

The Cycle of Writing Difficulties and Writing Stages

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Abstract

Writing difficulties influence how students write in every writing stage. Applying the cyclical nature of writing difficulties across different stages of the writing process, this paper investigates students' perception of their writing difficulties and writing stages based on five research questions. The quantitative study employed a survey (41-item questionnaire) with a purposive sample of 267 respondents. Data were collected and analysed using SPSS, and the findings were presented by using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings indicated that moderate levels of writing difficulty are prevalent across these areas of rhetorical situation, goal setting, teaching instruction, teacher explanation, long-term memory, individual paragraph, and writing process, with significant challenges particularly noted in rhetorical situation and goal setting. The findings also reported that reviewing assignment requirements and studying model essays by skilled writers are considered very important in before writing stage. Meanwhile, the findings also revealed that in while write stage, starting with the introduction is a highly popular strategy among students, emphasizing its importance in beginning the writing process well. The findings for when revising stage showed that checking if the essay meets the requirements is seen as the most important revision strategy. Finally, correlation analyses revealed three relationships between the writing difficulties and all the writing stages. Discussions of the findings and implications of the study are also reported in this paper.

Keywords: Writing Difficulties, Writing Challenges, Writing Stages, Writing Process, Correlational Study

Introduction

The writing process is widely described in distinct stages, each requiring specific skills and strategies. These stages typically involve planning, drafting, revising, and editing. The approach that focuses on these processes, as discussed by Aldabbus & Almansouri (2022); Bram & Angelina (2022), treats these stages as crucial learning phases where structured teaching methods can significantly improve students' writing abilities. This process-oriented approach aligns with the concept of scaffolded instruction discussed by Mmodana-Zide & Mafugu (2023), where support structures are adjusted gradually to help students develop their writing skills.

During this process, students encounter writing difficulties or challenges that are often classified into cognitive, behavioural, and psychological factors influencing the writing process. Studies by Rahmat (2023); Rahmat et al (2022) explore how students' beliefs and self-perceptions impact their academic writing. These studies utilize cognitive and behavioural psychology theories, suggesting psychological barriers such as anxiety and self-doubt can significantly affect student performance. Furthermore, Bulqiyah et al (2021) examine how cognitive load influences writing, suggesting technological tools can help reduce these burdens.

In the Malaysian context, where English is a second language for many, students face unique challenges in learning academic writing in English. Li & Razali (2019) for instance, critically examine how the process-based approach is being implemented in Malaysian educational systems, pointing out the necessity for curriculum adaptations and better teacher training to tackle these challenges effectively. Therefore, understanding and addressing writing difficulties and stages here is crucial for developing educational strategies that can enhance writing outcomes for Malaysian students. This study thus aims to investigate students' perception of their writing difficulties and writing stages. The five research questions are:

- How do academic students perceive their writing difficulties?
- How do academic students perceive their before writing stage?
- How do academic students perceive their while writing stage?
- How do academic students perceive their when revising stage?
- Is there a relationship between writing difficulties and all writing stages?

Literature Review

Writing Difficulties

Recent studies show that students, especially those learning English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL), face several significant challenges in academic writing. These challenges can be grouped into linguistic, cognitive, affective, process-oriented, and technological difficulties, each affecting learners in higher education uniquely.

Linguistic Difficulties

Linguistic barriers are among the most common problems noted in multiple studies. Students often struggle with grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, and organizing their writing properly (Akhtar et al., 2020; Aldabbus & Almansouri, 2022). Problems include incorrect use of tenses, difficulties with parts of speech, and issues in writing coherent and well-structured paragraphs (Bulqiyah et al., 2021). Moreover, the ability to use academic vocabulary and to express ideas clearly are ongoing challenges (Bram & Angelina, 2022).

Cognitive Difficulties

Cognitive challenges appear primarily in organizing and generating ideas. Students frequently find it difficult to logically structure their essays, develop a strong thesis statement, and maintain coherence throughout their writing (Yabukoshi & Mizumoto, 2024). They also face problems in creating content that is both relevant and sufficiently detailed, indicating a lack of critical thinking and planning skills (Bulqiyah et al., 2021).

Affective Difficulties

Emotional factors play a significant role in writing performance. Negative views and attitudes towards writing tasks, such as anxiety and a lack of confidence, are intensified by previous bad experiences and self-imposed negative expectations, leading to avoidance and poor outcomes (Rahmat et al., 2022). Motivational issues, often due to the perceived lack of relevance of the writing tasks, also negatively impact students' engagement and efforts (Akhtar et al., 2020).

Process-Oriented Difficulties

The process of writing, especially revision, presents several challenges. Many students find it hard to effectively revise their work, correct grammatical mistakes, and meet word limits (Yabukoshi & Mizumoto, 2024). These problems highlight a lack of effective revision strategies and inadequate control over the writing process.

Technological and Resource Difficulties

Although technology could help in the writing process, its usage among students is usually limited to simple tasks like searching for information and checking vocabulary. The adoption of technology in more complex writing processes like drafting and revising is notably poor (Rahmat, 2023). Students also report a limited use of advanced technological tools that could improve their writing, such as specialized writing software or online collaborative platforms (Yabukoshi & Mizumoto, 2024).

This overview of the literature suggests that academic writing difficulties are a significant obstacle to successful learning in ESL/EFL contexts. A comprehensive approach that includes linguistic training, cognitive strategy development, emotional support, and effective use of technology is needed to address these issues of academic writing difficulties.

Stages in Writing

The process of teaching academic writing to ESL students involves several distinct stages, each of which plays a critical role in developing writing skills. This literature review synthesizes findings from multiple studies to present a clear picture of these stages, focusing on the importance of scaffolding and collaboration in enhancing the writing abilities of ESL students.

Pre-writing

The initial stage of writing, known as pre-writing, involves brainstorming ideas and planning the structure of the writing piece. Good planning during this stage is crucial as it sets the foundation for the entire writing process (Rahmat & Whanchit, 2024). Furthermore, students need to fully understand the assignment requirements, which helps in aligning their initial efforts with the expected outcomes (Mdodana-Zide & Mafugu, 2023).

Drafting

During the drafting stage, students start to put their planned ideas into written form. This stage allows students to focus on expressing their thoughts without worrying too much about grammatical accuracy, thus promoting a better flow of ideas (Ismail, 2019). This phase is also essential for students to practice structuring their arguments and thoughts in a manner that meets academic standards (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2019).

Revising

The revision stage is crucial for making substantial changes to the initial drafts based on feedback from peers and instructors. A recent study (Li & Razali, 2019) highlights the importance of this feedback in refining the drafts, focusing on improving coherence and organization according to academic conventions. This stage is also vital for enhancing the quality of the text and ensuring it communicates the intended message effectively (Fajrina et al., 2023).

Post-Writing

The final stage includes making final adjustments to grammar, punctuation, and overall presentation to ensure that the text is error-free and effectively communicates the intended message (Nguyen, 2024). It is also suggested by a study (Mdodana-Zide & Mafugu, 2023) that reflection after submission can provide students with insights into their writing process, helping them identify strengths and areas for improvement for future assignments.

In summary, a well-organized approach to teaching writing, enriched with targeted support and collaboration, can greatly enhance the writing outcomes for ESL students. The studies reviewed here highlight the importance of a structured approach to the writing process. Using scaffolding and collaborative learning strategies at various stages can significantly improve the academic writing skills of ESL students. These strategies are particularly beneficial in addressing the challenges faced by students due to language barriers and differences in academic culture.

Past Studies on Writing Difficulties

Academic writing represents a significant challenge for learners of ESL/EFL, demanding detailed exploration into the complexities of these challenges and the effective strategies for overcoming them. This review highlights the findings of recent studies by Rahmat (2023); Rahmat et al (2022); Bulqiyah et al (2021), which investigate the barriers—cognitive, psychological, and educational—that inhibit effective academic writing among ESL and EFL students. These studies provide valuable insights into how personal perceptions and cognitive abilities impact students' writing processes in diverse educational contexts. Rahmat (2023) examines university students' struggles with managing knowledge and analyzing problems within academic writing courses. While Rahmat et al (2022) study how the self-perceptions of 373 Malaysian undergraduates, influenced by previous experiences, significantly affect their writing behaviours, using surveys and reflective essays for data collection, Bulqiyah et al (2021) identify key affective and cognitive barriers, such as anxiety and difficulties in idea organization, through a web-based questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with 21 undergraduate students. The collective findings from these studies highlight the need for educational strategies that address psychological and cognitive challenges, aiming to enhance

writing proficiency and confidence among students in academic settings (Rahmat, 2023; Rahmat et al., 2022; Bulqiyah et al., 2021).

As educational systems increasingly emphasize improving writing skills among ESL and EFL learners, evaluating the effectiveness of educational interventions and technological tools becomes crucial. Recent studies from Akhtar et al (2020); Aldabbus & Almansouri (2022); Bram & Angelina (2022); Yabukoshi & Mizumoto (2024) highlight how various teaching methodologies and technological integrations can enhance writing outcomes. These studies explore different aspects of writing education, from linguistic instruction to digital resource utilization, advocating for adaptive and supportive educational practices. Akhtar et al (2020) perform a systematic review to assess diverse educational interventions designed to improve ESL learners' writing skills. Meanwhile, Aldabbus & Almansouri (2022) point out structural and linguistic challenges encountered by 36 university students, utilizing a 25-item questionnaire. While Bram & Angelina (2022) call for improved teaching methods and feedback mechanisms, based on student surveys and essay analysis at Sanata Dharma University, Yabukoshi & Mizumoto (2024) investigate how 54 Japanese university students use technology across different writing stages, using a detailed survey to assess their use of technology and the writing challenges they face. In summary, these studies collectively stress the need for innovative, technology-enhanced teaching approaches that provide comprehensive linguistic support and create strong learning environments to improve ESL and EFL writing outcomes (Akhtar et al., 2020; Aldabbus & Almansouri, 2022; Barli Bram & Angelina, 2022; Yabukoshi & Mizumoto, 2024).

Past Studies on Stages in Writing Process

The exploration of writing processes in educational contexts reveals diverse approaches to understanding how students navigate through the stages of writing. In a comparative study, Fajrina et al (2023) investigated the writing strategies of Indonesian EFL students versus native English speakers, employing a questionnaire to gather insights from 135 students. Their findings highlight variable strategic behaviours particularly notable between the drafting and revising phases, emphasizing the necessity for enhancing strategic writing competencies. Nguyen (2024) conducted a study at Hanoi Law University, utilizing a Likert scale survey with 105 English-major sophomores to examine the predominant use of while-writing strategies, where students focus significantly on essay development and structuring, with less attention to pre-writing and post-writing stages. Contrasting with these approaches, Flower and Hayes (1981) presented a cognitive process theory based on protocol analysis, suggesting that writing involves recursive cognitive processes including planning, translating, and reviewing, which are not confined to sequential stages but are dynamically integrated throughout the composing process as influenced by the writer's evolving goals.

The integration of process-based and collaborative approaches in teaching ESL writing presents a complex yet vital exploration into improving instructional methodologies. Recent studies Rahmat & Whanchit (2024); Selvaraj & Aziz (2019); Ismail (2019); Li & Razali (2019); Mgodana-Zide & Mafugu (2023) highlight how various educational strategies impact the writing stages, from pre-writing to finalizing, in ESL contexts. The studies collectively argue for a tailored approach to writing instruction, designed to meet the diverse needs of ESL students. Rahmat & Whanchit (2024) investigate the impact of social interactions and cognitive strategies on the writing process, employing a survey with 109 students to measure these effects. Meanwhile, Selvaraj & Aziz (2019) conduct a systematic review of teaching methodologies, evaluating literature from multiple studies that focus on process approaches

and their implementation. While Ismail (2019) assesses differentiated instruction combined with a process approach through observations and student work samples from 39 undergraduates, Li & Razali (2019) critique the practical application of process-based approaches in Malaysian education, relying on a systematic review of prior studies. Lastly, Mmodana-Zide & Mafugu (2023) examine a collaborative scaffolded approach involving 216 first-year students, using a mixed-methods approach to analyse the effectiveness of lecturer and writing centre interventions. In summary, these studies collectively emphasize the importance of adaptive and integrated instructional strategies across various writing stages. They advocate for the integration of scaffolding, cooperative learning, and differentiated instruction to enrich the pre-writing, drafting, revising, and finalizing stages, enhancing ESL students' writing competencies across educational settings (Rahmat & Whanchit, 2024; Selvaraj & Aziz, 2019; Ismail, 2019; Li & Razali, 2019; Mmodana-Zide & Mafugu, 2023).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1 explores the cyclical nature of writing difficulties across different stages of the writing process in this study. According to Rahmat et al (2021), the cycle begins and ends with the writers' fear of writing, which is rooted in their perception of writing difficulties as discussed by (Flower & Hayes, 1981). This fear significantly influences how writers approach the stages of writing identified by Petrić & Czárí (2003), specifically before writing, while writing, and when revising, as presented in the cycle in the diagram. Each stage is interconnected, emphasizing the ongoing impact of writing fear on the writing process.

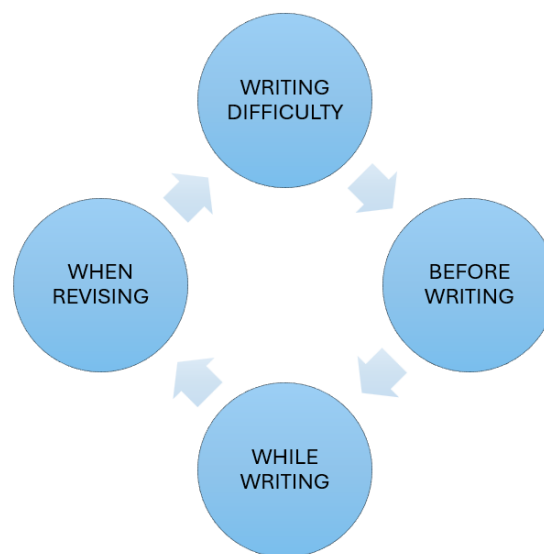


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study: Cycle of Writing Difficulty and Writing Stages

Methodology

This quantitative study aims to investigate students' perception of their writing difficulties and writing stages. A purposive sample of 267 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey which is rooted in Flower and Hayes (1981); Petrić & Czárí (2003) to reveal the variables in table 1 below. The survey has 5 sections. Section A has 2 items on demographic profile. Section B has 7 items on Writing Difficulties, Section C has 8 items on Before Writing Stage, Section D has 14 items on While Writing Stage, and lastly, Section E has 12 items on When Revising Stage.

Table 1

Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECTION	WRITING STAGE	NO OF ITEMS
B	Writing Difficulties	7
C	Before Writing Stage	8
D	While Writing Stage	14
E	When Revising Stage	12
TOTAL =		41

Table 2

Reliability of Survey

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.864	41

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .864, thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument employed in this study. Further analysis using SPSS is conducted to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

Table 3

Percentage for Gender

1	Male	35%
2	Female	65%

Based on table 3, a majority of the respondents were female (65%), and the others were male (35%).

Table 4

Percentage for Discipline

1	Science & technology	54%
2	Social Sciences	20%
3	Business	26%

Based on table 4, a majority of the respondents were in the science and technology field (54%).

Findings for Writing Difficulties

This section presents the findings to answer research question 1: How do academic students perceive their writing difficulties?

Table 5

Means for Writing Difficulties

Item	Mean
Rhetorical situation WDQ1 I find writing difficult because I am not familiar with different types of writing	2.9
Goal setting WDQ2 I find writing difficult because the goal for the essay writing is sometimes hard to achieve	2.9
Teaching instruction WDQ3 The teacher's instruction on what to do is sometimes not clear and that makes the essay writing difficult	2.1
Teacher explanation WDQ4 Sometimes the teacher's explanation makes me feel that writing is difficult	2.0
Long term memory WDQ5 Writing essays is difficult because I do not have background knowledge of the topic given	2.5
Individual paragraph WDQ6 Writing essays is difficult because I have to know what to write in each paragraph	2.7
Writing Process WDQ7 I find the writing difficult because I am unsure of the writing process	2.7

Table 5 presents the mean scores for various writing difficulties encountered in the writing process, categorized under specific aspects such as rhetorical situation, goal setting, teaching instruction, teacher explanation, long-term memory, individual paragraph, and writing process. The mean scores suggest a moderate level of difficulty across most categories, with the rhetorical situation and goal setting both rated at a mean of 2.9, highlighting these as significant areas of struggle for academic students. In contrast, the clarity of teaching instructions was perceived as less problematic, shown by a lower mean score of 2.1. The explanations provided by teachers posed a considerable challenge, with a mean score of 2.0, suggesting that the way information is conveyed by educators can significantly influence writing difficulties. Challenges related to accessing long-term memory and understanding the structure of individual paragraphs both received moderate scores of 2.5 and 2.7, respectively.

Findings for Before Writing Stage

This section presents the findings to answer research question 2: How do academic students perceive their before writing stage?

Table 6

Means for Before Writing Stage

Item	Mean
BWQ 1 I make a timetable/schedule for the writing process	2.6
BWQ 2 Before I start writing, I revise the requirements of the assignment	3.9
BWQ 3 I look at a model written by a proficient writer	4.0
BWQ 4 I start writing without a written or mental plan	2.4
BWQ 5 I think about what I want to write and have a plan in my mind, but not on paper	3.2
BWQ 6 I note I down words and short notes related to the topic	3.8
BWQ 7 I write an outline of my paper	3.4
BWQ 8 I write notes or an outline in my native language	3.1

Table 6 shows the mean scores for different activities that academic students do before they start writing. It can be seen that reviewing the assignment requirements (BWQ 2) and looking at a model written by a skilled writer (BWQ 3) are the most valued practices, with high mean scores of 3.9 and 4.0 respectively. This suggests that these activities are very important for a good start in the writing process. On the other hand, making a timetable for the writing process (BWQ 1) and starting to write without any plan (BWQ 4) are less popular, with lower mean scores of 2.6 and 2.4, showing that these are not common practices. Other preparatory steps like noting down words and short notes related to the topic (BWQ 6) and making an outline of the paper (BWQ 7) also have high mean scores of 3.8 and 3.4, indicating their importance in the early stages of writing. Interestingly, the practice of writing notes or an outline in one's native language (BWQ 8) got a moderate score of 3.1, which shows moderate use among academic students who are not native English speakers.

Findings for While Writing Stage

This section presents data to answer research question 3: How do academic students perceive their while writing stage?

Table 7

Mean for While Writing Stage

Item	Mean
WWQ 1 I start with the introduction	4.6
WWQ 2 I stop after each sentence to read it again	4.0
WWQ 3 I stop after a few sentences or a whole paragraph, covering one idea	3.7
WWQ 4 I reread what I have written to get ideas to continue	4.3
WWQ 5 I go back to my outline and make changes to it	3.5
WWQ 6 I write bits of the text in my native language and then translate them into English	3.2
WWQ 7 I am very confident with my grammar and vocabulary	2.8
WWQ 8 I simply what I want to write if I don't know how to express my thoughts in English	3.6
WWQ 9 If I don't know a word in English, I write it in my native language and later try to find an appropriate English word	3.6
WWQ 10 If I don't know a word in English, I find a similar English word that I know	4.0
WWQ 11 If I don't know a word in English, I stop writing and look up the word in a dictionary	3.5
WWQ 12 I use a bilingual dictionary	3.2
WWQ 13 I use a monolingual dictionary	2.6
WWQ 14 I ask somebody to help out when I have problems while writing	3.8

Table 7 provides mean scores for various strategies employed during the writing stage, as reported by academic students. The highest score, a 4.6, is given to the practice of starting with the introduction, indicating that this is a highly favoured strategy among academic students for initiating the writing process. Regularly stopping to reread each sentence or paragraph to ensure coherence and unity is also common, with mean scores of 4 and 3.7 respectively. Another highly rated strategy is rereading previously written text to gather thoughts and continue writing, scoring 4.3. In contrast, lesser-used strategies include going back to the outline to make changes, and writing initial drafts in the native language before translating into English, with mean scores of 3.5 and 3.2, respectively. Notably, confidence in grammar and vocabulary is relatively low, with a mean score of 2.8, suggesting potential insecurity or difficulties in these areas. Other strategies like using dictionaries (bilingual or monolingual) or seeking help when encountering writing difficulties show varied use, with mean scores ranging from 2.6 to 3.8.

Findings for When Revising Stage

This section presents data to answer research question 4: How do academic students perceive their when revising stage?

Table 8- Mean for When Revising Stage

Item	Mean
WRQ 1 I read my essay aloud	2.8
WRQ 2 I only read what I have written when I have finished the whole paper	3.0
WRQ 3 When I have written my paper, I hand it in without reading it	1.9
WRQ 4 I use a dictionary when revising	3.0
WRQ 5 I make changes in vocabulary	3.3
WRQ 6 I make changes in sentence structure	3.4
WRQ 7 I make changes in the structure of the essay	3.2
WRQ 8 I make changes in the content or ideas	3.3
WRQ 9 I focus on one thing at a time when revising (e.g. content, structure)	3.4
WRQ10 I drop my first draft and start writing again	3.0
WRQ 11 I check if my essay matches the requirements	4.1
WRQ 12 I leave the text aside for a couple of days and then I can see it from a new perspective	3.0

Table 8 provides insights into the mean scores for various revision strategies employed by academic students during the revising stage of the writing process. Notably, checking if the essay meets the requirements (WRQ 11) received the highest mean score of 4.1, highlighting its critical importance in the revision process. Other well-regarded strategies include making changes in sentence structure (WRQ 6) and focusing on one aspect of revision at a time, such as content or structure (WRQ 9), both scoring 3.4. In contrast, the least favoured practice, as shown by a mean score of 1.9, involves submitting the paper without re-reading it (WRQ 3). Reading the essay aloud (WRQ 1) and using a dictionary while revising (WRQ 4) both received moderate scores of 2.8 and 3.0, respectively. Other practices, such as making changes in vocabulary (WRQ 5), essay structure (WRQ 7), and content (WRQ 8) were also employed with mean scores ranging from 3.2 to 3.3. Additionally, the practice of dropping the first draft to start anew (WRQ 10) and setting the text aside to gain a fresh perspective (WRQ 12) were rated with mean scores of 3.0.

Findings for Relationship between Writing Difficulties and All Writing Stages

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

To determine if there is a significant relationship in the mean scores between metacognitive, effort regulation, cognitive, social, and affective strategies, the data is analysed using SPSS for correlations. Findings are presented separately in tables 9, 10, 11, and 12 below.

Table 9

Correlation between Writing Difficulties and Before Writing

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

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

Table 9 shows that there is a relationship between writing difficulties and before writing stage. The correlation analysis shows that there is a low significant relationship between writing difficulties and before writing stage, ($r=.193^*$) and ($p=.000$). According to Jackson (2015), a coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. A weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, a moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and a strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a weak positive relationship between writing difficulties and before writing.

Table 10

Correlation between Before Writing Stage and While Writing Stage

		BEFOREWRITI NG	WHILEWRITIN G
BEFOREWRITING	Pearson Correlation	1	.592**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	267	267
WHILEWRITING	Pearson Correlation	.592**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	267	267

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

Table 10 shows that there is a relationship between before writing stage and while writing stage. The correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant relationship between before writing stage and while writing stage, ($r=.592^{**}$) and ($p=.000$). According to Jackson (2015), a coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. A weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, a moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and a strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between before writing stage and while writing stage.

Table 11

Correlation between While Writing Stage and When Revising Stage

		WHILEWRITING	WHENREVISING
WHILEWRITING	Pearson Correlation	1	.613**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	267	267
WHENREVISING	Pearson Correlation	.613**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	267	267

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

Table 11 shows there is a relationship between while writing stage and when revising stage. The correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant relationship between while writing stage and when revising stage, ($r=.613^{**}$) and ($p=.000$). According to Jackson (2015), a coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. A weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, a moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and a strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between while writing stage and when revising stage.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussions

This study aims to investigate students' perception of their writing difficulties and writing stages. The first research question addresses academic students' perception on their writing difficulties. The findings reveal that students encounter various difficulties in academic writing, categorized into areas such as rhetorical situation, goal setting, teaching instruction, teacher explanation, long-term memory, individual paragraph, and writing process. The findings show that students mostly face moderate levels of difficulty across these areas. Notably, the challenges in rhetorical situation and goal setting are significant, pointing to substantial struggles in these aspects (Rahmat, 2023). On the other hand, teaching instructions appeared to be less of a problem, suggesting that the way instructions are given is not the main issue. Additionally, students reported moderate challenges related to accessing long-term memory and structuring individual paragraphs, indicating possible issues in managing and retrieving necessary information for writing (Bulqiyah et al., 2021).

The second research question addresses academic students' perception on their before writing stage. The findings show that reviewing assignment requirements and studying essays written by skilled writers are considered very important, indicating their crucial role in starting the writing process effectively. In contrast, practices such as setting a timetable for the writing process and beginning to write without any plan are not favoured, suggesting these are not common among students. Moreover, the steps like noting down relevant words and brief notes on the topic, and making a paper outline are seen as important in the early stages of writing. This supports Mmodana-Zide & Mafugu's (2023) findings, which encourage structured preparatory activities to improve students' readiness and writing performance. Interestingly, the use of notes or an outline in one's native language is moderately popular among students

who are not native English speakers, similar to what Fajrina et al. (2023) found about the use of native language to aid the drafting process in EFL contexts.

The third research question addresses academic students' perception on their while writing stage. The method of starting with the introduction is very popular, showing its importance in beginning the writing process well. Additionally, it is common for students to regularly stop to reread each sentence or paragraph to ensure the text is coherent and unified. This strategy of continuous review to maintain flow and clarity during writing also appears in the study by Mdogana-Zide & Mafugu (2023), which highlighted the benefits of revising repeatedly to improve the overall quality of the text.

On the other hand, less common strategies include revisiting the outline to make adjustments and starting the draft in the native language before translating it into English. These findings relate to what Fajrina et al (2023) observed about the variable use of native language in drafting, which not all EFL students commonly practice. The relatively low confidence in grammar and vocabulary points to potential challenges in these essential areas, a concern similarly noted by Ismail (2019) in the context of requiring different instructional approaches.

Other strategies like using dictionaries, both bilingual and monolingual, and seeking help when facing writing difficulties, show varied usage among students. This indicates a range of reliance on external resources for writing support, showing the different ways students try to overcome their writing difficulties.

The fourth research question addresses academic students' perception on their when revising stage. The findings show that checking if the essay meets the requirements is seen as the most important strategy in the revision process. Other strategies that are highly regarded include changing sentence structure and focusing on one aspect of revision at a time, such as content or structure. These methods are supported by the study from Mdogana-Zide & Mafugu (2023), which highlights the benefits of structured and focused revisions.

On the other hand, the least favoured practice is submitting the paper without re-reading it, suggesting a risky approach that could lead to lower-quality submissions. Moderately used strategies include reading the essay aloud to find awkward phrasing and using a dictionary during revision to ensure correct usage of words, which corresponds with Ismail's (2019) emphasis on the importance of language accuracy in academic writing. Commonly, students also make changes in vocabulary, essay structure, and content, supporting the comprehensive revision strategies discussed by (Fajrina et al., 2023). Additionally, some students choose to discard their first draft to start anew and set the text aside to gain a fresh perspective, indicating a readiness to thoroughly refine their work to improve clarity and coherence.

Finally, the fifth research question addresses writing difficulties' relationship with all the writing stages. There are three relationships discovered by the correlation analyses. First, there is a weak but significant correlation between writing difficulties and the before writing stage. This finding suggests that while the preparatory activities before writing have a minor positive connection on the writing challenges encountered, they are still important. This observation is consistent with Jackson (2015) which also noted that preparatory actions have varying levels of influence on the writing process. Effective planning during the before writing stage, as identified by Rahmat (2023), can also lessen some of the challenges faced during writing.

Second, there is a strong positive correlation between the before writing and writing stages. This suggests that activities conducted during the before writing phase significantly

connect with the actual writing process, echoing Jackson's (2015) guidelines. This strong relationship aligns with the conclusions of Mmodana-Zide and Mafugu (2023), who emphasized the critical connection between structured pre-writing activities and effective writing. This observation also supports studies like those by Akhtar et al (2020), which highlighted the importance of detailed planning in improving ESL learners' writing skills.

Third, there is a strong positive correlation between the while writing and when revising stages. This implies that the techniques and methods applied during the writing phase significantly relate with the revising strategies, which supports the observations of (Fajrina et al., 2023). This finding collectively indicate that revising strategies are directly connected with the writing methods employed, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these stages. It also aligns with Bulqiyah et al (2021), who emphasized the importance of repetitious feedback and revision in refining students' writings.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Since the findings for the first research question show that students face significant writing difficulties with rhetorical situations and goal setting Rahmat (2023), instructors should focus on strategies that clarify these areas. Instructors can include more direct instruction on understanding rhetorical contexts and setting clear writing goals. Workshops or modules designed to address these skills can help students better understand the purpose and audience of their writing tasks.

Next, since the findings for the second research question show that students find reviewing assignment requirements and studying model essays important in the before writing stage Nguyen (2024), these activities are crucial for successful writing. Instructors should emphasize structured pre-writing activities, such as creating detailed outlines and taking notes in both the target language and native language if needed (Fajrina et al., 2023). Providing students with clear guidelines and examples can help them prepare better for their writing tasks.

Moreover, the findings for the third research question show that the popular strategy of regularly rereading sentences or paragraphs during writing Mmodana-Zide & Mafugu (2023); thus, this should be encouraged. Instructors can promote this by teaching students how to review and revise their work during the writing process. Techniques such as peer review sessions and guided self-assessment checklists can help students develop a habit of continuous improvement.

The findings for the third research question also highlight the importance of revising for content and structure, and ensuring essays meet assignment requirements (Nguyen, 2024). Instructors should provide students with detailed revision checklists and strategies for focusing on different aspects of their writing one at a time. Activities like reading essays aloud and using dictionaries during revision can be part of writing curricula to improve language accuracy and overall quality (Ismail, 2019).

Future studies should include a more diverse sample to see if these findings apply to different demographic groups and educational contexts. Research could focus on comparing students from various cultural backgrounds and educational fields to explore how these factors influence writing difficulties and strategies.

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