Exploring the Challenges of Teaching Writing in EFL Classrooms: Perspectives from Prospective Teachers

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Abstract
Teaching writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms presents significant challenges, particularly for prospective teachers who must navigate the complexities of linguistic demands, pedagogical strategies, and institutional constraints. This qualitative study explores these challenges from the perspectives of pre-service EFL teachers, focusing on their anticipated struggles and proposed solutions. Data were collected through open-ended online questionnaires administered to prospective teachers enrolled in education programs, with purposive sampling ensuring participants had relevant teaching practicum experience. The findings highlight key obstacles, including students' limited vocabulary and motivation, difficulties in providing effective feedback, and the tension between form-focused and process-oriented writing instruction. Additionally, the study reveals gaps in teacher training programs, emphasizing the need for enhanced practical training and curriculum reforms. By synthesizing these insights, this research aims to contribute to improving EFL writing pedagogy and better preparing future teachers to address these challenges.

Keywords: EFL writing; Teaching Challenges; Prospective Teachers

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms presents a myriad of challenges, particularly for prospective teachers who are

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still navigating the complexities of pedagogical practices. Writing is often regarded as one of the most difficult skills to master in language learning due to its cognitive and linguistic demands (Han et al., 2021; Lam & Chiu, 2018). Unlike speaking, which allows for immediate feedback and spontaneous communication, writing requires a structured approach, including planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Harmer, 2007). For EFL learners, these processes are further complicated by limited vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracies, and cultural differences in rhetorical structures (Selvi & Galloway, 2024). Consequently, prospective EFL teachers must develop effective strategies to address these challenges while fostering students' writing proficiency.

The difficulties in teaching writing are not solely confined to students' linguistic limitations but also extend to instructional methodologies, classroom dynamics, and assessment practices. Research indicates that many EFL teachers struggle with providing meaningful feedback, designing engaging writing tasks, and integrating technology into writing instruction (Lestariningsih et al., 2022; Lestariningsih & Wijayatiningsih, 2021; Mulyadi & Wijayatiningsih, 2020; T. D. , Wijayatiningsih et al., 2021; T. D. Wijayatiningsih et al., 2022). Additionally, prospective teachers often face challenges in balancing between form-focused instruction (e.g., grammar and vocabulary) and process-oriented approaches that emphasize idea development and creativity (Rofiqoh et al., 2022; Yamaç et al., 2020). These pedagogical dilemmas highlight the need for a deeper exploration of how future EFL teachers perceive and respond to the challenges of teaching writing.

Prospective teachers, who are still in the process of developing their teaching competencies, offer unique insights into the obstacles they anticipate in the EFL writing classroom. Their perspectives are crucial for teacher education programs, as they reveal gaps in pre-service training and areas requiring further professional development (Hyland, 2003). Studies have shown that many novice teachers feel underprepared to teach writing due to insufficient exposure to practical teaching strategies during their training (Rahimi & Fathi, 2022). Furthermore, the transition from theory to practice often leaves them uncertain about how to adapt their knowledge to diverse classroom contexts(Bailey & Judd, 2018). Understanding these challenges can help teacher educators refine curricula and provide targeted support to equip future teachers with the necessary skills for effective writing instruction.

This study aims to explore the challenges of teaching writing in EFL classrooms from the perspectives of prospective teachers. By examining their experiences, concerns, and proposed solutions, this research seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on EFL writing pedagogy and teacher preparation. The findings may provide valuable implications for teacher education programs, curriculum designers, and policymakers in enhancing writing instruction for EFL learners.

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2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing in a second or foreign language is widely acknowledged as one of the most complex and demanding language skills to teach and to learn. It requires not only mastery of linguistic features such as grammar, vocabulary, cohesion, and coherence but also higher-order cognitive processes such as planning, organizing, revising, and reflecting (Pingmuang & Koraneekij, 2022a; T. D. , & Wijayatiningsih & Erito, 2025; T. D. Wijayatiningsih et al., 2022). In the EFL context, these challenges are often amplified due to limited exposure to the target language outside the classroom and learners' restricted opportunities for meaningful writing practice (Lakhal, 2021; Pingmuang & Koraneekij, 2022)).

Moreover, writing is not only a product but a process, which involves recursive stages of brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing (Nuangchalerm & Intasena, 2022). Therefore, effective writing instruction should not merely focus on grammatical accuracy but must also guide learners through the process of developing ideas, organizing content, and refining meaning. This complex nature makes writing one of the most challenging areas for EFL teachers to master and for learners to engage with meaningfully.

Writing is widely acknowledged as one of the most demanding skills for EFL learners due to its complex cognitive and linguistic requirements (Hyland, 2007). Learners often struggle with grammar, vocabulary, and coherence, which hinders their ability to express ideas effectively (Ardiasih et al., 2019). Additionally, writing involves metacognitive processes such as planning, organizing, and revising, which many learners have not fully developed (Harmer, 2007). Psychological barriers, including writing anxiety and lack of confidence, further complicate learners' engagement in writing tasks (Shi et al., 2021).

From the teacher's perspective, especially among prospective teachers, challenges include limited training in writing pedagogy, an overemphasis on grammatical correction, and difficulty in providing constructive feedback(Zahroh et al., 2020). Many novice teachers rely on traditional product-based approaches and lack the experience to support process-oriented writing instruction. Institutional constraints, such as large class sizes, rigid curricula, and exam-driven education systems, also hinder effective writing instruction (Suharno et al., 2024). These challenges highlight the need for teacher education programs to equip future educators with strategies that promote cognitive, emotional, and linguistic development in writing.

3.   METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the challenges faced by prospective EFL teachers in teaching writing. The qualitative approach is chosen to gather in-depth perspectives and

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experiences from participants, allowing for a detailed understanding of their struggles and strategies in writing instruction (Cresswell & Plano, 2018). The participants consist of pre-service English teachers enrolled in education programs, selected through purposive sampling to ensure they have relevant teaching practicum experience. Data is collected through an open-ended online questionnaire, which includes questions about their teaching challenges, strategies for addressing students' writing difficulties, effective teaching methods, and the support they need to improve their instruction.

4.   RESULTS

This results shows the students 'challenges in teaching writing in the EFL classroom.

Table 1. The Students' Writing Challenges
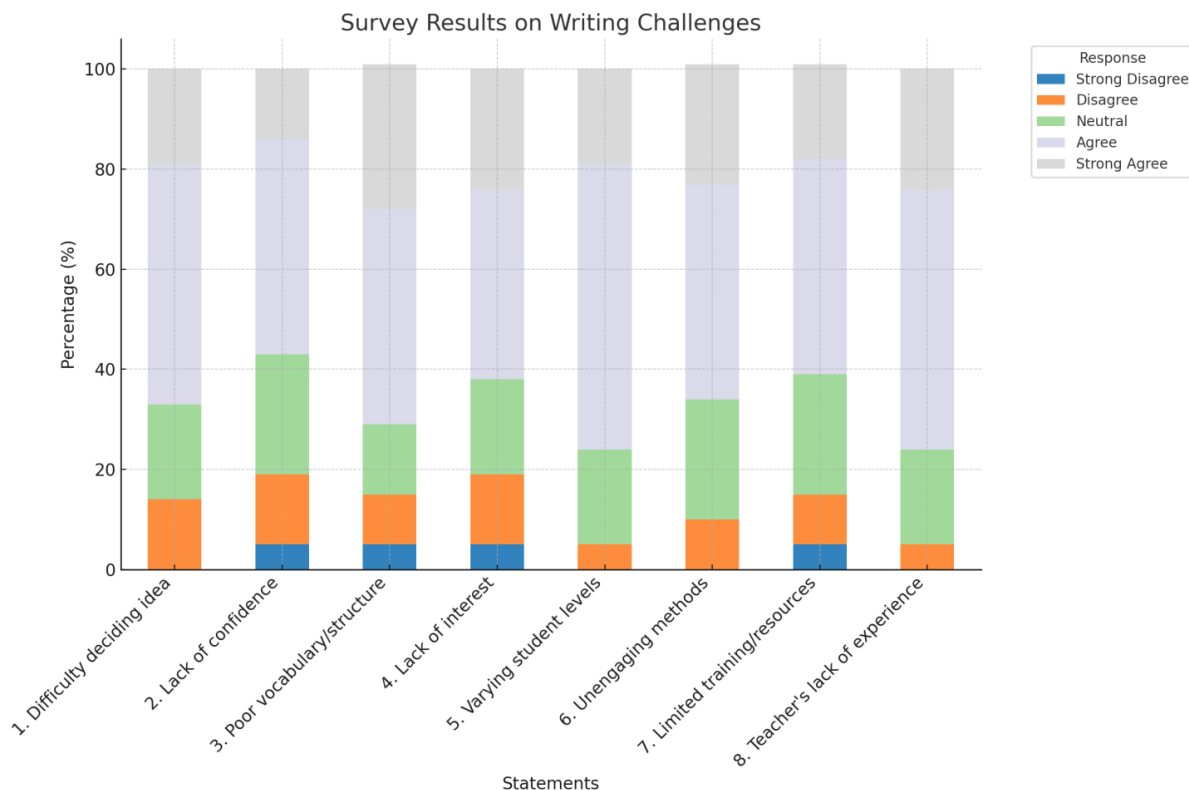
The survey results reveal significant challenges faced by both students and teachers in the context of EFL writing instruction. These challenges are multifaceted, encompassing issues related to students' confidence, motivation, linguistic proficiency, and teachers' instructional strategies and resources. The

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findings are presented thematically below, supported by the percentage data from the survey.

One of the most prominent challenges is students' difficulty in generating ideas and developing their writing. The survey indicates that 48% of respondents agree and 19% strongly agree with this statement, while only 14% disagree and 19% remain neutral. This suggests that a majority of students struggle with the initial stages of writing, such as brainstorming and organizing their thoughts, which are critical for producing coherent texts.

Another critical issue is students' lack of confidence in writing. The data shows that 43% agree and 14% strongly agree that students feel less confident due to limited experience and fear of making mistakes. Conversely, 5% strongly disagree and 14% disagree, indicating that while this is a widespread issue, it may not affect all students uniformly. This lack of confidence often stems from perceived linguistic inadequacies, which further demotivates students from engaging in writing tasks.

Linguistic barriers, particularly poor vocabulary and sentence structure, also pose significant obstacles. A striking 43% agree and 29% strongly agree that these limitations hinder students' ability to write clearly, while only 5% strongly disagree and 10% disagree. This highlights the urgent need for targeted instruction to address these foundational skills. Additionally, 38% agree and 24% strongly agree that students lose interest in writing because they find it overly difficult and overwhelming. This lack of motivation is exacerbated by the perception that writing requires mastery of multiple complex aspects, further discouraging students from practicing the skill.

The survey also sheds light on the challenges teachers face in delivering effective writing instruction. A significant 57% agree and 19% strongly agree that teachers struggle to tailor their instruction to accommodate students' varying ability levels. Only 5% disagree, underscoring the near-universal nature of this challenge. Differentiated instruction is essential in EFL classrooms, yet the data suggests that many teachers find it difficult to implement effectively.

Another major hurdle is the application of engaging and interactive teaching methods to boost students' motivation. Here, 43% agree and 24% strongly agree that teachers face difficulties in this area, while 10% disagree. This indicates a gap in pedagogical strategies, where traditional, less interactive methods may still dominate classroom practices. The lack of innovative approaches could contribute to students' disengagement and poor writing outcomes.

Teachers also grapple with limited training and resources for teaching writing, as evidenced by 43% agreement and 19% strong agreement with this statement. Only 5% strongly disagree, suggesting that resource constraints are a pervasive issue. Without adequate professional development and materials, teachers may lack the tools to address students' diverse needs effectively.

Furthermore, 52% agree and 24% strongly agree that teachers' own familiarity with writing significantly impacts their ability to create a supportive

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learning environment. This finding highlights the importance of teachers' writing proficiency and pedagogical knowledge in fostering students' literacy development. If teachers are not confident or skilled in writing themselves, it becomes challenging to model effective practices or inspire students.

The survey results underscore the interconnected nature of the challenges in EFL writing instruction. Students' struggles with idea generation, confidence, and linguistic skills are compounded by teachers' difficulties in providing differentiated, engaging, and well-resourced instruction. The high percentages of agreement on these issues suggest that they are widespread and require systemic solutions.

For instance, the prevalence of students' linguistic barriers (e.g., vocabulary and sentence structure) calls for integrating more contextualized and interactive language activities into the curriculum. Similarly, the lack of student motivation and confidence points to the need for writing tasks that are relevant, achievable, and linked to students' interests.

On the teachers' side, the findings emphasize the necessity of enhanced professional development programs. These programs should focus on practical strategies for differentiated instruction, innovative teaching methods, and the effective use of limited resources. Additionally, fostering teachers' own writing skills and confidence could have a cascading effect on their ability to support students.

5.   DISCUSSION

This current study explores the challenges faced by prospective EFL teachers in teaching writing, highlighting issues such as students' limited vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracies, lack of motivation, difficulties in providing effective feedback, and the tension between form-focused and process-oriented instruction. These findings are corroborated by the survey results, which reveal that students struggle with idea development (48% agree, 19% strongly agree), confidence in writing (43% agree, 14% strongly agree), and vocabulary and sentence structure (43% agree, 29% strongly agree). Teachers, on the other hand, face challenges in differentiating instruction (57% agree, 19% strongly agree) and applying interactive methods (43% agree, 24% strongly agree). These results align with the broader literature on EFL writing, as evidenced by the four referenced articles, which offer insights into potential solutions and comparative perspectives.

The challenges identified in the survey and the article resonate with the findings of Kusumastuti et al. (2019; Neuwirth et al. (2021); Tyas et al. (2019), who emphasize that ESL students often struggle with word choice, grammar, and sentence structure, hindering their ability to produce coherent texts. Similarly, Adas & Bakir (2013; Du et al. (2017); Kanniainen et al. (2019) noted that students in non-English dominant contexts face difficulties due to insufficient linguistic proficiency, which affects writing quality. The lack of

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vocabulary and grammatical knowledge not only impedes students' ability to express ideas but also demotivates them, as they feel overwhelmed by the complexity of the task. This is reflected in the survey, where 24% of students strongly agree and 38% agree that they feel less interested in writing due to its perceived difficulty.

The issue of motivation is further explored by), whose systematic review identifies students' attitudes toward writing as a significant barrier. They highlight that students perceive writing as tedious and challenging, particularly when they do not see its immediate relevance to their lives. De la Fuente et al. (2017) ; Shi et al. (2021); Zhu & Doo, (2021)supported this by arguing that writing must be meaningful to students; otherwise, it becomes a burden rather than a tool for growth. The survey results support this, with 19% of students strongly agreeing and 48% agreeing that they have difficulty deciding on ideas and developing their writing, indicating a lack of engagement and intrinsic motivation.

Another major challenge is the difficulty in providing constructive feedback. Prospective teachers in the IUCEE study expressed concerns about balancing corrective feedback with encouraging creativity. This aligns with Mashfufah et al. (2024); Mulyono et al. (2023); Yusuf & Jazilah (2020) who found that teachers often struggle with feedback due to large class sizes and time constraints. Sato & Loewen (2018) also points out that feedback is time-consuming and requires careful consideration, which is often not feasible in crowded classrooms. The survey reveals that 57% of teachers agree and 19% strongly agree that providing appropriate instruction for different ability levels is challenging, further underscoring the need for practical feedback mechanisms.

The tension between form-focused and process-oriented instruction is another recurring theme. The study reveals a conflict between traditional grammar-focused instruction and process approaches that emphasize idea development. Al Bataineh et al. (2019) ; Ji & Pham (2020)discuss how the product approach, which prioritizes grammatical accuracy, often clashes with the process approach, which values creativity. Laksani et al. (2020)) advocates for a balanced approach, combining elements of both to cater to students' diverse needs. The survey supports this, with 52% of teachers agreeing and 24% strongly agreeing that unfamiliarity with writing hampers their ability to create a supportive learning environment.

To address these challenges, the Istudy and the referenced articles suggest several solutions. For vocabulary and grammar, interactive and contextualized activities, such as mind maps and visual aids, are recommended Mulyadi et al. (2020) to boost motivation, designing relevant tasks that connect to students' interests and real-life contexts is crucial (Ardiasih et al., 2019; Nückles et al., 2020). Peer feedback and technology can make feedback more manageable ((Teng, 2021) while an eclectic approach that combines product and process methods can address diverse needs (Hashempour et al., 2015; Yulianawati et al., 2022).

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This study has illuminated the multifaceted challenges encountered by prospective EFL teachers in teaching writing, particularly within the Indonesian educational context. The findings, grounded in both qualitative narratives and survey data, underscore several core difficulties: students' lack of confidence and motivation, limited vocabulary and syntactic range, and difficulties in generating and organizing ideas. Teachers, on the other hand, face the equally complex task of differentiating instruction to meet diverse student needs, employing engaging pedagogical strategies, and navigating limitations in training and teaching resources. A significant portion of the survey participants (48% agree and 19% strongly agree) indicated that students struggle with idea generation and organization. This affirms that writing is not merely a linguistic skill, but also a cognitive process that requires systematic scaffolding. Moreover, low self-confidence that reported by 57% of respondents (combining agree and strongly agree) which hampers students' willingness to take risks in writing, which is often rooted in the fear of making errors. These emotional and cognitive barriers reinforce the necessity for a supportive learning environment where students are encouraged to view writing as a process rather than a product. On the teacher's side, over 70% of respondents expressed difficulty in addressing different ability levels and applying interactive methods. This points to a pedagogical gap in teacher preparation programs, where pre-service teachers are insufficiently equipped to implement differentiated and engaging instruction. The finding that many teachers themselves lack confidence in writing further complicates their ability to serve as effective writing models.

6.   CONCLUSION

All in all,   these findings reflect a pressing need to reform teacher education curricula. Future teachers must be trained not only in theoretical pedagogy but also in practical, adaptive strategies that promote writing proficiency. Integration of process-oriented instruction, peer collaboration, contextualized vocabulary teaching, and technology-assisted feedback are potential solutions. Additionally, empowering teachers through continuous professional development will enhance their instructional capabilities and self-efficacy. Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing discourse on EFL writing instruction by centering the lived experiences and expectations of future educators. Addressing these interconnected challenges holistically will be critical in improving both student outcomes and teacher readiness in EFL writing classrooms

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