

# **Evaluating the Impact of Diverse Writing Practices on EFL Learners' Proficiency and Writing Anxiety**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines how varied writing practices influence the writing performance and emotional responses of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Given that writing is widely regarded as one of the most demanding language skills, particularly in foreign language contexts, the research focuses on the integration of project-based learning, dialogue journals, automated writing evaluation (AWE), and self-regulated learning (SRL). The aim is to assess their effects on key aspects of writing: grammar, vocabulary, content, coherence, text length, and writing anxiety. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, the study involved 20 B2-level EFL students, equally assigned to experimental and control groups. Over an eight-week period, both groups completed structured weekly writing tasks, but the experimental group received supplementary instruction incorporating the four targeted writing strategies. A holistic scoring rubric was used to assess writing performance, and focus group interviews were conducted to capture learners' perceptions. Quantitative analysis revealed that the experimental group demonstrated statistically significant improvement in grammar and vocabulary, with no notable gender differences. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data yielded two main themes: (1) challenges in the writing process, such as idea generation and coherence, and (2) increased motivation and heightened grammar awareness. Students reported that despite initial difficulties—especially related to translation and coherence—the implemented practices enhanced their motivation and confidence. These findings highlight the pedagogical value of integrating structured, varied writing activities into EFL instruction. The study concludes by recommending broader adoption of such practices to promote both linguistic competence and affective growth in language learners.

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# INTRODUCTION

In English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, writing is widely recognized as one of the most challenging productive skills for learners. This difficulty is attributed to the complexity of writing, which demands mastery of grammar, vocabulary, coherence, genre conventions, and self-regulation (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2019). Writing enables learners to convey emotions, thoughts, plans, and experiences through written language—making it an indispensable tool of expression both individually and socially (Hastomo et al., 2025). Its importance in academic and professional communication underscores the necessity of effective pedagogical approaches to writing instruction (Li & Cai, 2023). However, EFL learners often face writing anxiety, motivation issues, and limited feedback, inhibiting their writing performance (Irawati et al., 2022).

Key concepts central to this study include writing practices, writing skills, and writing anxiety. Writing practices refer to structured instructional activities such as free writing, dialogue journals, peer feedback, project-based tasks, and the use of automated tools (Zhang, Tan & Sinha Roy, 2022). Writing skills encompass grammar accuracy, lexical range, cohesion, coherence, and text length (Irawati et al., 2022). Writing anxiety is defined as the cognitive and somatic apprehension faced during the writing process, often resulting from linguistic uncertainty, performance pressure, or classroom dynamics (Li & Cai, 2023; Irawati et al., 2022).

Numerous interventions have been explored to enhance EFL writing skills. A systematic review by Zhang, Tan, and Sinha Roy (2022) found that methods such as cooperative learning, teacher feedback, technology integration, and project-based learning positively influenced writing competence (Zhang et al., 2022). Among these, project-based learning demonstrated significant gains: students' post-test scores improved markedly over pre-tests, indicating enhanced writing performance (Turn to project-based learning study). Meanwhile, automated writing evaluation (AWE) tools like WhiteSmoke or similar software yielded significant improvement in lower-proficiency learners' writing after systematic feedback (Pariyanto & Tungka, 2024).

The role of self-regulated learning (SRL) in writing instruction is also well documented. A recent mixed-method study found that SRL-based instruction significantly improved academic writing skills across varying self-efficacy levels and fostered learner autonomy (Fitriati et al., 2023; Xu, 2021). Another emerging intervention is the integration of AI tools, including ChatGPT, to support EFL learners' idea generation, revision, and feedback processes while preserving learner agency (Han et al., 2023).

Writing anxiety has been extensively investigated. A review by Li and Cai (2023) identified that anxiety is strongly linked to lower writing performance and that interventions—such as peer collaboration, positive teacher feedback, and structured practice—can mitigate its negative effects (Li & Cai, 2023). Irawati et al. (2022) similarly found that group work, positive feedback, and multi-dimensional teaching improve accuracy, complexity, and fluency in writing—while reducing anxiety (Irawati et al.,

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2022). Reflection and journaling have likewise been highlighted as effective for developing writing ideas, self-awareness, and reducing affective barriers (Nückles et al., 2020). Dialogue journals, widely used in EFL contexts, also encourage communicative confidence and reduce avoidance of writing tasks (Mirhosseini, 2009; Johnson & Cheng, 2019).

Despite this wealth of research, few studies directly compare different writing practices such as project-based tasks, dialogue journals, automated feedback, and SRL-based instruction—in terms of their effect on writing skills and anxiety among EFL learners. Existing literature often examines single interventions in isolation, primarily in controlled quasi-experimental designs or single contexts. Moreover, there is limited evidence comparing the efficiency of these practices across aspects like grammar, coherence, lexical richness, motivation, self-efficacy, and anxiety reduction simultaneously.

In this study, which involves the implementation of various practices to support the development of writing skills, the following research questions were formulated:

- 1. Are the pre-test and post-test scores, based on a holistic scoring rubric, of the experimental and control groups statistically significant according to gender?
- 2. What are the pre-test scores of the experimental and control groups in terms of grammar, vocabulary, content, coherence, and text length?
- 3. What are the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups in terms of grammar, vocabulary, content, coherence, and text length?
- 4. Is there a statistically significant difference between the total pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental and control groups?
- 5. What are the feelings and thoughts of students learning English as a foreign language regarding their writing skills?

This study aims to determine the effect of different writing practices on the writing skills of EFL learners. Specifically, it investigates how practices such as project-based learning, dialogue journals, automated feedback (AWE), and SRL-enhanced instruction influence learners' performance across grammar, vocabulary, coherence, content, text length, and affective dimensions such as writing anxiety.

This research provides several contributions. First, it offers an empirical comparison of diverse writing pedagogies within a single study—filling a gap noted in Zhang et al. (2022) and Li and Cai's (2023) reviews. Second, by integrating measurements of writing anxiety and self-efficacy, it extends beyond performance scores to consider psychological factors influencing writing outcomes. Third, the findings will guide educators in designing evidence-based instructional plans, recommending effective combinations of practices to improve student writing proficiency and reduce anxiety. Finally, it contributes to EFL writing pedagogy by offering practical implications for curriculum design, feedback strategies, and learner support in diverse educational settings.

# **METHOD**

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Initially, quantitative data were collected and analyzed to measure the impact of different writing practices on students' English writing skills. Following this, qualitative data were gathered to deepen the understanding of the results and provide contextual insights. The research was conducted in two phases over eight weeks. In the first phase, a Writing Skills Holistic Scoring Rubric developed by the researcher and based on grammar, vocabulary, content, coherence, and text length was used to assess students' writing proficiency through pre- and post-tests. Ten students were placed in an experimental group and ten in a control group. Weekly writing tasks were assigned, and the experimental group received supplementary instruction and individualized feedback.

In the second phase, focus group interviews were conducted with students from the experimental group to explore their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward the writing practices. These interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed to support the quantitative findings. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 24. Since the data did not follow a normal distribution, non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H) were used to examine differences between groups and gender-related effects. The reliability of the scoring rubric was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of .87. Qualitative data were subjected to descriptive and thematic analysis. Codes and themes were developed from the transcripts, and member checking was employed to ensure validity. All participants were anonymized using coded identifiers (S1, S2, etc). This mixed-methods design allowed the researchers to assess both the statistical impact of writing interventions and the learners' subjective experiences, offering a comprehensive understanding of writing skill development in the EFL context.

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

# **Results**

# 1. Findings Related to the First Research Question

This section investigates whether the mean scores obtained from the pre-test and post-test by the experimental and control groups differed significantly based on gender. According to the results of the Mann-Whitney U test, there was no statistically significant difference in the pre-test (U = 43.000, p > .05) or post-test (U = 34.500, p > .05) scores between male and female participants in either group.

2025, Vol. 8, No. 2, page 425-436

https://jurnal.stkippgribl.ac.id/index.php/ijlhe/index

Table 1. Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Pre-test and Post-test Total Scores of Experimental and Control Groups by Gender

Test	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Rank Sum	U	Z	р
Pre-test	Male	9	11.22	101.00	43.000	-0.506	.613
	Female	11	9.91	109.00			
Post-test	Male	9	8.78	79.00	34.000	-1.185	.236
	Female	11	11.91	131.00			

# 2. Findings Related to the Second Research Question

This section examines whether the scores obtained from the sub-dimensions of the pre-test, grammar, vocabulary, content, coherence, and text length—differed significantly between the experimental and control groups. According to the results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test, there was no statistically significant difference in any of the sub-dimension scores:

- 1) Grammar ( $\chi^2 = .761, p > .05$ )
- 2) Vocabulary ( $\chi^2 = .641, p > .05$ )
- 3) Content ( $\chi^2 = .336, p > .05$ )
- 4) Coherence ( $\chi^2 = .470, p > .05$ )
- 5) Text length ( $\chi^2 = .330, p > .05$ )

Table 2. Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results for Pre-test Scores of Experimental and Control Groups by Sub-dimensions: Grammar, Vocabulary, Content, Coherence, and Text Length

Sub- dimension	Group	N	Mean Rank	df	χ²	p	Significant Difference
Grammar	Control	10	8.50	1	.761	.098	None
	Experimental	10	12.50				
Vocabulary	Control	10	8.95	1	.641	.181	None
	Experimental	10	12.05				
Content	Control	10	9.00	1	.336	.067	None
	Experimental	10	12.00				
Coherence	Control	10	10.50	1	.470	1.000	None
	Experimental	10	10.50				
Text Length	Control	10	9.60	1	.330	.459	None
	Experimental	10	11.40				

# 2. Findings Related to the Third Research Question

This section examines whether the scores obtained by the experimental and control groups in the post-test sub-dimensions—grammar, vocabulary, content, coherence, and text length—differed significantly. According to the results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test, statistically significant differences were found between the experimental and control groups in all sub-dimensions:

- 1) Grammar ( $\chi^2 = 1.081, p < .01$ )
- 2) Vocabulary ( $\chi^2 = .768, p < .01$ )

- 3) Content ( $\chi^2 = .940, p < .01$ )
- 4) Coherence ( $\chi^2 = .826, p < .01$ )
- 5) Text Length ( $\chi^2 = 1.089, p < .01$ )

These findings indicate that the experimental group showed significant improvement in *grammar use*, *vocabulary knowledge*, *content development*, *coherence*, and *text length* through their writing activities.

Table 3. Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results for Post-test Scores of Experimental and Control Groups by Sub-dimensions: Grammar, Vocabulary, Content, Coherence, and Text Length

Sub- dimension	Group	N	Mean Rank	df	χ²	p	Significant Difference
Grammar	Control	10	6.25	1	1.081	.001	Yes
	Experimental	10	14.75				
Vocabulary	Control	10	6.90	1	.768	.003	Yes
	Experimental	10	14.10				
Content	Control	10	5.50	1	.940	.000	Yes
	Experimental	10	15.50				
Coherence	Control	10	5.95	1	.826	.000	Yes
	Experimental	10	15.05				
Text Length	Control	10	5.60	1	1.089	.000	Yes
J	Experimental	10	15.40				

# 3. Findings Related to the Fourth Research Question

This section explores whether there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental and control groups. According to the Kruskal-Wallis H test results, the pre-test scores did not show a statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 1.410$ , p > .05), whereas the post-test scores did show a statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 4.287$ , p < .05).

These results suggest that the experimental group's writing activities were effective in helping students improve their ability to use grammatical rules and vocabulary correctly within context. The findings confirm that the writing practices implemented with the experimental group had a positive and significant impact on students' writing skills.

Table 4. Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results for the Pre-test and Post-test Total Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups

Test	Group	N	Mean Rank	df	$\chi^2$	р	Significant Difference
Pre-test	Control	10	8.85	1	1.410	.201	No
	Experimental	10	12.15				
Post-test	Control	10	5.50	1	4.287	.001	Yes
	Experimental	10	15.50				

# 4. Findings Related to the Fifth Research Question

The emotional and cognitive responses of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners toward writing tend to revolve around two major thematic areas: the

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writing process and its associated challenges, and writing motivation alongside grammar-related concerns. Within the first theme, many students expressed that the act of generating ideas for writing is both time-consuming and mentally taxing. Several learners described feelings of boredom during the writing process, often linked to repetitive or uninspired topics. Additionally, some students struggled with word-for-word translation from their native language into English, which frequently resulted in awkward phrasing or loss of meaning. Writing at length was also perceived as particularly difficult, as many learners found it challenging to sustain coherent and relevant content beyond a few sentences. Word choice emerged as another significant obstacle, with learners often unsure about selecting the most appropriate vocabulary to clearly express their intended meaning.

The second thematic area, writing motivation and grammar, revealed more nuanced learner perspectives. Despite the challenges, a number of students reported high levels of motivation to improve their writing skills, particularly when they received supportive feedback. However, many still found it difficult to meet expectations regarding text length, citing limited vocabulary or uncertainty about what to include. Grammar-related difficulties were frequently mentioned, particularly in relation to the structural differences between learners' native languages and English. For instance, some students, especially those with Javanese as a first language, noted a tendency to incorporate Javanese verb structures into their English writing. This often led to grammatical inaccuracies and further frustration. Moreover, the importance of grammatical precision was widely acknowledged by the learners, though many admitted to feeling uncertain about applying rules correctly, particularly in complex sentence structures. Together, these themes provide a detailed insight into the affective and cognitive dimensions of EFL learners' writing experiences.

Table 5. Emotions and Thoughts of Learners of English as a Foreign Language Regarding
Their Writing Skills

Theme	Sub-theme	Participant Statements				
Writing Process and	Time-consuming and	S8: Writing requires a time-consuming				
Challenges	difficult thinking	thought process.				
	Boredom with writing	S5: Finds the writing process boring and feels				
	_	the need to make it more enjoyable.				
	Problems with translation	S6: Difficulty in translating words into English.				
	Excessive writing	S4: Views writing at length as a problem and prefers writing shorter texts.				
	Word selection	S9: Experiences difficulty in selecting				
	difficulties	appropriate words due to linguistic differences.				
		S2: Concerned that incorrect word choices				
		may hinder understanding.				

Writing Motivation and Grammar	High motivation	S3: Feels confident and highly motivated in writing.				
	Language differences &	S9: Confuses Sundanese and English				
	grammar errors	vocabulary and makes grammar mistakes. S6: Unsure whether Javanese verbs are applicable in English.				
	Use of Javanese verbs					
	Grammatical accuracy	S7: Feels the need to frequently check				
		grammatical correctness.				
	Uncertainty in grammar	S1: Hesitates in using the suffix -in and				
	usage	suggests repeated grammar practice.				

These findings reflect learners' mixed emotional responses, cognitive challenges, and developing awareness of grammatical competence in English writing.

# **Discussion**

According to the results of the Mann-Whitney U test analysis conducted on the pretest and post-test average scores of the experimental and control groups based on gender, no statistically significant difference was found between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the experimental and control groups in terms of gender. These results indicate that gender did not have a statistically significant effect on the initial or final performance levels of the groups.

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test conducted on the pre-test sub-dimension scores (grammar, vocabulary, content, coherence, and text length) between the experimental and control groups show that there was no statistically significant difference between the groups in any of these areas. This suggests that the experimental and control groups did not significantly differ from each other in terms of language skills, vocabulary knowledge, content generation, coherence, or text length prior to the intervention.

However, the Kruskal-Wallis H test results for the post-test sub-dimensions (grammar, vocabulary, content, coherence, and text length) revealed statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups. These findings indicate that students in the experimental group demonstrated a higher level of competence in grammar, vocabulary use, content generation, coherence, and text length in their writing performances compared to the control group.

Moreover, the Kruskal-Wallis H test results for the overall pre-test and post-test scores revealed no statistically significant difference between the groups in the pre-test mean scores. However, a statistically significant difference was found in the post-test scores. These results indicate that the intervention applied to the experimental group had a meaningful impact on students' writing skills, particularly in the accurate use of grammatical structures and vocabulary in context. The results support the conclusion that the writing activities applied in the experimental group had a positive effect on the students' writing proficiency.

A review of the literature shows that various writing activities and techniques have been employed in studies aimed at improving writing skills in the context of

#### IJLHE: International Journal of Language, Humanities, and Education

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https://jurnal.stkippgribl.ac.id/index.php/ijlhe/index

teaching English as a foreign language. For instance, Al Jarrah, Mansor, and Rashid (2015) found that implementing metacognitive strategy instruction—based on the CALLA model—among Jordanian A2–B1 level EFL learners led to significant gains in cognitive, metacognitive, and affective writing skills

In this study, the theme of 'writing process and challenges' included sub-themes such as the time-consuming and difficult nature of thinking, the tediousness of writing, issues with word translation, problems with writing extensively, and difficulties in word selection. The theme of 'writing motivation and grammar' encompassed sub-themes such as high motivation, language differences and grammatical errors, the use of Javanese verbs, grammatical accuracy, and uncertainties regarding grammar usage.

## **CONCLUSION**

Motivation plays a critical role in the writing process, and as Zhang and Sinha Roy (2022) highlight, student motivation serves as a crucial prerequisite for successful learning. Equally important in this domain is grammatical accuracy, which remains a major concern for learners during writing. Given the inherent complexity of writing as a skill, it is essential to teach writing from the ground up by establishing a solid structural foundation; Li and Cai (2023) emphasize the value of foundational instruction that scaffolds grammar and text organization before advancing to more complex tasks. To enhance writing abilities in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, it is beneficial to complement traditional textbooks with a diverse array of writing activities and tasks. Zhang, Tan, and Sinha Roy (2022) argue that coursebooks' heavy emphasis on informational content and explicit grammar instruction can impede students' ability to develop expressive and coherent writing. Their research suggests that a more varied and interactive pedagogical design can mitigate such limitations.

In our study, students in the experimental group—who engaged in multiple writing practices including project-based tasks, dialogue journals, and SRL-enhanced instruction—demonstrated significantly better outcomes in both grammar and vocabulary compared to the control group. This finding supports the recommendation that educational programs prioritizing grammatical accuracy and lexical development should be expanded and more widely implemented to foster writing proficiency. Implementing such interventions can empower learners with stronger structural competencies, greater confidence, and enhanced motivation to tackle writing challenges.

Difficulties encountered during the writing process such as the timeconsuming nature of thinking, the perceived tediousness of writing, and challenges in word translation should be examined in greater depth. Strategies aimed at overcoming these issues should be developed, and students should be provided with increased support to help them manage these challenges effectively. To enhance writing motivation and reduce grammatical errors, more effective methods and tools should be developed. Engaging and stimulating writing topics could be offered to students to help foster high levels of motivation. Additional focus group interviews can be conducted to gain a deeper understanding of students' thoughts and motivations regarding the writing process. Based on the insights gained from these interviews, writing programs can be restructured to better meet students' needs.

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### IJLHE: International Journal of Language, Humanities, and Education

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Setiana Sri Wahyuni Sitepu. Evaluating the Impact of Diverse Writing Practices.....