through structured or collaborative means.

While the use of online resources indicates initiative, it may also reflect gaps in formal instructional support. Without guidance, students may struggle to evaluate the quality of online materials or apply them effectively to their writing tasks.

6.6 Integrated Interpretation

Taken together, the findings suggest that students' writing difficulties are not isolated but interconnected. Linguistic challenges, moderate confidence, limited practice, and uncertainty about instruction appear to form a mutually reinforcing pattern.

From a theoretical perspective, this can be understood as the interaction of multiple factors:

- Limited input (Krashen) constrains linguistic development
- Limited output practice (Swain) reduces opportunities for skill refinement
- Product-oriented instruction may limit awareness of writing processes
- Moderate self-efficacy (Bandura) influences engagement and persistence

These factors do not operate independently; rather, they interact to shape students' writing experiences. For example, limited confidence may reduce practice, while insufficient practice may prevent improvement, reinforcing both linguistic difficulties and low confidence. This suggests that effective intervention should address these dimensions simultaneously rather than in isolation.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

8.1 Conclusion

This study investigated the writing challenges faced by second-semester students at the Faculty of Languages, University of Benghazi. The findings indicate that students experience a range of difficulties, with grammar (46.0%) and vocabulary (47.6%) emerging as the most prominent. Additional challenges include idea generation (25.4%) and insufficient practice (19.0%).

Students' confidence in writing is moderate (mean = 2.92), with only a minority demonstrating high confidence. Help-seeking behavior is inconsistent, as one-third of students rarely or never seek instructor support. Furthermore, a majority of students (50.8%) are uncertain about the sufficiency of writing instruction, and a substantial proportion (30.2%) perceive it as inadequate.

Writing practice is limited, with 44.4% of students practicing rarely or never, while only 31.8% engage in writing regularly. Students rely heavily on online resources (52.4%), with less use of structured or interpersonal support systems.

Overall, the findings suggest that students' writing difficulties are associated with a combination of linguistic limitations, moderate confidence, limited practice, and reliance on self-directed learning. These factors appear to interact in ways that may hinder sustained improvement in writing skills.

8.2 Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Increase Exposure to Comprehensible Input

Students should be provided with greater access to meaningful English input through:

- Extensive reading programs
- Exposure to model texts
- Use of authentic materials appropriate to their level

2. Provide Regular and Structured Writing Practice

To address limited practice:

- Incorporate frequent low-stakes writing tasks
- Require weekly writing activities
- Implement writing portfolios to track progress

3. Adopt a Process-Oriented Approach to Writing

Instruction should emphasize:

- Planning, drafting, revising, and editing
- Use of outlines and brainstorming techniques
- Peer review and multiple drafts

4. Strengthen Feedback and Instructional Clarity

To reduce uncertainty:

- Clearly define learning objectives and expectations
- Provide consistent and formative feedback
- Use rubrics to guide evaluation

5. Support the Development of Writing Confidence

To improve self-efficacy:

- Sequence tasks from simple to complex
- Provide constructive and balanced feedback
- Highlight student progress and improvement

6. Encourage Help-Seeking Behavior

To increase engagement with support:

- Normalize asking for help in the classroom
- Offer accessible consultation opportunities
- Create peer support systems

7. Guide Effective Use of Learning Resources

To improve resource use:

- Recommend reliable online platforms
- Integrate textbooks into instruction

- Train students in evaluating and using resources effectively

8. Promote Collaborative Learning

To expand support networks:

- Incorporate peer review sessions
- Encourage group writing activities
- Establish writing partnerships or study groups

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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/organization
- 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