The Influence of Writing Difficulties on Composing Process

[1]Maisarah Noorezam, [2]Nadzrah Sa'adan, [3]Siti Aishah Taib, [4]Ami Amnaida Hamid, [5]Mohd Zakaria Mohd Noh, [6]PM Dr Noor Hanim Rahmat

[1,2,3,6]Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Cawangan Johor, Kampus Pasir Gudang, Johor, [4]English Language Unit, Kedah Matriculation College, Changlun, Kedah, [5]Mechanical Engineering Department, Politeknik Mukah, Sarawak
Email: maisa691@uitm.edu.my, nadzr210@uitm.edu.my, aishah711@uitm.edu.my, ami.amnaida@kmk.matrik.edu.my, zakarianoh@pmu.edu.my, noorh763@uitm.edu.my
Coressponding Author Email: maisa691@uitm.edu.my

Abstract
Writing in English is a difficult task for a second language learner. The process of writing, from planning to drafting and editing, may take a lengthy time to complete. However, when learners focus on the writing process and explore strategies to work through their writing, they are expected to understand themselves better. Thus, this study aims to investigate the influence of writing difficulties on writers and the processes of writing, as well as the relationship between writing difficulties and the writing process. This quantitative research design involved a purposive sample of 267 participants from local tertiary institutions. The results indicate that the respondents did not encounter significant writing difficulties in general. They understand the writing process and take action at each stage. Future studies may need to investigate and address other elements that may be influencing writing difficulties.
Keywords: Writing, Writing Difficulty, Composing Process, Writing Process, ESL Writers

Introduction
Background of Study
Process writing is an approach used by language learners that focuses more on the process of writing than the written outputs (Onozawa, 2010). Learners are expected to comprehend themselves better when they are focusing on the writing process, and explore strategies to work through their writing. Writing entails a particular sequence of processes (Hyland, 2008). In general, writers will begin with prewriting, then drafting and finally revising. Abderraouf (2016, p.xiii) mentioned that the concept of writing is a set of sub-processes

involving planning, translating, and reviewing. Another sequence added two more steps after revising; editing and evaluating. Some writers prefer to follow the usual pattern of the process, and some may adjust or skip one or two processes depending on their competency and purpose of writing.

Writers are entitled to their views on the difficulty of writing. The challenges may vary according to an individual's proficiency and skills in the language. However, the complexity of the writing process itself holds a significant sway to produce a well-written composition. Brown (2000, p. 335) states that writing needs more effort in understanding, thinking, planning, and revising.

In Malaysia, though the inclusion of this writing process started in the 1980s, it is just recently that language specialists began paying attention to individual learning and the writing process itself (Palpanadan et al., 2015). Interestingly, Malaysian tertiary level students' writing performance remains low Kee & Razali (2019), despite the excellent results for writing skills among Malaysian examination takers in the primary and secondary school as well as pre-university levels, as reported in the Results Report of Cambridge Baseline 2013 (English Language Standards and Quality Council [ELSQC], Ministry of Education Malaysia [MOE], 2015).

Statement of Problem

As second language learners, the level of difficulty in a writing task can profoundly shape how individuals approach and engage with the act of composing. Research on writing difficulties have been discussed in many different settings. Based on a comprehensive literature review by Bulqiyah et. al (2021), the major difficulty found in students' writing is linguistics competency. In addition, affective and motivational factors are also common attributions towards writing difficulties. The strategies used to cope with this issue are also concerned by many researchers (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 2003; Winarto, 2015, Dian et.al, 2020).

One of the means to manage writing difficulties is by practicing the writing process. Teachers can scaffold students by providing them with the practice and skills necessary to produce a well-written, meaningful and acceptable writing (Avan, 2015). However, a study investigating the influence of writing difficulty on the composing process is still limited. Further research of tertiary students' perspectives under this topic is necessary as students' incompetency in ESL writing poses constant threat to their academic performance and may jeopardise their career and professional development (Tan et al., 2006).

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This objective of the study is done to explore perception of learners on how writing difficulties influence writing process. Specifically, the objectives of the study are:
- To explore how do writing difficulties influence writers
- To identify how does planning influence writing
- To identify how does drafting influence writing
- To identify how does editing influence writing
- To examine is there a relationship between writing difficulties and the writing process

The study is done to answer the following research questions:
- How do writing difficulties influence writers?
- How does planning influence writing ?

- How does drafting influence writing?
- How does editing influence writing?
- Is there a relationship between writing difficulties and the writing process?

Literature Review

Why do Writers find Academic Writing Difficult?

Academic writing can be particularly challenging for writers, especially for ESL learners. According to Baharudin et al (2023), the difficulties stem from several areas. First, academic writing requires a strong command of formal language and specialized vocabulary, which can be tough for those who are still learning English. Additionally, the strict conventions and structures of academic writing - like proper citation, coherent argumentation, and logical organization, add another layer of complexity. ESL learners also have to juggle critical analysis and synthesis of information from various sources, which can be overwhelming. These combined linguistic and cognitive demands make academic writing challenging and overwhelming to many, as detailed in their study (Baharudin et al., 2023).

Writing Process

Writing is a complex process as it requires the mastery of many sets of skills. It is not innate but one has to show persistent effort and extensive practice (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996:6). According to Lakshmi (2006), writing process involves 5 stages as follows;

Stage 1: Prewriting
- Students write on topics based on their own experiences.
- Students gather and organize ideas.
- Students define a topic sentence.
- Students write an outline for their writing.

Stage 2: Drafting
- Students write a rough draft.
- Students emphasize content rather than mechanics.

Stage 3: Revising
- Students reread their writings.
- Students share their writings with teacher.
- Students participate constructively in discussion about their writing with teacher.
- Students make changes in their compositions to reflect the reactions and comments of teacher. Also, students make substantive rather than only minor changes.

Stage 4: Editing
- Students proofread their own writings.
- Students increasingly identify and correct their own mechanical errors.

Stage 5: Publishing
- Students make the final copy of their writings.
- Students publish their writings in appropriate forms.
- Students share their finished writings with the teacher.

Each stage of this writing process help learners to identify and discuss their focus and activities throughout the process of writing (Lakshmi, 2006).

Past Studies on Writing Difficulties

Research on writing difficulties among ESL learners, like the studies by Baharudin et al (2023); Bulqiyah et al (2021), sheds light on the common challenges students face. Baharudin et al (2023) focus on the writing process and difficulties faced by ESL learners. They surveyed a diverse group of 179 ESL students using a survey questionnaire consisting of five sections with 41 items to identify specific challenges. The research found that students struggled with grammar, vocabulary, and organizing their ideas coherently. These linguistic limitations often made it difficult for them to meet the objectives of their writing assignments.

Similarly, the study by Bulqiyah et al (2021) looked at writing difficulties from the perspective of university students. They gathered data from 21 undergraduate students using questionnaires that asked about their experiences with essay writing and six of them were invited to the interview section. The findings revealed that students had trouble generating ideas, developing coherent arguments, and using academic language appropriately. Additionally, many students reported experiencing writing anxiety and a lack of confidence, which further hindered their ability to write effectively.

The implications of these studies are significant for educators and curriculum developers. Baharudin et al (2023) suggest that addressing the motivational and confidence issues underlying writing difficulties can greatly improve students' writing skills. They recommend supportive teaching methods that focus on building both language proficiency and student confidence. On the other hand, Bulqiyah et al (2021) highlight the importance of providing more practice opportunities and constructive feedback. Both studies advocate for a comprehensive approach that integrates language development with strategic writing practice, ensuring that ESL learners get the support they need to succeed in academic writing.

Past Studies on Writing Process

Many studies have been done to investigate different perspectives of writing process. Writing process in this research points to reasons on how writing difficulty can influence the composing process of writing. Avan (2015) reported a study on the effect of scaffolding on EFL students' writing ability through the writing process. Thirty second-year college students were the subjects of this experimental design study. The study concludes that scaffolding students' writings through the writing process approach met the students' needs in EFL writing, and improved their writing skill. It is also revealed that most of them have had difficulty in grammar.

Next, the study by Alodwan & Ibnian (2014) also looked at the importance of the writing process on the development of university students' essay writing skills. The respondents are 90 non-English major students who were classified to an experimental and control group. The study's findings demonstrated that students benefited a lot by understanding the writing process and positively impact their essay writing abilities. The researchers also recommended to pay more attention to teaching writing as a process, especially the prewriting stage, rather than a product.

Conceptual Framework

One main reason why writers perceive the writing process as a complicated process is that it depended on how they perceived writing difficulties. According to Rahmat, et.al (2021), writers' fear of writing builds up their perception of how difficult the writing task will be. This can become a cycle of writing prophecy which can influence writers' future writing experience. This study is based on Flower and Hayes (1981) writing difficulties and writing

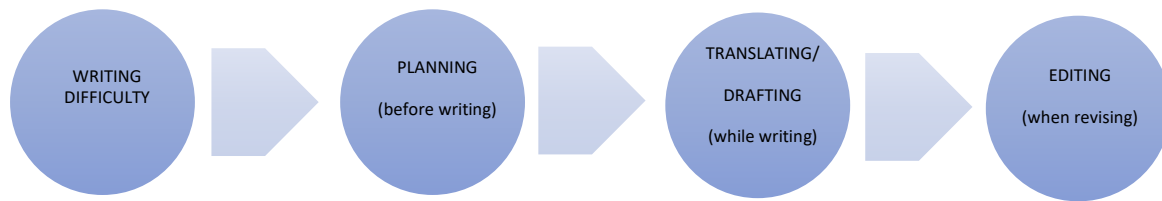process . The sub-categories and items are adapted from Pedric & Czalr (2003) as presented in figure 1 below.

Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study
The Influence on Writing Difficulty on Composing Process

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to investigate the influence of writing difficulty on the composing process in writing. A purposive sample of 267 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Flower and Hayes (1981); Pedric & Czalr (2003) to reveal the variables in table 1 below. The survey has 5 sections in total. Section A has items on demographic profile. Section B has 7 items on Writing Difficulty, Section C has 8 items on Planning for pre-writing stage, Section D has 14 items on Translating/Drafting, and the last section, Section E represents Editing cognitive process model with 12 items.

Table 1
Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECTION	COGNITIVE PROCESS MODEL Flower and Hayes (1981)	WRITING STAGE (Pedric & Czalr, 2003)	NO OF ITEMS
B	Writing Difficulty		7
C	Planning	Before Writing	8
D	Translating/Drafting	While writing	14
E	Editing	When Revising	12
			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 chosen/used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

Findings
Findings for Demographic Profile

Table 3
Percentage for Discipline

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

Table 3 demonstrates the percentage for the field of discipline among respondents. 54% of the respondents were from Science & Technology while 20% with a Social Sciences background. The remaining 26% came from the Business disciplines.

Table 4
Percentage for Level of Study

1	Matriculation/Foundation/ Pre-u	49%
2	Diploma	23%
3	Bachelor	28%

Table 4 shows the percentage for respondents' level of study. Majority of them (49%) are studying Matriculation or taking Foundation or Pre-U. Diploma students taking up to 23%, and 28% are doing their Bachelor Degree.

Table 5
Percentage for English Proficiency

1	Very weak	1%
2	Weak	6%
3	Average	57%
4	Good	30%
5	Excellent	6%

Table 5 indicates the percentage for English Proficiency among respondents. It can be seen that 93% of the respondents possess medium to high proficiency level. 57% of the respondents are ranged Average, 30% Good and 6% Excellent. While the lower proficient respondents are ranged as Weak for 6% and Very weak for only 1%.

Findings for Writing Difficulties
This section presents data to answer research question 1: How do writing difficulties influence writers?

Table 6
Mean for WRITING DIFFICULTY

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 goa 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 teachers explanation makes me feel that writing is difficult	2
Long term memory WDQ5 Writing essays are difficult because I do have background knowledge of the topic given	2.5
Individual paragraph WDQ6 Writing essays are 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 6 shows the mean score for Writing Difficulty items. All items recorded less than 3 mean scores. The highest average score is 2.9 for both Rhetorical Situation and Goal Setting items. Other challenges faced by respondents in writing are Individual Paragraph and Writing Process for 2.7% mean score each. The least writing difficulty item for only 2% mean score is Teacher Explanation.

Findings for Planning
This section presents data to answer research question 2: How does planning influence writing ? In the context of this study, this is measured by Before Writing.

Table 7
Mean for BEFORE WRITING (BW)

	Mean
BWQ1 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
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 7 reveals the mean score for Before Writing process. Six out of eight items recorded mean scores above 3.0. The highest mean score is on item 3 (M= 4) which indicates that the respondents refer to a proficient sample writing before they write. They also revise the requirements of the assignment and note down notes related to the writing topic with 3.9 and 3.8 mean scores respectively. The least mean score is on item four (M= 2.4) which indicates that the respondents disagree that they start writing without a written or mental plan.

Findings for Translating/Drafting

This section presents data to answer research question 3: How does translating/drafting influence writing? In the context of this study, this is measured by While Writing.

Table 8
Mean for WHILE WRITING (WW)

	Mean
WWQ1 I start with the introduction	4.6
WWQ 2 I stop after each sentence to read it again	4
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 in it	3.5
WWQ 6 I write bits of the text in my native language and then translate them in 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 similar English word that I know	4
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 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 8 indicates the mean score for While Writing Process. The highest mean score is on the first item (M = 4.6), where respondents start writing with Introduction. They also reread their writing to get ideas to continue (M=4.3) and use synonyms (M=4). The average score also demonstrates that the least mean score (M=2.6) is on item no 13, for monolingual dictionary use.

Findings for Editing

This section presents data to answer research question 4: How does editing influence writing? In the context of this study, this is measured by When Revising.

Table 9
Mean for WHEN REVISING (WR)

	Mean
WRQ1 I read my essay aloud	2.8
WRQ 2 I only read what I have written when I have finished the whole paper	3
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.
WRQ 5 I make changes in vocabulary	3.3
WRQ 6 I make changes in sentence structure	3.4
WRQ7 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 (eg. content, structure)	3.4
WRQ10 I I drop my first draft and start writing again	3
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 in a new perspective	3

Table 9 shows the mean score for When Revising process. The highest mean score is on the second last item (M=4.1) for respondents essay checking. With shared mean scores of 3.3 and 3.4, respondents make changes in vocabulary, sentence structure, content or ideas and focus on one thing at a time when revising. The lowest score (M=1.9) is for submitting a written paper without reading it.

Findings for Relationship between writing difficulties and the writing process
This section presents data to answer research question 5- Is there a relationship between writing difficulties and the writing process? To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between metacognitive, effort regulation, cognitive, social and affective strategies data is anlaysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in table 3, 4, 5 and 6 below.

Table 10
Correlation between Writing Difficulty and Planning

Correlations

		WRITINGDIFFICULTY	PLANNING
WRITINGDIFFICULTY	Pearson Correlation	1	.193[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
	N	267	267
PLANNING	Pearson Correlation	.193[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	267	267

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

Table 10 shows there is no association between writing difficulty and planning. Correlation analysis shows that there is a low significant association between writing difficulty and planning. (r=.193**) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant

at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a weak positive relationship between writing difficulty and planning.

Table 11
Correlation between Planning and Translating

Correlations

		WRITINGDIFFICULTY	TRANSLATING_DRAFTING
WRITINGDIFFICULTY	Pearson Correlation	1	.073
	Sig. (2–tailed)		.237
	N	267	267
TRANSLATING_DRAFTING	Pearson Correlation	.073	1
	Sig. (2–tailed)	.237	
	N	267	267

Table 11 shows there is no association between writing difficulty and translating. Correlation analysis shows that there is no significant association between writing difficulty and translating. (r=.073) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is no relationship between writing difficulty and translating.

Table 12
Correlation between Planning and Editing

Correlations

		WRITINGDIFFICULTY	EDITING
WRITINGDIFFICULTY	Pearson Correlation	1	.030
	Sig. (2–tailed)		.628
	N	267	267
EDITING	Pearson Correlation	.030	1
	Sig. (2–tailed)	.628	
	N	267	267

Table 12 shows there is no association between writing difficulty and editing. Correlation analysis shows that there is no significant association between writing difficulty and editing. (r=.030) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is no relationship between writing difficulty and editing.

Conclusion
Summary of Findings and Discussions

This paper presents the influence of writing difficulty on the composing process. The findings reveal that respondents didn't have much issue with writing difficulty in general. For the writing process, respondents seem to apply most of the strategies before writing. The similar finding is reported for while writing process, where respondents start writing with Introduction, reread their writing to get ideas to continue and use synonyms for uncommon English words they encounter. Since they have an average confidence level on vocabulary and grammar, they prefer to use bilingual dictionary rather than monolingual to help them in writing. When revising, respondents did check their work before submission and make changes in vocabulary, sentence structure, content or ideas and focus on one thing at a time. This finding implies that respondents are aware of the process in writing and take actions in each stage of the writing process. Meanwhile, the writing difficulty does not really hinder students from the writing activity except for their weak confidence in vocabulary and grammar. This specific writing difficulty is a similar finding as reported in Baharudin et al. (2023); Bulqiyah et al (2021) where these two issues are among the linguistic limitations students are struggling with.

The last research question query if there is a relationship between writing difficulties and the writing process. Based on the findings, there is no association between writing difficulty and planning, writing difficulty and translating, and writing difficulty and editing. This means that the level of difficulty a person experiences when writing does not influence the three processes (planning, translating and editing) of writing. Since the respondents are in the system where the writing process is made focus, they perhaps have a strong foundation on the composing process. By understanding this, it positively impacts their writing abilities (Alodwan & Ibnian, 2014).

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that writing difficulty does not have much influence on the composing process of writing. There may be individual differences in what influences writing difficulty. In addition, the other contributing factors that could be influencing writing difficulty need to be addressed in the future research. This could include elements such as writer's block, anxiety, topic familiarity, or environmental factors. Future research could also look at theories used in this study that emphasise the interconnectedness of planning, translating, and editing might need expansion since these components are not associated with writing difficulty, they must account for other factors.

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