

Writing Assignments Difficulties, Factors, and Solutions: ESL Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

Writing assignments have been considered challenging for English as a Second Language (ESL) students. Several studies have investigated writing difficulties, primarily focusing on lexical and grammatical problems. However, few studies have explored challenges at various stages of writing. This research examines teachers' views on the challenges ESL tertiary students face when writing descriptive essays in the three primary stages: pre-writing, during writing, and post-writing. It also explores the factors contributing to these challenges and provides suggestions for overcoming them. Explanatory research was conducted by collecting quantitative and qualitative data from a web-based questionnaire and semi-structured interviews and analyzing those datasets separately. Fifteen English teachers participated in the online survey, and five teachers underwent individual interviews. This research reveals the problems ESL tertiary students encounter at the different stages of writing essays. In the pre-writing stage, students struggled most with outlining. During writing, they worked most on avoiding plagiarism, writing well-structured sentences, and linking between sentences. In the post-writing stage, they worked most with editing and revising. The teachers identified a lack of knowledge and creativity, over-dependence on teacher feedback, and unawareness of the writing process as the main factors behind these difficulties. The teachers suggested numerous solutions to overcome the challenges, including continuous writing training, teacher guidance, and increasing students' awareness about writing stages by applying different digital techniques.

Keywords: editing and revising, lack of knowledge, over-dependence, outlining, three primary stages of the writing process

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Introduction

Writing is an essential productive skill ESL students need to learn. Writing well-structured paragraphs requires ESL students to acquire numerous skills (Tseng et al., 2019; Toba et al., 2019). For ESL students, writing is considered a demanding skill as it involves the processes of thinking, composing, and expressing ideas in language. Writing is complicated and challenging as it involves different sets of competencies and involves understanding, thinking, planning, and revising (Winatro, 2015). Writing has several stages: (1) selecting suitable sources, (2) reading texts, (3) taking notes, (4) planning and outlining, (5) combining various sources, (6) organizing paragraphs and (7) rewriting and proofreading (Bailey, 2015). Students need to be aware of these stages to write well.

Several factors are connected to writing difficulties, with learners' writing strategies and learning processes playing significant roles in shaping their writing abilities (Bakry & Alsamadani, 2015; Winatro, 2015). Teachers' teaching methods and involvement in writing instruction have also been considered essential factors influencing students' learning (Akhter et al., 2019; Tseng, 2019). Most importantly, students' emotions, motivation, and interest in writing are crucial factors in enhancing students' writing skills (Al Fadda, 2012; Moses & Mohammed, 2019).

ESL students encounter various obstacles when writing. The obstacles are products of such factors as students' vocabulary and diction (Fareed et al., 2019; Toba et al., 2019), understanding of grammatical features (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Toba et al., 2019), processes for exploring and generating ideas (Ceylan, 2019; Pablo et al., 2018), organization (Toba et al., 2019) and training (Ceylan, 2019). Previous studies have shown that ESL students' significant difficulties are linguistic and that they struggle with vocabulary and grammar.

Saudi students encounter various writing challenges, as evidenced by studies conducted by Al Fadda (2012), Al Khairy (2013), and Alghammas (2020). These challenges predominantly revolve around vocabulary, grammar, and writing cohesion. Alkubaidi (2019) demonstrated that the teacher-centred approach in the Saudi educational system results in students memorizing passages and encountering challenges in constructing well-structured paragraphs. She claimed that depending on communicative writing methods would inspire students more than focusing on form. Alghammas (2020) identified several factors that affect Saudi students' writing: lack of English writing practice, the negative impact of the Arabic language, instructors' focus on syntactic rather than semantic forms, ineffective teaching methods, and teachers' unwillingness to teach writing courses.

Significance of the study

A rapidly growing body of research has examined essay writing difficulties in many different settings. There is limited research on teachers' perspectives regarding the challenges students face at various stages of the writing process: pre-writing, during writing, and post-writing. The present study contributes to filling this research gap by surveying English language teachers at a Saudi University. It also explores the factors contributing to these difficulties and solutions to overcome them. This study will provide a basis for designing or applying appropriate teaching strategies for essay writing courses for tertiary students. Moreover, identifying factors contributing to writing difficulties will provide valuable insights for refining language curricula. The findings can be used to enhance language programs, ensuring they address the specific needs of ESL students, ultimately improving overall language proficiency.

Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- a) to investigate teachers' perspectives on ESL tertiary students' writing difficulties at the pre-writing, writing, and post-writing stages
- b) to delve into the factors contributing to writing difficulties
- c) to explore potential solutions to writing difficulties
- d)

Research Questions

RQ1: What do teachers perceive as Saudi tertiary students' primary difficulties with writing essays?

RQ2: What are the reasons behind those difficulties?

RQ3: What solutions offered by teachers could address those difficulties?

Literature Review

Essays are the most popular type of writing assignment in ESL universities (Van Geyte, 2013). An essay is a written composition that explores a specific topic, typically structured into distinct paragraphs, each dedicated to a significant point (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). The essential components of an essay include (1) an introduction paragraph designed to engage readers, (2) body paragraphs that elaborate on each sub-topic related to the central theme, and (3) a conclusion paragraph summarizing the key points of the essay.

In their systematic review of the writing challenges ESL elementary students face and the challenges encountered by their teachers, Moses and Mohammed (2019) explored two primary linguistic difficulties ESL students face in writing essays: lack of vocabulary and limited knowledge of grammar. Students and teachers regard language proficiency as the primary source of students' difficulties with writing (Akhter et al., 2019; Al Khairy, 2013; Alkubaidi, 2019; Fareed et al., 2016; Moses & Mohammed, 2019). Clear and well-structured paragraphs can be written by students who have a sufficient vocabulary and are familiar with various English grammatical rules. ESL students have reported their lexico-grammatical problems when writing essays (Albadi, 2015; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Ceylan, 2019; Dhanapal & Agab, 2023), including their lack of appropriate vocabulary and misuse of grammar. Moreover, lack of ideas and difficulty organizing ideas also hinder students' writing (Fareed et al. 2016; Pablo et al. 2018). Teachers have agreed that poor linguistic proficiency is the main challenge for ESL writers (Alghammas, 2020; Tseng, 2019). Both students and teachers agreed on considering language proficiency as the main challenge for writing which is classified as a linguistic difficulty (Al Khairy, 2013; Alkubaidi, 2019; Fareed et al., 2016; Dhanapal & Agab, 2023).

Scholars have identified other sources of ESL students' writing difficulties: cognitive difficulties, affective difficulties, pedagogical difficulties, lack of ideas, and difficulties with organizing ideas (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Fareed et al., 2016; Pablo et al., 2018). Cognitive problems affect students' ability to transfer features of their native language to their English writing, and affective difficulties influence students' and teachers' attitudes toward learning and teaching writing (Bulqiyah et al., 2021). Pedagogical difficulties arise due to teaching methods (Fareed et al., 2016). Students' readiness and motivation are also considered critical psychological factors. Teachers perceive students as struggling because students lack motivation and interest, are placed in classrooms with students of different levels, and lack professional experience.

Akhtar et al. (2019) summarised three main linguistic difficulties ESL learners encounter in their writing: grammar, coherence, and writing development. Psychological factors such as

learners' attitudes, anxiety, and lack of motivation are major in creating healthy learning environments. Another major problem is students' inability to recognize grammatical mistakes even when they focus on language more than content when writing. Most Arab university students have reported struggling with editing and revising their writing because they cannot detect their mistakes (Al Mukdad, 2019).

Lack of confidence and motivation, anxiety, fear of exams, and insufficient teacher involvement also result in students struggling with writing (Fareed et al., 2016; Tseng, 2019). Focusing on rubrics for assessment has been another crucial factor behind learners' low writing proficiency (Alkubaidi, 2019). ESL university students tend to memorize passages to pass writing courses (Alkubaidi, 2019). Moreover, the educational system influences what teaching methods are applied. In Saudi Arabia, university students rely on their teachers for direct monitoring of their learning, particularly in writing, and seek feedback to edit their writing. As a result, teachers focus more on form and writing mechanics than on writing's communicative aspect and the purpose of genre (Alghammas, 2020; Alkubaidi, 2019).

Applying various writing practices is instrumental in enhancing the writing skills of ESL university students. Adas and Bakir (2013) suggest that blended learning and online learning can inspire instructors to assign additional writing tasks to students, incorporating technologies like wikis. Participating in activities such as creating a class wiki not only encourages students to see writing as a step-by-step process but also promotes collaboration (Alghammas, 2020). These teaching methods may engage ESL university students and increase their motivation in writing classes (Alkodimi & Al-Ahdal, 2021). By integrating the comprehensive writing process, which includes prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing, students not only improve their writing skills but also develop a profound understanding of the art of writing, leading to an overall enhancement in their proficiency as writers (Rashid et al., 2022).

Training ESL university students on basic writing strategies needed in the three main stages (planning, writing, and editing) may help novice writers focus on writing good essays (Al Fadda, 2012; Cylan, 2019). Teaching ESL university students to integrate different direct strategies, including cognitive and compensation strategies, and indirect learning strategies, including the meta-cognitive, affective, and social strategies Winarto (2015) suggested, into their writing at the different stages can help them improve their writing skills. ESL university students need sufficient opportunities to practice writing continuously to overcome the difficulties they encounter and build their familiarity with varying writing processes (Al Mukdad, 2019). Improving students' self-assessment skills is essential to enhance their self-monitoring and self-evaluation skills (Winarto, 2015).

Previous studies have reported teachers' role in reinforcing learned writing skills and correcting problems by providing ESL students with effective feedback (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Cylan, 2019). Teachers must support their students with feedback to master writing techniques, improve self-editing (Al Mukdad, 2019), and learn autonomously (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Cylan, 2019; Tseng, 2019). Explaining linkers, citations, and references with suitable models may give students essential input for their writing development (Cylan, 2019). Additionally, teachers' choice of essay topics significantly affects student motivation. Writing about topics that interest them motivates students to read and persist when they encounter difficulties (Al Murshidi, 2014).

Based on available studies, there has been no prior investigation into the specific writing challenges experienced by ESL university students at each stage of the writing process. Researchers have focused on students' linguistic and psychological problems in their writing as a

whole rather than investigating problems at different writing stages. This study investigates teachers' perceptions of the main difficulties ESL university students encounter before writing while writing, and after writing to identify the causes of those difficulties. The study also investigates suggestions to overcome those difficulties.

Methodology

The study design is mixed-method, explanatory, and sequential. It was conducted by collecting quantitative and qualitative data from a web-based questionnaire and semi-structured interviews and analysing those datasets separately. Fifteen English teachers participated in the online survey, and five teachers underwent individual interviews. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with five teachers to complement the quantitative findings.

Participants

A total of 15 Non-native female English language teachers at the English Language Institute at Umm Al-Qura University participated in the present study. They were all teaching tertiary medical students. The study took place in the second semester of the first year of the academic year (2022-2023). Table One presents the participants' average age and years of teaching experience. The respondents at each level had different features.

Table 1. *Participants' characteristics*

Teaching rank	Mean age (SD)	Mean years of teaching experience (SD)
Lecturers 10	39.60 (5.40)	15 (5.99)
Professors 5	42 (10.8)	12 (9.17)

In this study, tertiary students study General English Course for 16 hours a week. The course lasts for ten weeks. The writing class was scheduled for two hours per week, employing a genre-based approach to teach students how to write descriptive essays. This method involved presenting two models to help students practice and enhance their understanding of the schematic structure of descriptive essays. Subsequently, students were tasked with applying the practiced structure to write about a famous person (see Appendix A for more details).

Research Instruments

Survey

The survey questions were derived from 15 criteria in Elbow and Belanoff's (2000) and Al Badi's (2015) surveys. Teachers filled out the survey after the English course to ensure they had observed students' writing difficulties across all three stages. As the course was conducted in English, data were gathered in English. The questionnaire items were formulated to address the research questions and organized based on their relevance to the three primary writing stages: pre-writing, writing, and post-writing. The first two items were related to pre-writing skills. The following seven items were related to the writing stage, and the last six were associated with the post-writing stage. The researcher used a five-point frequency rating scale (never, seldom, sometimes, often, usually). For example, teachers are asked to rate how often their students brainstorm and write down their ideas when they start writing. Appendix B presents the survey items. The survey was sent to teachers at Saudi University's English Language Institute via Google Forms. At the end of the survey, the teachers answered a few questions about their teaching

background and were asked to indicate if they would like to participate in a follow-up interview (by ticking a box in the online survey). A parallel questionnaire was distributed to students through a Google form; however, an insufficient number of responses were collected.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers as a follow-up to uncover reasons behind difficulties that emerged in the quantitative analysis (For more details, see Appendix C). Five survey respondents (four professors and a lecturer, see Table One) consented to participate in the interviews. Separate sessions were held with each respondent. The recorded interview sessions, lasting 30–45 minutes, commenced with an overview of the leading writing difficulties identified from the survey results. Respondents then answered questions about the reasons behind those difficulties (RQ2) and possible solutions (RQ3). To preserve anonymity, the five teachers were assigned codes ranging from T1 to T5.

Research Procedures

The data were collected three weeks after the completion of the writing course. The questionnaire was sent to the participants by email, and they were asked to provide answers to an online semi-structured questionnaire. The purpose of the study was explained on the first page of the questionnaire, and it was clearly stated that participation in this study is voluntary. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to complement the quantitative results and to answer the second and third research questions.

Data Analysis

The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were assessed through a pilot phase, during which three teachers completed the survey to identify potential design issues and flaws. The collected responses were then input into SPSS 20.0 for analysis. Thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2016) was employed to classify themes within the data.

Results

RQ1: Writing difficulties encountered by students at different writing stages.

To answer the first research question, the researcher calculated the frequency and corresponding percentages of responses, as shown in Table Two in Appendix D. Teachers reported several writing difficulties at different stages of writing. In the pre-writing stage, 59.9% of respondents identified outlining as the most challenging skill (criterion 2); contrastingly, brainstorming was 59.9% easy. While writing, students struggled most with avoiding plagiarism 79.9%, followed by linking between sentences correctly 79.9%, writing complete grammatical sentences 66.6%, writing topic sentences 59.9% and writing introductory paragraphs 53.2%. In the post-writing stage, they struggled with checking their vocabulary use 53.3%, use of grammar 46.6%, and use of proper mechanics (e.g., use of punctuation) 46.6%. Teachers reported that students find editing first drafts more complicated than final drafts.

RQ2: Factors behind students' writing difficulties

Interview responses facilitate interpreting students' writing difficulties more than multiple-choice responses do. In the semi-structured interviews, teachers explained three leading causes behind the identified difficulties.

Lack of previous knowledge and lack of creativity

Teachers emphasized that students may face challenges due to their limited understanding of critical writing terminology. It is worth noting that students faced significant difficulties with plagiarism because the term was new to them, and they were unaware of its meaning and consequences. T3 explained:

They have never been introduced to plagiarism. They were surprised when I told them not to copy and paste from available online sources.

Another prevalent challenge was writing outlines. Students lacked a proper understanding of how to structure and write outlines effectively. T4 highlighted:

When they start writing their outlines, they face challenges. They don't know how to write notes because they were not taught how to do it before entering the University or during their earlier education. Some of them wrote complete sentences; others just tried writing words, but they did not know that they needed to write outlines, not a sentence with verbs, just some vocabulary, some nouns and adjectives.

Teachers reported that students could not write their topic sentences and introductory paragraphs. Even after receiving detailed instructions on constructing topic sentences and various types of paragraphs, students tended to mimic provided examples and felt reluctant to generate their sentences and paragraphs. Even though they were taught in detail how to construct topic sentences and introductory paragraphs, they were given the components of each paragraph in detail. T5 commented on students' lack of creativity and confidence in composing their paragraphs:

They could not write creative topic sentences; they just copied what was in the model.

Similarly, T1 commented:

I think it is problematic because they follow the models. Yes, only four or five were very creative, and they were very good at writing. They have written things very interesting, but the rest they would copy the same, change one word, and it is the same. The model was supposed to be the perfect image, but it's not. It is a concise paragraph. It is an old style of writing, but it's still there. So they think it is 'Okay'.

Complete dependence on the teacher's feedback

Students struggled with editing their first drafts more than their final drafts due to poor peer review. When editing their first drafts, students depended on their teachers' feedback rather than on reviews from their peers. T3 commented:

It depends on the level of the students. Students could not spot their peers' mistakes as they were not advanced. Only three to four students have sharp eyes where they spot mistakes. And here's why: those are the advanced level.

T1 commented:

They do check for each other, but they just keep saying, "Oh, that's good. That's good" without giving any corrections or any feedback. No, because they all have the same level and the same background of writing.

T4 did not have students provide one another with peer reviews and focused on giving individual feedback to satisfy students' need to get high scores on their writing tasks and final exams. T4 provided a different explanation for why students struggle with first drafts more than with final drafts:

If you are unwilling to put in the effort now, it will not work out well later. I think it works. Last semester, my students did an excellent job on the final exam, except for the limited time, of course, and some of them couldn't finish. But they wrote good sentences with

verbs and complete sentences with punctuation. They impressed me with the final exam, but some of them couldn't finish it because of the time limit.

T3 agreed that peer review is unnecessary, arguing there is insufficient time for it. She preferred giving students her feedback rather than having them depend on peer review. She said:

I don't think we have sufficient time. This is the problem. You know, this book is not easy. I would say, it is for a higher level. We need a lot of time for speaking, for vocabulary units, and for grammar. Of course, I like to do paperwork, but it takes a lot of time.

Insufficient knowledge of the writing process

Teachers highlighted students' limited knowledge of the main stages of writing (pre-writing, writing, and post-writing) and the skills needed at each stage. Students tend to imitate the models given, produce the exact sentences, and use the same phrases and linking words. Students encountered the most difficulty in the final stage of the writing process, as they lacked awareness of their responsibilities in revising their first drafts and participating in peer reviews. T2 reported:

They have missed some grammatical mistakes and punctuation. They don't know how to give positive or negative feedback; they skip that. They think that's correct. They don't know. They are unaware of how to edit.

Similarly, T1 commented:

They found grammatical mistakes for each other. They found some vocabulary mistakes for each other, but they didn't care about the structure of the paragraph. Most of them didn't get this. They didn't understand the importance of this issue. I kept giving them individual advice that they needed to work again and rewrite, so they needed reminders. They think that this is unimportant.

Teachers highlighted the lack of correct use of grammatical rules and lack of coherence in students' writing. They highlighted students' inadequate use of vocabulary and proper grammatical mechanics as the main problems. T4 commented:

If they lack sufficient background knowledge in English grammar and punctuation, I cannot help them since I have already discussed the models with them, and I showed them: "Where's the full stop? Where is the comma? The letters are here. Capital! Is it the beginning of a sentence? Is it the name of a person? Is it a proper noun?" I've been on it since the start, but if they're not on board and we're already at the point of editing each other's work, it's a clear signal that there's a problem.

The shortage of writing classes and the limited time allocated to each class are crucial factors contributing to teachers having inadequate time to guide students through various writing stages. Teachers specified two hours weekly for writing practice, which was not enough for students to practice writing as T3 highlighted:

I faced the challenge of not having enough time to explain many concepts that my students were unaware of. They need to spend more time in writing, to make them aware of many writing mechanisms and strategies. Students must practice, but the time is so short, and they also complain about that.

RQ3: Teachers' Solutions

Teachers suggested several solutions for the difficulties found in each writing stage.

Pre-writing difficulties

Teachers considered teacher guidance and support important in preparing students to write. To help students write excellent and complete outlines, teachers discuss the main components of their writing and help students search for sources. T1 commented:

Allocating sufficient time for research, reading, and engaging with related examples to the target area. Explain it, give examples, and offer continuous support.

T5 commented:

Focus on pre-writing strategies, the “brainstorming technique.” We can employ five valuable strategies: listing, clustering, freewriting, looping, and asking questions. These strategies assist in generating and organizing ideas and facilitating the development of topics for writing.

During writing difficulties

Students need a lot of practice constructing complete grammatical sentences and coherent paragraphs. T2 highlighted the usefulness of using ready-made exercises:

Offering pre-designed exercises centred around constructing grammatically correct sentences related to the specific writing genre, may likely assist them in learning proper sentence construction and paragraph organization.

Students need to understand that writing is a process that involves different stages. T3 commented:

Understanding the idea that good writing needs time, and it involves editing, reviewing, and rewriting to achieve coherent results. It is essential to teach students the importance of editing and that writing should not be done within a single step.

T5 advised:

Draw their attention to the balance between content and punctuation. Make resources available for them and be open to support them.

T1 underscored the importance of students practicing writing complete grammatical sentences and coherent paragraphs in class:

Let them write in the class to implement the required skills and give them feedback while they write. Practice writing sentences like the ones they had mistaken and check their progress in learning the proper construction of similar sentences.

Most importantly, students need support and teacher feedback to navigate each step in the writing process. T3 recommended providing numerous valuable tips for writing first drafts:

Give plenty of tips and try to write more than a first draft. Also, there are helpful tips during writing: 1–Use simpler words and phrases. 2–Write shorter sentences but avoid choppiness. 3–Use important key terms consistently. 4–Balance the use of simple and sophisticated language.

Post-writing difficulties

Teachers commented on students' lack of editing strategies. Teachers can help students improve their editing skills by using available online apps and programs, guiding them through peer review, providing individual teacher feedback, and most importantly, training them to check and revise their writing. T1 and T4 provided the following tips:

More peer review—using apps and programs for checking grammar/spelling mistakes.

After writing, they can use their phones to check spelling. Also, give them accurate feedback individually. (T1)

1–Reread the story and make sure the sentences make sense. 2–Add phrases to make the story flow smoothly and eliminate unnecessary or redundant details. 3–Have a checklist to proofread for spelling, vocabulary, and grammar. (T4)

Discussion

The researcher explored teachers' perspectives on the difficulties encountered by students during the three main stages of writing (pre-writing, writing, and post-writing) (RQ1), investigated the reasons behind those difficulties (RQ2), and suggested solutions for overcoming them (RQ3).

In answer to RQ1 and RQ2, the quantitative and qualitative data showed that students struggle with various writing skills for various reasons. The most challenging skill was avoiding plagiarism. Many students lack a comprehensive understanding of the meaning and significance of plagiarism. A considerable number of Saudi language teachers may not be guiding their students on how to ethically incorporate and build upon ideas and information while giving proper attribution to prevent plagiarism. This finding agrees with Pablo et al.'s (2019) conclusion that teachers struggle to guide their students in how to avoid plagiarism.

The results indicate that students do not receive adequate training in crucial pre-writing strategies such as drafting and outlining. Teachers reported that, in the pre-writing stage, students' main difficulty was writing outlines because they were unfamiliar with the main techniques for writing outlines. Al Fadda (2012) concluded that novice writers would benefit from learning to prepare an outline before writing and to follow the three main stages of writing. These findings suggest that students need training in writing strategies. Such training can teach them to begin writing projects in ways that minimize stress later in the writing process (Ceylan, 2019).

The primary challenges students face in writing include constructing grammatically correct sentences, formulating effective topic sentences, and composing introductory paragraphs. Teachers explained that students depend on imitating models given and ignoring the importance of writing well-structured sentences. Students suppress their creativity to earn high scores on their writing tasks and final exams. This finding is consistent with Alghamms's (2020) and Alkubaidi's (2019) findings that Saudi students write to achieve specific grades. Even though Tseng (2019) argued imitation and exam-oriented pedagogy can help improve students' writing, students and teachers should not rely on these approaches as they may cost students their creativity and enjoyment of writing.

Saudi students struggle to write well-structured sentences even though their teachers explain and enforce grammar rules applicable to their writing tasks. Similarly, Al Fadda (2012), Al Khairy (2013) and Dhanapal and Agab (2023) found that grammatical mistakes were among Saudi learners' main writing challenges. Limited knowledge of grammar could lead to students' anxiety about writing grammatically correct sentences (Fareed et al., 2016). This finding is consistent with Akhater et al. (2019) finding that 39% of ESL students struggle with grammar and coherency in their writing.

Teachers reported that, in the post-writing stage, students struggle most with editing. They struggle to check their vocabulary use, grammar, and writing mechanics. Students also lack training in reviewing their peers' work and do not appreciate the importance of self-assessment. Saudi students regard writing as a finished product rather than a process. Writing instructors exacerbate this misconception if they do not teach their students to write multiple drafts. Alghammas (2020) found that Saudi students write and submit their writing for grading without

making purposeful revisions. This finding confirms the importance of each writing stage in the process of writing as advised by Rashid et al. (2022).

Teachers claimed that students' ignorance of peer review and dependence on teacher feedback were the main factors behind students' difficulties with editing. These findings suggest that teachers should prioritize improving students' ability to assess writing, as teaching them to correct mistakes themselves would benefit them and their peers. Teachers should evaluate their training strategies according to whether they improve students' learning skills (Winatro, 2015).

Alkubaidi (2019) criticized the transmissive teaching system in Saudi Arabia, pointing out that it fosters excessive dependence on teachers among students. A suggested alternative, as proposed by one teacher, is to promote a practice where students independently edit their work before seeking feedback from teachers. Teachers would provide feedback after students had exerted effort to correct their mistakes. While teacher involvement with students' writing is essential, it should be restricted as per Cylen's (2019), Bulqiah et al.'s (2021), and Fareed et al.'s (2016) suggestions. They insist on the importance of teacher feedback for improving students' writing. Teachers can provide written or oral feedback only after students edit their writing (Rashid et al., 2022).

Teachers mentioned numerous solutions for each writing stage. Teacher support and guidance are essential in all stages of writing. Teachers need to encourage students and motivate them to write about topics they are interested in. Additionally, teachers ought to offer students training in utilizing various techniques for brainstorming and revising their first drafts. This finding supports previous research conducted in the Arab world (Al Fadda, 2012; Al Mukdad, 2019; Alkubaidi, 2019; Alghammas, 2020). Using online technologies in writing classes can make students better writers. Alghammas (2020) reported using blended learning in writing and wikis to improve Saudi university students' writing skills. Adas and Bakir (2013) reported that EFL students' writing skills improved significantly as their use of topic sentences, paragraphs, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation marks, and capitalization improved.

While teacher feedback is essential, students need to practice giving peer feedback in class. Doing so could improve students' awareness of their mistakes. This solution is consistent with Tseng's (2019) conclusion that error awareness is vital for students to learn to correct themselves. In Al Khairy's (2013) study, Arab students also suggested peer feedback as a valuable method for enhancing writing skills. Writing continuously was considered crucial for improving students' writing skills. Al Mukdad (2019) indicated that teachers dedicate more class time to writing activities and that universities assign extra classes to ESL students who need them. Students should have sufficient opportunities to practice writing. Al Mukdad (2019) recommended acquainting ESL university students with the writing process by providing opportunities for them to practice each stage of writing repeatedly. She insisted on the importance of knowing the writing processes (generating ideas, planning, drafting, and revising) from the beginning of the course so that students can write successfully.

Conclusion

This research investigated teachers' views on the challenges ESL tertiary students face during the three main writing stages (pre-writing, writing, and post-writing) and the factors behind those challenges. The participants suggested various solutions to the difficulties students encounter at each stage. This research reveals the problems ESL tertiary students experience at the different stages of writing essays. In the pre-writing stage, students struggled most with outlining. During

writing, they worked most on avoiding plagiarism, writing well-structured sentences, and linking between sentences. In the post-writing stage, they mainly worked on editing and revising. The teachers identified a lack of knowledge and creativity, overdependence on teacher feedback, and unawareness of the writing process as the main factors behind these difficulties. The teachers suggested numerous solutions to overcome the difficulties, including continuous writing training, teacher guidance, and increasing students' awareness about writing stages by applying different digital techniques.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. One limitation was the participants' gender. All participants were female due to the separate classes for male and female students in the institution where the study was conducted. Future research should include male and female learners to explore the generalizability of the reported findings. Another limitation was focusing only on teachers' views. The researcher distributed a questionnaire to students to compare their opinions with those of teachers, but the number of responses received was inadequate. Future studies need to examine students' perspectives to compare what they regard as difficulties with those reported by teachers in this study.

The study results have significantly contributed to understanding Saudi tertiary students' difficulties in writing essays and in offering better teaching practices to enhance writing instruction. The study would provide an initial base for continuing investigation writing pedagogy. This study carries a significant implication, as its findings could potentially have a positive impact on the English curriculum and educational policies within the Saudi higher education system. Writing challenges will likely be minimized by improving writing practices and integrating new technology in writing.

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