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## Exploring the Development of English Language Writing Skills at the Tertiary Level

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the development of writing skills among first-year students at a Saudi Arabian university. Over the course of a two-semester academic year, students complete six writing tests, each requiring a specific type of essay, including descriptive, argumentative, compare and contrast, cause and effect, and persuasive writing. A total of 360 essays from 60 students were analyzed quantitatively to track their writing progress. Additionally, face-to-face interviews were conducted to explore students' perceptions of their writing experiences, challenges, and improvements. The analysis was guided by specific rubrics to assess key writing components such as grammar, coherence, organization, and argumentation. By examining both students' written pieces and their reflections, this study provides valuable insights into their writing development in an EFL context. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of academic writing acquisition at the tertiary level and offer insightful pedagogical recommendations for enhancing writing instruction in similar educational settings.*

**Keywords:** English Language writing development, Rubrics, First Year, Writing Assessment, Tertiary Education, Essay Writing.

### Introduction

A growing body of research has focused on second language learners' writing production to find exclusive linguistic features and patterns in their English writing development. (e.g., Biber and Gray 2013; Frignal, Li, and Weigle, 2014; Gebiril and Plakans, 2013; Grant and Ginther, 2000; Guo Crossley and McNamara, 2013; Jarvis, et al, 2003; Knoch, et al, 2014). This study area has shown different perspectives and insights into improving the writing quality. Furthermore, the findings of these studies provide vital and beneficial pedagogical implications and information to guide writing instruction properly. Investigating the writing development of learners provides us with a wide range of possibilities to explore, redefine, and thus redesign the existing norms and theories of teaching writing. Considering this growing significance, the current study aims to conduct longitudinal research focusing on how the development of writing skills takes place in learners. Furthermore, it also presents the learners' responses, in retrospect, on the writing experiences they rectified for themselves during their course.

According to Berninger et al, (1991), neural and linguistic processes, together with cognitive processes, are the most widely used approaches for assessing and analyzing writing skills. Skills related to the movement of fingers, the way the letters are produced, and the coding of orthographic data reside at the neural level. These skills are said to be developed in grades 1 to 3. Linguistic skills, such as word and sentence structure levels, are developed in grades 4 to 6.

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More advanced cognitive constraints, such as things related to planning, translating, and revising, are thought to be developed in grades 7 to 9 (Abbot & Berninger, 1993).

The most important approaches used to assess the quality of writing are primary, analytic, and holistic scoring. While the primary approach uses purpose, audience, and writing assignment as the criteria of evaluation, the analytic scoring focuses on content and organization, which are individual qualities. Finally, holistic scoring adopts the rater's general impression of a text. According to Huot, (1990), since holistic scoring is time-saving and is consistent with analytic scoring, it has become a default practice. A very general and conventional approach to evaluating the quality of writing is by analyzing the language features (McNamara, et al, 2010; Witte & Faigley, 1981).

### **Research Questions**

1. What measurable progress does Preparatory Year students in a standardized English curriculum achieve in their academic writing abilities, as assessed through rubric-based evaluations, over two semesters?
2. In what ways do tertiary-level students improve specific textual elements, such as vocabulary usage and sentence construction, in their narrative writing throughout an academic year, as observed through formative assessments and teacher feedback?

### **Theoretical Background**

Writing development is purely a matter of linguistic development, according to Durrant et al. (2021). When students are exposed to a variety of language-based instructions, they, in fact, develop a range of skills, including writing skills.

The development of writing can be mainly and widely attributed to development from cognitive, linguistic, and social perspectives. Subsequent research has been carried out regarding the effects of different language instruction types on writing. As Mavrou (2020) argues, writing output is not only a matter of language regulation but also the result of the processes of working memory and executive functioning that are prerequisites to the management of ideas as well as the organization of written documents. The researchers further underscore the necessity of the incorporation of cognitive training with language learning to improve the writing skills of ESL students. This shows the importance of instructional specificity in writing, where both cognitive and linguistic domains should be of premium importance.

Hyland (2009) discussed three broad approaches to researching and teaching writing. The first approach has been adopted to focus on the tangible and practical aspects of writing by looking at it as a textual product. These ideas are implicitly taken from Structuralism and the Transformational Grammar of Noam Chomsky (1957). In this process, the writers can encode the semantic representations of the students' intended meanings in their writing by following grammatical rules.

On the other side, from a cognitive perspective, Sumarno (2021) insists on the inclusion of metacognitive processes in the writing process. These strategies entail the use of learner self-analysis of a particular aspect of writing, self-assessment as well as self-evaluation over a period. Metacognitive awareness can play a pivotal role in the development of the quality of academic writing of second language learners by facilitating the level of self-regulation. One of them is the cultivation of the skills for the assessment and feedback that has been connected to an increase in the results of the writing process (González-Pérez et al., 2022). Such an approach

encourages students to write with more than just the perspective of one's writing. Doing it all in one round makes the texts much better, and students also understand the use of language better.

Weigle (2002) noted that a good test design is not only about thinking of a topic for the students to write about and employing the teacher's judgment to rank them, but Weigle, in fact, proposed a list of key questions to standardize the design of assessment tasks and marking procedures. The tests, especially the writing questions at the Saudi university, are completely in parallel with Weigle's, (2002) suggestions.

Abbot and Berninger (1993) analyzed structural relationships that exist in writing-related skills in grades 1 to 6. They took a total of 600 students, both boys and girls, discussed the results of the study, and considered handwriting, spelling, and composition quality. In this study, we are discussing the students' writing development through the descriptors, such as Content, Structure, Grammar, Vocabulary, and Mechanics of language. In another study conducted by Friginal and Weigle (2014), by using Factor Analysis, they ascertained four functional dimensions. They calculated the rate of frequent linguistic features in ESL academic essays.

Recent research also points to the fact that feedback has made an important contribution to the process of writing. For example, Cao et al. (2022) investigated the effect of peer feedback on the writing of ESL students. This study indicates that when peer reviews are done correctly, a significant improvement in the quality of student writing, especially in grammar, vocabulary, and coherence, is realized. Finally, the authors explain that peer feedback allows students to have a cooperative learning environment, the concept under which students not only rely on the feedback of their peers but also learn from the process of evaluating others' work (Latifi et al., 2021). This co-construction of knowledge helps in understanding the rules of writing and increases the effectiveness on the part of a student in the ability to self-edit.

Ferris and Hedgcock, (2004) measure writing production, and the outcome is based on student-written text. This type of assessment is known as 'direct assessment' based on Hamp-Lyons, (1991), which emphasizes that the length of the text and the prompts given to the students provide them with 'considerable room'. Having compared it with the Hamp-Lyons, (1991) notion of direct assessment, the writing prompts used in the present course also create a good amount of scope and considerable room for the test takers.

Aull, (2015) opines that improper language use, lack of clarity, etc., highlights the enormous significance of first-year writing in higher education. Hyland (2009) suggests that the reason for the lack of clarity in students' writing is mainly attributed to the lack of descriptions of specialized genres.

According to Ramona (2012), problems related to and connected with second language writing are both linguistic issues - seen through textual analysis- and psychological issues. The authors of the present work undertook the textual aspect of the students' writing, such as grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction, to substantiate and corroborate the growth and development of the students' writing.

In a similar study conducted by Crosthwaite (2016) on course effectiveness, the author used multidimensional analysis of the students' essays and reports to determine whether the course was effective. The present study also focuses on the same theme, but it specifically targets the development of students' writing production longitudinally.

Mikyung et al, (2018) provided beneficial perspectives on EFL students' L2 writing proficiency. After analyzing the data, they stated that the academic vocabulary scores were a solid predictor of writing development. Moreover, they saw a pattern in the aspects of syntactic complexity, such as subordinate clauses, noun phrases, passives, and modals. In the current study, the authors have considered these aspects during the examination and analysis.

## Method

This study primarily examines the developmental trajectories of students' writing skills across different proficiency levels. The research aims to systematically analyze the data to keep track of / gain insights into the progression of students' writing abilities over an academic year. The data set comprises students' exam essays written in response to prompts from a pre-defined set of three options. Students were instructed to select one topic and develop an essay accordingly.

The study was conducted throughout six assessments administered during the academic year. To ensure a representative sample, researchers selected 60 students from each proficiency level (Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced) across male and female cohorts. The essays were evaluated using a department-approved rubric refined over the last five years to align with internationally recognized standards of assessment (e.g., Brown, 2014; Hyland, 2019). This rubric evaluates various writing mechanics and structure, including coherence, cohesion, grammar, vocabulary, and task response.

The evaluation process was carried out independently by two experienced faculty members to maintain reliability and minimize potential bias. This dual-assessment approach aligns with best practices in educational research to ensure the validity and consistency of scoring (McNamara, 2000; Weigle, 2002). The findings are expected to provide valuable insights into the efficacy of current pedagogical practices and contribute to the broader discourse on developing writing proficiency in second language learners.

## Data Collection

The authors randomly selected 60 male and female students as subjects for the study. From each student, we collected six essays they wrote in the tests. So, a total of 360 essays were quantitatively and qualitatively examined and analyzed. After the analysis, they were also invited to participate in a face-to-face interview. As mentioned earlier, these interviews were conducted to know the perceptions of the students and understand their writing continuity and progression in their current courses. Table 1 below graphically illustrates the number of students selected for the study.

**Table 1: Number of students chosen in male and female campuses**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Beginner</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>Total</b>
Male	10	10	10	30
Female	10	10	10	30
			<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>

## Data Analysis

The essays produced by the first-year students during 2021-2022 were assessed and analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Upon analyzing these essays, very important aspects of writing were noted and consequently subjected to further examination. For instance, it was apparent that beginner and intermediate-level students committed more grammar-related errors in the later

tests where they had to write an essay within the stipulated time. The following subsections explain how the essays were evaluated and analyzed.

### **Human Ratings**

Two expert raters assessed the essays using a rubric that had been developed by the department members and is similar to the criteria used in internationally accepted tests such as IELTS and STEP. The samples of the rubric are provided below in Table 1 and Table 2. Assessors were required to grade each essay on five different analytical features. The chosen descriptors were Content, Organization, Grammar, Vocabulary, and Mechanics (Spelling, Capitalization, Punctuation). Additional descriptors such as the use of cohesive devices, which are indicators of writing quality, are embedded in ‘organization’ (Scott et al, 2011). Each component was given ten points in the rubric, and the ratings were combined into an overall rating. The researchers took the final grade out of fifty in the interest of the study. Both syntactic and morphological properties, such as sentence variety and syntactic complexity, were taken into consideration.

### **Statistical analysis**

The statistical analysis in this study primarily addresses three key research questions. First, we want to know whether students’ writing improved in six academic essays over two semesters. Second, the purpose of the second research question is to investigate whether there are any differences in the writing development of students grouped at beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels. Finally, we investigate whether individual writing descriptors (Content, Structure, Sentence Structure, Vocabulary, and Mechanics) would experience growth or gain efficiency for the entire students.

To answer these questions, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the six essays that each learner completed throughout the academic year (2020-2021). Since this study aims at comparing the means of the three groups – beginner, intermediate, and advanced proficiency level – and the development of writing descriptors, ANOVA is a suitable test for identifying if there are significant differences between the groups. Furthermore, the analysis of variance ANOVA was conducted on the writing test scores to investigate the overall improvement of the students’ writing over the six writing tests.

Moreover, a detailed analysis was done on each descriptor, especially the vocabulary, which is one of the key factors in writing. Vocabulary has been one of the many daunting areas of study in second language (L2) writing. However, lexical development is another important dimension of academic writing that is expected to stay as a challenging factor for the L2 writers due to its features of high lexical complexity and lexical sophistication (Duran et al., 2004; McCarthy & Jarvis, 2007). In this context, vocabulary development was of interest as part of the total construction of writing proficiency, with a focus on patterns of change or decline across proficiency levels and time.

### **Interviews**

Kim’s (2006) study highlights that the interview method is a metacognitive tool that stabilizes emotions and can empower ESL learners. Out of many important types of interviews, which are open-ended, semi-structured, and structured, we sought to utilize semi-structured interviews because they are less formal (Fontana & Frey, 2000). The selected students were interviewed by the researchers to understand their writing experience. Ten students who appeared for the interview were asked some specific questions. The list of questions used in the interview was

about their present status and whether they were required to produce any writing. They were also asked about the extent of their writing skill development from the time they joined the university to the completion of their first year, the impact of feedback provided by the teachers, and the influence of peer feedback on their writing. Overall, the questions were flexible, which allowed the interviewees to think and express their opinions clearly and freely (Sadiq, 2011). Apart from asking them about their writing experiences during the course, we also inquired if there were any negatives concerning their perspectives (Bebout, 2001). The students' responses are presented in the findings and discussion chapter. Codes are used to represent the students' responses.

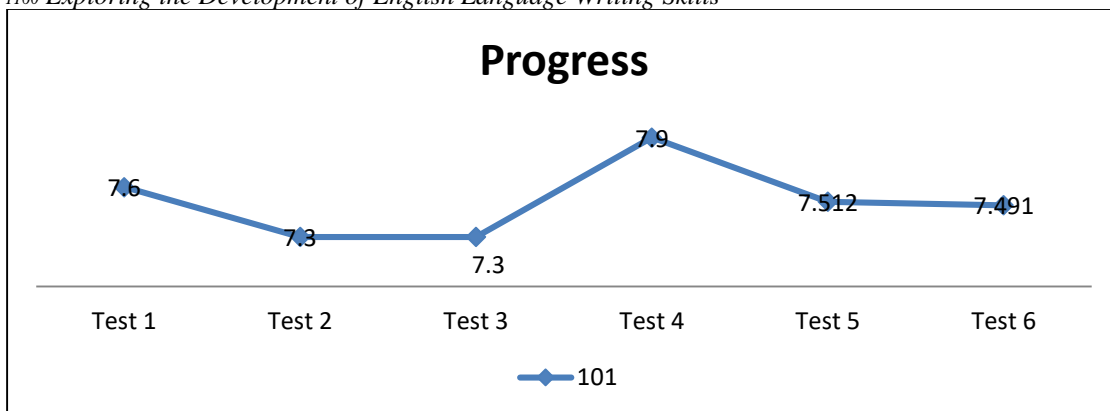
SB1	-	Student Beginner 1
SB2	-	Student Beginner 2
SI1	-	Student Intermediate 1
SI2	-	Student Intermediate 2
SA1	-	Student Advanced 1
SA2	-	Student Advanced 2

## Findings and Discussion

The following figure 1 shows the achievement of students on the six tests conducted in a given academic year. As indicated in the table below, there was a slight increase in the performance of the students from Test 1 to Test 2 and a slight drop in the final test, Test 3. This decline needs more scrutiny, especially regarding the time factor in the third test.

The decrease in scores in the final test could be attributed to the increased difficulty and time constraints associated with writing a five-paragraph essay. Although the total test time in all the tests was equivalent, students were expected to write more detailed essays in Test 3, and this may have proved Herculean to the students, especially in the light of the existing time constraints. Interviewing the students, many of whom stated that they had problems with the organization of ideas and thoughts due to time constraints, strengthened this interpretation. This was most apparent in the final test, where students failed to meet the depth of the content they sought to cover alongside the time constraint to write. However, previous tests have entailed a one-paragraph or three-paragraph composition to possibly give the students work with the content rather than the time factor experts are in.

This small decrease in the results in Test 3 is explained by the difference in the complexity of the tasks and time constraints in writing tests. Regarding the results of the tests conducted with the students, the subjects demonstrated obvious improvement in the previous tests, but in Test 3, where the writing task is more complicated and time was limited, students' performance was affected. This implies that future tests should allow more time when doing extensive writing or designing special ways in which students could be helped to manage their time when doing extensive writing.



**Figure 1: Writing progress of the students in six tests**

Table 2 below shows the mean, P=Value, and differences in the Beginner tests. The table fundamentally analyses the beginner level students' progress. It can be seen from the P-Values, which are done to compare the tests, that there is no significant difference among the tests. The course P-Values are 0.296, 0.491, and 0.932, respectively. From Table 2, it can be observed that the beginner students' writing development significantly increased with the P-Values showing no considerable difference.

**Table 2: Means, P-Values, and Differences in Beginner Students' Writing Development**

Beginner	Comparison	Means	P-Value		Differences to
Semester-1	Test 1 with Test 2	6.9556	5.9778	0.296	No Differences
	Test 1 with Test 3	6.9556	6.2111	0.491	No Differences
	Test 2 with Test 3	5.9778	6.2111	0.932	No Differences
Semester-2	Test 1 with Test 2	6.1333	7.1556	0.392	No Differences
	Test 1 with Test 3	6.1333	6.0000	0.984	No Differences
	Test 2 with Test 3	7.1556	6.0000	0.304	No Differences

Table 3 below demonstrates the crucial differences in the intermediate-level students' writing performance in the periodic tests conducted throughout the academic year. The P-Values below show that there's not a significant difference among the tests' grades compared to other tests. For instance, statistics reveal that there is no difference between Test 1 and Test 2, but there is a slight difference in comparison with Test 2 and Test 3. As far as the writing development in the second-semester tests is concerned, the numbers demonstrate that there is a significant difference between Test 1 and Test 2 and Test 3, with the values showing 0.003, 0.866, and 0.001, respectively.

**Table 3: Means, P-Values, and Differences in Intermediate Students' Writing Development**

Intermediate	Comparison	Means		P-Value	Differences to
<b>Semester-1</b>	Test 1 with Test 2	6.9411	7.6526	0.220	No Differences
	Test 1 with Test 3	6.9411	6.0737	0.109	No Differences
	Test 2 with Test 3	7.6526	6.0737	0.001	Differences for test 1
<b>Semester-2</b>	Test 1 with Test 2	6.6842	7.8158	0.003	Differences for test 2
	Test 1 with Test 3	6.6842	6.5161	0.866	No Differences
	Test 2 with Test 3	7.8158	6.5161	0.001	Differences for test 2

Table 4 below clearly exhibits the Advanced students' writing development in their tests. The P-Values in the table signify that except for Test 1 with Test 2 (0.0017), the remaining tests revealed no difference; there is a common phenomenon that occurs in the rest of the test grades. Since it is an advanced group, the student's mean scores are between 8 and 9 fractions. The advanced students show good proficiency in their writing and show that an exponential increase in their grades will be challenging as they have already achieved the expected proficiency in their writing. In terms of their writing performance, they are above all their counterparts at the Beginner and Intermediate levels.

**Table 4: Means, P-Values, and Differences in Advanced Students' Writing Development**

Advanced	Comparison	Means		P-Value	Differences to
<b>Semester-1</b>	Test 1 with Test 2	9.1737	8.3316	0.017	Differences for test 1
	Test 1 with Test 3	9.1737	8.9895	0.812	No Differences
	Test 2 with Test 3	8.3316	8.9895	0.079	No Differences
<b>Semester-2</b>	Test 1 with Test 2	9.0105	9.0842	0.981	No Differences
	Test 1 with Test 3	9.0105	8.9737	0.993	No Differences
	Test 2 with Test 3	9.0842	8.9737	0.958	No Differences

Table 5 below is a quantitative description of the mean and standard deviation of the descriptors used in the rubrics. In a study conducted by Storch (2009), the quantitative measures of language (sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization) revealed no difference over time. The scenario of the present study shows the same pattern.

**Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Descriptors in the First Semester**

Descriptors	Mean	Std. Deviation
Content	7.2854	.32178
Organization	7.2994	.32044
Sentence Structure	7.3068	.32055



Vocabulary	7.3172	.31762
Mechanics	7.3262	.31796

Table 6 below statistically answers whether the descriptors used in the rubric showed any difference. It can be observed that a significant variation occurred in most of the descriptors in the tests together. Crossley and Mc Namara's (2014) study provided more evidence of syntactic development. In sentence structure, there is a difference of 0.002. Students tend to write longer sentences to express their ideas, but it is observed that they end up writing long run-on sentences, which results in differences. Regarding language mechanics such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, it was found that all the different levels of students tend to commit errors, i.e., Beginners, Intermediates, and Advanced.

**Table 6: Students' Writing Progress by Rubric Descriptors in the First Semester**

(I) Rubric	(J) Rubric	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Differences
<b>Content</b>	Organization	-.0141*	.00472	.018	For organization
	Sentence Structure	-.0214*	.00472	.002	For sentence structure
	Vocabulary	-.0318*	.00472	.000	For vocabulary
	Mechanics	-.0408*	.00472	.000	For mechanics
<b>Organization</b>	Sentence Structure	-.0073	.00472	.160	No differences
	Vocabulary	-.0177*	.00472	.006	For vocabulary
	Mechanics	-.0267*	.00472	.000	For mechanics
<b>Sentence Structure</b>	Vocabulary	-.0104	.00472	.059	No differences
	Mechanics	-.0194*	.00472	.003	For mechanics
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Mechanics	-.0090	.00472	.093	No differences

The information provided in Table 7 below looks at the Mean and Standard Deviation of the Descriptors in the second semester. With a 7.3999 Mean, the descriptor 'Content' has the lowest, and the descriptor Sentence Structure has the highest mean, 7.4141.

**Table 7: Mean and standard Deviation of the descriptors in the Second Semester**

Descriptors	Mean	Std. Deviation
Content	7.3999	.43272
Organization	7.4090	.43075
Sentence Structure	7.4141	.42784
Vocabulary	7.4237	.42369
Mechanics	7.4311	.41883

Table 8 below demonstrates the Mean Differences, Standard Error, Significance, and Differences in the Descriptors in the second semester. There are differences seen in Sentence Structure, Vocabulary, and Mechanics. In this regard, students should understand the genres used in writing. (Huttner, 2008) stated that essential genre awareness is vital for students because

they are confronted with various genres throughout their academic careers. This will be highly beneficial for them as it will establish a crucial and transferable skill for their future professions.

**Table 8: Mean Differences, Standard Errors, and Significance of Rubric Descriptors in the Second Semester**

(I) Rubric	(J) Descriptors	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Differences
<b>Content</b>	Organization	-.0141*	.00472	.010	For organization
	Sentence Structure	-.0214*	.00472	.000	For sentence structure
	Vocabulary	-.0318*	.00472	.000	For vocabulary
	Mechanics	-.0408*	.00472	.000	For mechanics
<b>Organization</b>	Sentence Structure	-.0051	.00458	.297	No differences
	Vocabulary	-.0147*	.00458	.012	For vocabulary
	Mechanics	-.0221*	.00458	.001	For mechanics
<b>Sentence Structure</b>	Vocabulary	-.0096	.00458	.068	No differences
	Mechanics	-.0170*	.00458	.006	For mechanics
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Mechanics	-.0074	.00458	.146	No differences

## Interviews

Most of the students who were interviewed are very concerned about translating their thoughts from (Mother Tongue/ First Language) L1 to (Second Language) L2 when they write, especially beginners. A couple of them expressed that this lacuna occurs in speaking and writing. According to them, the writing teacher has played a vital role in improving their writing by providing them with practice. In addition, surprisingly, the beginners were not very satisfied with the peer feedback given by their peers who didn't have the expected command over L2 writing. On the other hand, advanced students spoke very highly of peer feedback, and they thought it would facilitate productive interaction among their classmates. When the students were asked about the resources they used to develop their writing, the intermediate students said they used tools available on the internet, e.g., free tools to correct their grammar mistakes. The responses below were given when we asked about their writing experience in the first year, their current exposure to writing, and the extent to which they are required to write in English.

**Student Beginner 1** – *I improved in writing, but I think I had a problem with vocabulary, and I translated from Arabic to English, which took time to write my ideas. This made my writing slow down on the tests.*

**Student Beginner 2** – *At first, I struggled with structuring my ideas in English. I would think in Arabic and then translate, which made my writing slow and sometimes unclear. Over time, I learned to organize my thoughts directly in English, which has made writing much easier for me.*

**Student Beginner 3** – *When I started university, I found writing in English very stressful, especially because I lacked a strong vocabulary. I would often rely on a dictionary to find words, which made my writing slow. However, after taking academic writing courses, I feel more confident.*

**Student Intermediate 1** - *In conclusion, most of the problems I experienced when writing English were related to the fact that English was primarily scientific.*

**Student Intermediate 2** – *I write all exams in English, and I feel comfortable writing English now.*

**Student Intermediate 3** – *Initially, writing essays in English was very challenging because I wasn't used to expressing my thoughts in a foreign language. However, with practice, I gained confidence. Now, I can write research reports and assignments without much difficulty.*

**Student Intermediate 4** – *Writing in English is now part of my daily academic routine. At first, I had trouble with grammar and sentence structure, but with continuous practice, I have improved. Now, I write essays and reports with much more ease.*

**Student Advanced 1** – *Current examinations at the College of Medicine focus exclusively on short answer questions. When I started, I did not have writing skills. As time progressed, I developed my writing skills and became a better writer. I am glad that I have improved.*

**Student Advanced 2** – *Although I initially struggled with grammar, I gradually improved over time. Through continuous practice, feedback from my instructors, and exposure to academic writing, I became more confident in structuring my sentences correctly. While I still make occasional mistakes, my overall writing has become more accurate and fluent.*

Many students must produce L2 writing in their current course by submitting reports, making notes of their lectures, and writing short answer questions in their periodic tests. They emphasize the importance of writing taught in the first year. Moreover, they read and listen to their lectures in English, which makes it evident that they need to be proficient in basic skills such as writing and speaking.

## **Conclusion**

This study provides substantial evidence of writing development among tertiary-level students. Through statistical analysis of grades evaluated by two professional assessors, the study revealed consistent growth across most descriptors, with notable exceptions in mechanics, sentence structure, and vocabulary. The primary finding highlights a discernible improvement in students' writing abilities. Additionally, insights from face-to-face interviews with students underscore the importance of emphasizing real-time writing practices. As noted by Hirose and Harwood (2020), writing has historically been underemphasized in Japanese classrooms, with genuine writing practices beginning only at the university level. This scenario is reflective of numerous ESL contexts globally, where writing often lacks priority in early educational stages.

The findings of this study suggest actionable implications for both teachers and students. Teachers are encouraged to integrate hands-on writing exercises into their curriculum while fostering an environment conducive to peer and teacher feedback. As argued by Ellis (2021), interactive feedback loops can significantly enhance learners' linguistic competencies. Furthermore, peer-review strategies, combined with structured teacher feedback, may address persistent challenges in developing writing skills, particularly in mechanics and syntax. These strategies could serve as viable solutions to improve overall writing proficiency in ESL learners.

Although this research predominantly employed a quantitative approach, its implications pave the way for future studies. Further research could adopt qualitative methodologies to explore specific linguistic features, such as cohesive devices or lexical choices, to gain deeper insight

into writing development. Such targeted analyses would complement existing findings and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of ESL writing pedagogy.

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**Appendix:**

**A sample of 4 Paragraph Essay (200-275 words) rubrics employed to assess the writing skills**

**A sample of 5 Paragraph Essay (275-350 words) rubrics employed to assess the writing skills**

<b>Marks TOTAL= 50</b>	<b>Content (10 Marks) 5 paragraphs (about 23-</b>	<b>Organization (10 Marks)</b>	<b>Sentence Structure / Grammar (10 Marks)</b>	<b>Vocabulary/Idio ms (10 Marks) (reference</b>	<b>Spelling/ Mechanics (10 Marks)</b>
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	32 sentences) ; 275-350 words			topics in Q Skills books for cross-check)	
8-10	On topic; fully	Contains a clear thesis	Errors do not	Must demonstrate	6 or fewer errors
Marks TOTAL = 50	Content addresses test questions (about 16 original sentences)	Organization (10 Marks) <b>statement at or near the end of the introduction</b>  <b>Each body paragraph</b> consists of: -a clear topic sentence at	Sentence Structure / Grammar (10 Marks)  S-V errors are minimal	Vocabulary (10 Marks)  familiarity with relevant lesson vocabulary and expressions	Spelling/Mechanics (10 Marks) or punctuation  Each incorrectly spelled word
8-10	Introduction contains at least 3-5 sentences; thesis statement controls all subtopics and supporting details at least 2-3 sentences; 3 thesis body paragraphs each contains at least 6-8 sentences, clear topic sentence, paragraph controlling each idea with supporting details, and one controlling conclusion with supporting details; and transition Good transitions summarize ideas and paragraphs	Contains a clear thesis statement at or near the end of the introduction  <b>Each body paragraph</b> -a transition/concluding sentence at the end of the beginning -supporting details in form of organizational pattern (e.g., chronological detail order)  -a transition/concluding sentence at the end  Follows a clear organizational pattern (e.g., chronological order)  <b>Conclusion paragraph</b> at end	Mistakes do not interfere with comprehension of sentence level  Minimal mistakes  Correct use of compound sentences, not interfering with comprehension of the passage	Does not present primarily memorized or previously learned vocabulary and expressions  Correct usage  Level-appropriate vocabulary  Does not present primarily memorized or previously learned material	6 or fewer errors in spelling, capitalization, or punctuation.  Comma errors do not interfere with comprehension  Incorrectly spelled words count once
6-8	Slightly off topic or contains fewer than Good transitions	Thesis statement not included in introduction	Comprehensible overall	Mostly uses level-appropriate vocabulary	8 or fewer errors in spelling, capitalization

	<p>between ideas and paragraphs</p> <p><b>Thesis statement</b> does not control entire essay</p> <p>Fewer than 3 <b>body paragraphs</b></p> <p><b>Supporting details</b> absent or lack <b>relevance</b></p>	<p><b>Major essay elements</b> are present but lack coherence</p> <p><b>Body paragraphs</b> lack required elements or are not organized properly</p> <p><b>Conclusion</b> present</p> <p>Organizational pattern not clear</p>	<p>S-V errors are rare</p> <p>Some errors in sentence structure, mostly from incorrect use of conjunctions and resulting errors</p>	<p>but without particular inclusion of unit vocabulary</p> <p><b>Some</b> incorrectly used words and expressions, but not interfering with overall <b>comprehension</b></p>	<p>n, or punctuation</p>
6-8	<p>Slightly off topic or lower than 15 <b>sentences</b></p> <p><b>Conclusion</b> does not summarize and/or does not control new ideas introduced</p>	<p><b>Thesis statement</b> not included in introduction</p> <p><b>Major essay elements</b> present but not always <b>coherent</b></p> <p><b>Body paragraphs</b> do not contain required elements</p>	<p>Comprehensible overall</p> <p>Rare <b>S-V errors</b></p> <p><b>Run-ons</b> may interfere with comprehension</p>	<p><b>Some</b> incorrectly used words and expressions</p> <p>Errors do not interfere with overall comprehension</p>	<p><b>8 or fewer errors</b> in spelling, capitalization, or punctuation</p> <p>Errors interfere with comprehension</p>
4-6	<p>Noticeably off topic and/or contains fewer than 15 <b>sentences</b></p> <p><b>Supporting details</b> overall absent or lack <b>relevance</b> transitions between ideas and logical connections</p> <p>Weak <b>transitions</b> and logical connections</p>	<p>Lacks clear <b>thesis statement</b> and/or <b>controlling idea</b></p> <p><b>Conclusion</b> present</p> <p>Lacks <b>topic sentences, and/or conclusion, or such elements are in the wrong place</b></p> <p>No organizational pattern</p>	<p>Difficult to understand sentence structure because of grammar errors</p> <p>Extensive <b>S-V errors</b></p> <p>Extensive errors in <b>relative clauses and complex sentences</b></p>	<p>Noticeably incorrect use of vocabulary used with some order reference to lesson content is <b>below the expected level; noticeably limited</b></p>	<p><b>9-12 errors</b> in spelling, capitalization, or punctuation</p>
0-4	<p>Off topic, but demonstrates effort</p> <p><b>8-10 sentences</b> not summarized and/or introduces new ideas</p>	<p>There is no demonstration of basics of essay form, and no paragraph organization</p>	<p>The student is unable to form a correct sentence or produce correct subject-verb agreement</p>	<p>Uses <b>many</b> words incorrectly</p> <p>Relies on <b>excessively elementary</b> vocabulary</p>	<p><b>13-16 errors</b> in spelling, capitalization, or punctuation</p>



<p><b>4-6</b></p>	<p>Noticeably fewer than 3 total marks and/or 10 sentences for the essay</p> <p>Lacks complete logical transitions or fewer than 5 sentences:</p> <p>Lacks 0 marks for the conclusion</p>	<p>Lacks clear thesis statement and/or controlling idea</p> <p>Lacks some major essay elements</p> <p>Lacks conclusion</p>	<p>Difficult parts of the essay fail to convey meaning</p> <p>Extensive S-V errors</p> <p>Extensive errors in sentence structure</p>	<p>Some usage of idioms and collocations</p> <p>Vocabulary is below the expected level; noticeably limited</p>	<p><b>9-12 errors</b> in spelling, capitalization, or punctuation</p>
<p><b>0-4</b></p>	<p>The essay is off topic</p>	<p>There is no paragraph organization and/or</p>	<p>The student is unable to</p>	<p>Uses many words incorrectly</p>	<p><b>13-16 errors</b> in spelling,</p>
	<p>demonstrates effort</p> <p><b>5-9 sentences</b></p> <p>In this case, no more than 10 total marks and no fewer than 3 total marks should be given for the essay</p> <p>Completely off topic or fewer than 5 sentences: 0 marks for the entire essay</p>	<p>no demonstration of basics of essay form</p>	<p>form a correct sentence or produce correct subject-verb agreement.</p> <p>Large parts of the essay fail to convey meaning</p>	<p>Little variety in vocabulary use</p>	<p>capitalization, or punctuation</p>