



## Students' writing performance in higher education: An empirical study in English creative writing class

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### Suggested Citation:

Siti, S. (2024). Students' writing performance in higher education: An empirical study in English creative writing class. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Science*, 19(3), 279-289. <https://doi.org/10.18844/cjes.v19i3.7109>

Received from January 01, 2024; revised from March 23, 2024; accepted from May 11, 2024.

Selection and peer review under the responsibility of Prof. Dr. Hafize Keser, Ankara University, Turkey (retired)

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iThenticate Similarity Rate: 0%

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### Abstract

This study investigated students' writing performance concerning the problems that obstruct their perception of good writing skills. It also examined students' ability to identify their composition, including their introductory paragraph, supporting sentences, concluding paragraph, supporting sentences, concluding paragraph, and correcting linguistic errors such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation, among other things. Using a qualitative method, data were collected from undergraduate students who enrolled in a creative writing class. Thirteen students, ages twenty to twenty-one, took part in the interview process to find out more about the strategies and resources available to them for enhancing the linguistic accuracy of their writing. The findings revealed that most of the students' issues were related to language use. Mastering a second language is a different issue, in that, they must learn the grammar, vocabulary, syntactic structures, and other aspects of the new language. Students who had difficulty reading and writing in English had to work harder to develop concepts and thoughts for their writing assignments.

**Keywords:** Creative writing; English language; higher education; performance; undergraduate.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Writing may be defined as a process of communication in which numerous ideas and someone's feelings come together in written form. Effective writing is critical, and it becomes more critical as communicative language instruction principles (Uludag et al., 2019). Compared to the other three abilities to listen, read, and speak, writing is frequently seen as the most complex, making it a difficult skill for most EFL learners (Torrance, 2000). This is because writing is a skill that must be learned and taught and cannot be acquired spontaneously (Naghdi-pour & Kadhim, 2021; Qin & Liu 2021). Moreover, teaching writing in English requires careful planning because writing skills are not automatically accepted by second language learners (Cahyono et al., 2016); thus, writing is placed at the final stage of language development within the theory of second language acquisition (Eckstein & Ferris 2020). Additionally, conveying thoughts and emotions through writing is a complex process.

When students are required to write, they must consider three critical elements: the subject, the goal, and the audience (Torrance, 2000). The subject demotes the issue being discussed, the goal denotes the text's function (whether intended to provide an example, explain, or debate), and the audience suggests the intended readers. In other words, to write an adequate composition, students must possess sufficient knowledge of these three components.

Furthermore, it is critical to remember that writing is distinct from other skills. Writing is not a skill that a man acquires spontaneously like speaking is. It is a taught behavior that is culturally specific (Kimb et al., n.d.). On the one hand, it is considered that writing requires various abilities and conventions, including writing readiness and knowledge of grammatical rules, for pupils to develop into proficient and successful writers. However, those could turn into a problem that comes up while students are learning and receiving writing training in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers frequently only pay attention to the final product of these students' writing, placing no pressure or intention on them and offering no helpful criticism on the process by which they were able to produce such a superb composition.

However, writing is about more than just putting ideas down on paper; it's also about effectively presenting and expressing ideas (Nik et al., 2010). It turns out that the teacher does not give pupils this kind of helpful criticism on their writing as long as they turn in the project on time. Students may not always benefit from critical feedback from teachers because they are unable to edit their work. It is vital to reexamine the events surrounding the writing class and to investigate further how the writing class ought to be run to meet the expectations.

Writing requires several skills and conventions like the organization to develop ideas and information (Wright et al., 2021). Furthermore, the accuracy in choosing the correct words to avoid ambiguity and the right use of grammatical order is a subject matter in writing. Students need to have a lot of practice in writing, such as writing a diary every day and practicing all day long (Putri et al., 2015). However, because they are not exposed to enough linguistic input and scaffolding or feedback sources, undergraduate students in EFL contexts rarely devote extra time to addressing language-related concerns in their written work (Naghdi-pour & Kadhim, 2021). As a result, this study looks at a few variables that influence students' writing abilities as well as troublesome areas, like spelling, grammar, and punctuation. It also looks at the probable tools or methods that students use to find and correct grammatical mistakes in their work. It is hoped that this research can help educators and EFL in comparable settings create more engaging learning environments where students can experiment with different learning activities and receive feedback on their writing for improved possibilities to address linguistic problems.

### 1.1 Conceptual or theoretical framework

The second half of the 20th century saw a significant evolution in writing pedagogy, moving from product-based to process-based instruction, genre-based instruction, eclectic approaches, and writing

across the curriculum, to name a few. This led to the development of a variety of instructional strategies, from those that emphasize form to those that emphasize meaning. The learning-to-write process is the strongest indicator of the recent transition in writing teaching away from linguistic product-based methods (Knoch et al., 2015; Peltzer et al., 2022). The writing-to-learn dichotomy, with the latter gaining more emphasis as writing becomes more widely acknowledged in the creation and exchange of knowledge across disciplines. It has been proposed that including students in disciplinary content will scaffold their written linguistic accuracy development and expand their repertoire of social literature, even if the majority of research on accuracy development in writing classrooms and programs has been on corrective feedback techniques. Still in its early stages, research on how writing-to-learn perspectives facilitate disciplinary acculturation and help students become more accurate writers (Ferris et al., 2013).

Since the goal of any written corrective feedback (WCF) intervention is to enhance linguistic accuracy, the majority of research on the development of linguistic correctness in L2 writing classes focuses on WCF or grammar correction. Supporters of remedial theories for students' writing focus on language flaws or challenges. One of these is the noticing hypothesis, which holds that learning requires exposure to bad or inaccurate occurrences of the target language. WCF is a form-focused pedagogical intervention that can draw language learners' attention to form within the framework of a communicative act. Learners can detect gaps in their interlanguage and take steps to correct them by using mediating learning tools and resources when they review and reflect on the feedback or input they have received. While criticism of writers' errors is essential for improving writing, it is insufficient.

The output hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of students' interaction with input, contends that language learners want chances to converse with native speakers of the language to validate their theories and spot linguistic gaps. It is believed that students move from fluency to linguistic correctness and may adjust or fill up the gaps in their language knowledge when they become aware of weaknesses in their interlanguage. In a similar vein, corrective feedback techniques should be incorporated into second-language writing workshops according to skill acquisition theory. This theory suggests that the process of fixing mistakes and filling in gaps in learners' interlanguage may lead to a rise in language automatization. Put differently, pupils practice different parts of the target language for long enough to make their explicit knowledge implicit or consolidated.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study**

The problems of this research are formulated as follows: (1) to what extent can students in higher education identify and fix their written linguistic errors? (2) what strategies and resources do EFL students in higher education fix their written linguistic errors?

## **2. METHOD AND MATERIALS**

A descriptive research methodology is used in this study. The environment, the participants, the design of the study, the tools used for research, and the process are all included in the methodology section. Although the organization and language of the written records are relevant to the essays of the students, the study's data source was the written English class students. It is crucial to dig further into the phrases "data" and "source of data," which are essential components of any research required to address the issues addressed in this study.

### **2.1 Participants**

The participants were students enrolled in the fifth semester and joined an English-creating writing class and the ages ranged between 20 and 21 years old in STKIP PGRI Bangkalan, Madura Island, East Java Province, Indonesia.

## 2.2 Data collection tools

As the most common components of linguistic accuracy, spelling, grammar, and punctuation, students were instructed to thoroughly proofread their papers to identify and fix any potential language errors. An additional study topic was addressed by interviewing the teachers and students to learn more about their perspectives on their work. The questions mostly addressed the writing assignments and projects the students completed, the feedback they got, and the methods they employed to cut down on grammatical mistakes in their work.

## 2.3 Data analysis technique

In this study, students manually counted the spelling, grammatical, and punctuation mistakes they found and corrected as part of the data analysis technique. Transcripts of the participant interviews were filed. The scripts underwent a thematic analysis to identify reoccurring themes and patterns and ascertain how they interacted with one another.

## 3. RESULTS

The first part discusses students' composition, including their introductory paragraph, supporting sentences, concluding paragraph, and correct linguistic errors such as spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc. Students were asked to write an essay on a topic of a person they adore much. The tables below show particular samples of the students' composition in their spelling, grammar, and others (table 1).

**Table 1**

*Extracts on error correction attempts from students' composition*

Error attempt	Example
Spelling	Original:.... <i>she will do her best for her family*</i> ... Edited:.... <i>she will do her best for her family</i> ...
Grammar	Original: <i>She does not fake smiles</i> ... Edited: <i>Her smile is not fake</i> ...
Punctuation	Original:.... <i>my mother is that she is naturally*</i> , friendly welcoming... Edited:.... <i>my mother is that she is naturally friendly and welcoming</i> ...

Besides, the students' composition is also discussed here and Table 2 presents the samples of their parts of the composition, namely the introductory paragraph, supporting sentences, and concluding paragraph. An introductory paragraph contains a thesis statement that introduces the essay's main idea. A thesis statement serves several purposes, including clearly stating the essay's major issue, enumerating its subtopics, mentioning the structure of the essay, and indicating where it should be placed usually after the introduction (Alice & Ann 1996).

A thesis statement is a statement that instructs the reader on how to view the meaning of the topic at hand. It is also called a road map; it tells the readers what to expect from the rest of the text. A thesis statement is usually a single sentence near the beginning, but often it is at the end of the first paragraph that presents arguments to the readers. As seen below, thesis statements are written by subjects.

**Table 2**

*Student's original essay taken from students' account*

<i>Introductory paragraph</i>	<i>My idol and my role model is Iqbal Dhiafakhri Ramadan. He is an actor and singer from Jakarta.</i>
<i>Supporting sentences</i>	<i>...when he was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade of middle school, Iqbal left his boy band because at that time he got a scholarship at UWC America, he preferred to continue his education rather than his career even though at that time his career could be said as a successful career. After 2 years in America, he returned to Indonesia and returned to the world of entertainment after a vacuum of several years.</i>

*Concluding Paragraph*

*...for Iqbal thank you for being an idol who provides a good example for his fans. I Love you...*

*...I like her because she can do anything in her youth. She can inspire many people, especially women I want to be like her because she can build her business without her parents' help but she makes her parents proud of her. And she said that her biggest inspiration is her parents and it same as me...*

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In some essays written by the subjects, a concise introductory paragraph that does not expose the readers to much information can lead them to predict what the essay is about. As shown in the example below, the essay talks about an idol. Another student wrote a short description of someone in their life. This is the introduction that may introduce what the writer wants actually to share. It is a concise and clear sentence. Since it is a descriptive essay, the first to come up is dealing with the introduction of the person discussed, and the writer wants to describe his mom as a role model in his life. It suits the term of leading readers to what is the essay going to say. Mentioning the person's name that will be discussed is another exciting part of this introduction because the reader pays attention carefully to the name itself.

One of the students wrote a complete sentence in the part of the introduction because it mentions the name of the figure that the writer likes. The writer tries to introduce who she adores by saying the family member of Putri Tanjung. But it can be assumed that not everyone knows who Chairul Tanjung is, even his daughter, namely Putri Tanjung. What the writer should propose is adding additional information about it. The teacher also asked the students to compose another topic of writing. It was recount text; telling a phenomenon or experience, they have ever had in their life. The introduction of the essay is complete enough since it has several sentences and a thesis statement.

One of the essays shows a good starting point by mentioning the exact time the story happened and the other feelings that the writer felt at that time. Then, it is also still in the introduction part of the essay, and the thesis statement was there. The writers mentioned the specific activity in this part where he met his idol, a football player. It is very usual, but the writer tries to inform the reader with his main idea or topic sentence of the essay. This essay is mainly started with a straight topic sentence which is relatively short and very general. It is not a good introduction; the point is in 'I got a lot of moments. It is clear that readers only be given moments without knowing whether the moments are entertaining or not.

One example below indicates a different case from the previous model. This is the first part of the introduction. From several sentences, one sentence refers to the main idea. However, if the writer has written down the word 'fun moments', it is better for him to enclose what moment is this. It is better to do this since it raises the reader's interest to come closer to the essay. We figure maybe there is a reason the writer did not put the 'moment' itself. Another confusing essay that the students wrote was there was no introduction in this essay. Another essay subject that the students should compose is a kind of an argumentative essay. The students are given a free topic to arrange based on the topic they most like. It is interesting to look at the results and have the patterns of their essays.

Another essay shows the first part of the essay which is initiated by mentioning her hobby. The writer focuses on one hobby to be discussed in her essay, listening to music. In her first paragraph, in terms of the introduction, she mentions one reason why she likes that hobby, listening to music. Music can make her feel comfortable. Hence, the thesis statement exists at the end of the paragraph. It is similar to this example below since the essay talks about student roles on campus in an argumentative essay. It should be highlighted that there should be at least one main idea or topic sentence in the introductory paragraph.

The concluding paragraph is another critical component of an essay since it reminds the reader of the essay's thesis statement. The final sentence wraps up the paragraph's subject development and lets the reader know that it is complete. The writer wrapped the essay first for the two concluding paragraphs in the first example. This is what we call an excellent paragraph since it wraps up the important point and

again the writer reminds the main idea by using other words but still in similar issues. Knowing the students' productions by students above, it can be said that writing is more intricate and abstract than speech (Chen & Zhang, 2019). Students need to have more practice because sometimes writing could torment students. Grammar norms and writing readiness are two of the many conventions and abilities needed to write well. Additionally, since writing is the act of putting ideas on paper and expressing them properly, teachers encounter great difficulties when teaching this type of talent. Writing is first and foremost a cognitive process. It's a challenging skill to learn. It is drafted, revised, and edited over an extended period. Students and instructors should work and cooperate to reach a satisfactory writing proficiency level. Thus, one of the studies proposed that writing teachers focus on the process of writing rather than the final product (Lan et al., 2019).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

According to the findings of the interviews, instructors must carefully select assignments that demand that students focus on the writing and editing processes. According to Myhill et al. (2013), this entails giving students time to work on a paper, time to work both individually and in collaboration with others, time to handle the content, time to organize, and eventually time for proofreading. This is the kind of thinking that leads to discoveries being made by others. Put another way, if instructors encourage their students to write frequently, they can help them improve as writers. Hence, it has been asserted that great teachers write and engage their students in their writing processes and outputs (Benetos & Bétrancourt, 2020). In their study, the direct experience with the assignments teachers assign to their students shows the students acquire a better sensitivity to the writing issues pupils face (Hajar et al., 2021). Thus, teachers should initiate their writing, as writing implies exchanging and discovering new ideas, which helps both parties. Then, it is emphasized that "there is no set of criteria that can 'transform education' unless teachers cherish and challenge the human heart, which is at the center of good teaching". In other words, teachers should actively listen to and stimulate the students, and share their viewpoints and ideas with them, to become more receptive and accepting of them in the long run (Li & Casanave, 2012; Lestari et al., 2021).

Furthermore, students must learn to think critically and creatively when they write (Zhang & Hyland, 2018). They contend that a skilled writer uses critical thinking skills all along the way. They go on, "No combination of writing ideas and strategies can ever help you write carefully if you lack critical thinking." Teachers should so promote and provide opportunities for pupils to explore beyond their current level of knowledge, be creative with language, and experiment with the effects of writing. The act of articulating new ideas and continuously using their hands and thoughts fosters a special "process" for learning reinforcement, which aids in our children's engagement with a foreign language. Writing is an essential part of any language study since it is closely connected to thinking (Lim & Polio, 2020).

Therefore, when writing, lecturers should learn not to take themselves too seriously. "It is not a sin to toss away an entire writing page if it is simply not functioning (not correct)" is something that lecturers might remind your students from time to time. As a result, the sharing of fresh ideas will make instructors and students feel fulfilled and more understanding. Furthermore, it's a commonly believed belief that a student needs to read a much to be a good writer. This is frequently the case since reading helps pupils become competent (Li & Casanave, 2012). Reading and writing are connected processes, just as speaking and listening, according to the Indonesian Ministry of Education. This illustrates the relationship between writing and reading since writers create meaning from their words, while readers derive meaning from the books they read. To conceive, construct, and arrange ideas to write correctly and effectively, both teachers and students need to read a lot.

In addition, kids who read a lot can use a variety of language abilities when they formulate and write down their ideas and thoughts. Our biggest wish is that instructors will encourage pupils to read widely.

Even if it is not easy to foster and maintain students' passion for reading, instructors should start by doing a good job of motivating their students, as mentioned (Yu & Hu, 2017). We may encourage our kids to read by incorporating newspapers, magazines, and other reading materials into our lectures. Students who read widely will therefore become more skilled and accomplished writers. Additionally, teachers should help students understand why and how to write as well as how to write freely, eloquently, and effectively. They should also encourage students to assess correctly, using either an analytical or holistic approach (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). Zheng & Yu, 2019). For this reason, the assignments that are given to the students should be pertinent, realistic, and meaningful (Tok & Kandemir, 2015). Furthermore, according to one study, students ought to recognize the importance of writing as a medium for communication and learning (Mahfoodh, 2017). Children benefit much from writing because it allows them to experience the "thinking process" or "writing process," which is divided into three stages: brainstorming before writing, writing and revising, and editing (proofreading).

Writing is a vital tool for students to learn and communicate, therefore its significance stems from their capacity to develop language skills, including fluency, accuracy, and the appropriateness of meanings and messages. Writing is therefore a key technique of assessment in our educational system. Most tests and evaluations involve written performance analysis. Because writing is the basis for student assessments, students must improve and refine their writing skills (Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019; Carey et al., 2022; Yu & Xu 2024). However, the main motivation for kids to become proficient writers is to use their writing skills creatively to communicate with others and the outside world. Therefore, for pupils to achieve the minimal degree of writing proficiency required of them, teachers and students must collaborate closely. We think instructors ought to be conscious of the various needs and preferences of their students. Teachers must therefore assess and consider how they are teaching writing (Barton et al., 2023). Teachers can also decide to register for a "professional development course" or a "refresher course" to stay up to date and meet the specific needs and demands of today's students.

Just like any other ability, writing requires a great deal of practice and feedback to become second nature (Parr & Timperley, 2010). Additionally, there were few systematic initiatives to support students in continuing to improve their linguistic accuracy in this context, such as strategy education and training. Except for a few instances in which disciplinary faculty emphasized the value of linguistic accuracy by, for instance, emphasizing a few specific flaws, students were responsible for fixing linguistic errors in their writing.

Students employed several tools and tactics (Flores-Ferrés et al., 2020; Plakans et al., 2019) to correct language errors in their work while receiving little assistance from their lecturers. To improve their exam performance or gain higher ratings, many students edit or proofread their written work. They were mainly motivated by personal goals, career plans, and access to many online learning resources. Even though there is a lot of evidence that corrective feedback can help students improve their linguistic accuracy in writing (Zhao, 2010), some teachers might have been put off by low expectations from their institutions and practical constraints like a lot of teaching and not enough training (Naghdipour & Kadhim, 2021). They might also think that giving feedback on language-related issues is not their job.

Hence, students' attitudes about what should be important changed because of their disciplinary acculturation. They thought content, expertise, or language should be more important (Koltovskaia, 2020). Also, language learning programs and disciplinary programs have different ideas and expectations about what students should learn. They also used more peer feedback and looked for technology-based tools to help them improve and correct their mistakes (Alobaid, 2020). One possible explanation for the discrepancy could be that these kids are more interested in language learning abilities and have less familiarity with disciplinary topics.

## 5. CONCLUSION

According to the findings of this study, significant exposure to the English language has improved the writing skills of undergraduate students. Evidence suggests that these undergraduates have learned writing abilities and have progressed to become excellent writers. It is believed that prolonged exposure and reading help develop developing strong writing abilities. Writing is difficult and time-consuming, but regular exposure to reading and writing will enhance writing skills. Overall, despite the possibility that the study's results will spark more conversation on second language development in writing, the small sample size makes it challenging to extrapolate the results to other EFL contexts. However, the study has several pedagogical ramifications for situations in which the use of English as a medium of instruction has been mandated to better prepare students for their futures in the classroom and the workplace. The results demonstrate that early error detection and repair skills training may equip students with the language skills they need to overcome linguistic obstacles in their academic writing.

Similarly, the English discipline department could advocate for more useful strategies to help students edit their written work rather than distributing rubrics and marking schemes. Faculty may, whenever and wherever it is required, look for ways to acquaint students with alternate feedback strategies and resources to assist them make better compromises between language knowledge and disciplinary knowledge, even if time constraints or administrative responsibilities prohibit them from doing so. To improve their comprehension of these strategies, teachers should, for instance, encourage students to attend writing centers, learning clubs, and laboratories in addition to taking part in formative assessments. Strategies like self-editing and peer-editing. Providing whole-class comments on the most prevalent faults after each significant student submission by constructing brief mini-lessons of 15 to 20 minutes might be another attempt to assist students in minimizing language-related errors in their writing. This might enhance students' understanding of the need to write grammatically acceptable texts in academic environments and improve the quality of their written work. However, there are limits that future research should address when researching students' written language accuracy.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Ethical Approval:** The study adheres to the ethical guidelines for conducting research.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

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