



# Writing English through the lens of the senior high school students: A phenomenological inquiry

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Received: 21 Mar 2025; Received in revised form: 18 Apr 2025; Accepted: 26 Apr 2025; Available online: 30 Apr 2025  
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**Abstract—** Writing is an indispensable skill in various life contexts. Improving students' writing skills is necessary for effectively communicating ideas, persuading others, and self-expression. However, writing is considered the most difficult skill, requiring massive effort and mastery of the rules. Students should possess knowledge of grammar, structure, meanings, vocabulary, and other prerequisites for effective writing. Hence, this study used the transcendental phenomenological research design to describe the lived experiences of Grade 12 students in writing English at Kapingkong National High School. The researcher collected data through criterion sampling, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Content experts validated interview questions. Thematic analysis revealed relevant themes: Positive outlook, Goal-oriented writing, Writing proficiency, Self-assessment in writing, Grammar problems, Disheartening organizational skill, Scarcity of time, Inevitable ambiguity, Problems on highfalutin terms, Age and learning gap, Technology and communication, Language barrier, Negative outlook, Academic help-seeking behavior, Learning and writing styles, Language resource, Writing routines, English writing competence, Learning and writing styles, and Teacher's feedback. The research findings suggested that many Grade 12 students struggled to compose grammatically accurate English paragraphs. The study revealed that students' English writing was mostly hindered by a lack of proficiency in English tenses, grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and other related factors. Furthermore, the primary factors contributing to students' inadequate writing skills in English included a lack of imaginative concepts, anxiety related to writing, insufficient structural organization, and an overreliance on peers. This highlighted the need for a learning and development program for students who required assistance enhancing their writing skills.



**Keywords—** Creative Writing, Students, Experiences, Phenomenology, English.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Writing is undeniably an indispensable talent in a variety of contexts. As one of the language abilities, writing is crucial for communicating a person's thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and attitudes. People are adept at sharing and communicating with others through writing. Individuals may write for their pleasure or other reasons.

The purpose of writing for students is to familiarize them with English. Writing is one way to talk to someone.

Students' writing skills are very important to how well they do in school because they must write most of their assignments, tests, reports, and study papers. In the same way, writing is an ability that can help students improve not just their English writing but a variety of other skills.

English is used worldwide as a lingua franca among people from different cultures, ethnic, and social backgrounds (Dewi, 2017). One of the most crucial skills for English teachers is the ability to effectively teach

writing in primary schools, an essential component of English language instruction. Writing lessons have been provided to pupils throughout their early childhood when they were only beginning to learn how to form letters properly.

The ability to write well is a crucial linguistic proficiency. Teaching writing focuses mostly on the process rather than the result. Writing encompasses more than the mere organization of letters to construct words, phrases, or paragraphs; it presents a formidable challenge to acquire proficiency in this skill. The academic domain encompasses various components, such as lexical and syntactic choices, structural arrangement of text, lucidity of meaning, and coherence of concepts (Keller et al., 2020; Yeh, 2020). Acquiring writing proficiency necessitates extensive practice and regular engagement to develop and refine this valuable ability. It is suggested that to generate high-quality written work, the author must undergo an extensive procedure, according to Martarini et al. (2020). The production of a proficiently written work necessitates utilizing a minimum of four procedures by the writer, namely prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing.

Writing is essential to effective English and speaking, reading, and listening. Writing involves numerous processes at once (Ling, 2016). School writing assignments foster better penmanship and greater intellectual progress via problem-solving and critical thinking. Getting better at writing is a struggle. However, the task itself is usually interesting. Focus is an issue for some kids, especially when writing. Quality writing requires much background knowledge; therefore, students should be interested in the subject. The student's command of English grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, spelling, and sentence structure is essential for effective writing.

More students' English writing abilities could improve at Kapingkong National High School (KNHS). Based on the observation data, students have certain writing challenges. Consequently, they needed more vocabulary mastery, struggled with tenses, struggled with acceptable grammar and sentence structure mastery, and struggled to organize their thoughts, especially in academic writing.

Based on the interview with the English teachers in KNHS, it was evident that most students struggled to master vocabulary. Students still required additional vocabulary and assistance to comprehend the meaning of challenging words used in English lectures. Additionally, students must work harder to commit the words they read or heard in the book to memory. The inability of students to employ the words in various circumstances is the other contributing element.

Language students may focus on developing their vocabulary, the foundation for language proficiency. In teaching English, especially at an early age, there are many things to be concerned about, including vocabulary (Katemba, 2020). Vocabulary is several words a language has (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, 2017). Megawati and Mandarani (in Megawati, 2016) argue that students' frequent struggles with speaking English result from their lack of vocabulary proficiency. Their ability to speak and write is low because they need more vocabulary. Sometimes, the students were less motivated to learn English, or the teacher, the media or method used by the teacher could have been more attractive (Saputri, 2020).

Various research on writing English skills only centered on upper secondary education, impacts of video making and blended learning, challenges faced by students and teachers on writing, use of Plotagon, the effect of Canva, process approach, using Facebook to develop grammar discussion and writing skills in English for university students, the problems faced by the teachers in developing English writing, students' assessment in writing, and integrated approaches to improve students writing skills for students majoring English (Keller et al., 2020; Yeh, 2020; Quvanch & Na, 2020; Moses, & Mohamad, 2019; Guzmán et al., 2019; Yundayani et al., 2019; Durga & Rao, 2018; Ahmed, 2016; Bilal et al., 2013; Javed, 2013; Tangpermpoon, 2008).

However, research on students' real experiences, including their happiness, contentment, and difficulties while learning English through writing, is sparse. As a result, an empirical study has been conducted to investigate and characterize the writing experiences of Grade 12 students. Furthermore, this study aimed to explore and understand the challenges the Grade 12 students encountered and the adaptive strategies they utilized in the challenges they faced in writing English.

### **Research Questions**

This study's central question was: *How do Grade 12 students describe their lived experiences in writing English at Kapingkong National High School (KNHS)?* It also sought to answer the following sub-questions:

1. How do the Grade 12 students describe their joys, satisfaction, and fulfillment in writing English?
2. Do Grade 12 students encounter challenges in writing English?
3. What are the adaptive strategies the Grade 12 students utilized for writing English?

## II. METHODS

### Research Design

This study used a Transcendental Phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of Grade 12 students at Kapingkong National High School in writing English. Phenomenology investigates what is experienced and how it is experienced (Neubauer et al., 2019), aiming to describe and understand these lived realities (Morley et al., 2017). Data were collected through criterion sampling, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The researcher focused on identifying key themes and adaptive strategies students used to overcome challenges in writing English based on their narratives.

### Participants of the Study

The participants were ten (10) Grade 12 students of KNHS taking Creative Writing subject for the School Year 2022-2023. The names of the participants were coded or undercovered to protect their confidentiality.

### Research Instrument

The study used a semi-structured interview to gather personal experiences, attitudes, and perceptions related to the research topic (DeJonckheere et al., 2019). The researcher developed the interview questions, checked them with the adviser, and validated them by four Master Teachers and one School Head to ensure content validity. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded for transcription and analysis, with assurances of confidentiality. Additional tools included a questionnaire validation form, interview protocols, an informed consent form, and a transcription guide.

### Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher secured approval from the School Principal and obtained informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality. Interviews were scheduled with health protocols observed, and responses were audio-recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed.

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher established credibility through consistent participant responses and continuous data analysis. Dependability and confirmability were ensured by aligning analytical processes with research standards and maintaining neutrality in interpretation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). An audit trail, field notes, color coding, and code names were used to document and organize data accurately.

Validity was enhanced by seeking alternative perspectives, conducting peer debriefing with the research adviser, and clustering interpretations. Member checking was used during interviews to verify participants'

responses. Data saturation was achieved when no new insights emerged, including from a participant with a unique perspective.

### Data Analysis Method

The researcher used thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify and interpret patterns within the data. This involved transcribing and reviewing interviews, generating initial themes from grouped codes, and refining them to align with participants' responses and the research framework. Each theme was clearly defined, with saturation reached when no new insights emerged. The final report highlighted key themes, and member checking ensured the accuracy of participants' perspectives.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study's results and discusses the implications of data gathered through an interview guide questionnaire during the interview conducted with the participants. Twenty (20) relevant themes were articulated through difficult procedural data analysis and interpretation. They were all synthesized from 189 formulated meanings, 66 initial themes, and 36 clustered themes. The identified relevant themes are as follows:

### Theme 1: Positive Outlook

This theme characterizes the participants' enthusiastic and emotionally connected perceptions of writing in English. It showed how students viewed writing as not merely an academic exercise but a personally meaningful and fulfilling activity promoting emotional well-being and self-growth.

The participants' reflections demonstrated their strong emotional ties to the writing process. For instance, one student shared: *"Yes, I feel joyous while writing English. I feel satisfied while writing English. Knowing that I can put my thoughts and feelings into words makes me satisfied with my capability. Yes, I feel fulfilled while writing English. Writing in English increases my joy to the point that I want to write more and more using the language."* – S3. This utterance reflected a deep sense of joy, satisfaction, and personal accomplishment, emphasizing how writing became a vehicle for *self-expression* and emotional fulfillment.

Another participant expressed a sense of achievement in overcoming challenges: *"Yes, most of the time, I experience writing fulfillment rather than the feeling of satisfaction. I feel fulfilled whenever I can surpass a challenging academic requirement that needs intensive skill and effort in writing or establish a foundation from the knowledge I produce, which needs to be maintained at*

*the end of writing or discussion.*” – S5. This illustrated how academic demands served as motivational forces, encouraging students to improve their skills and gain a sense of pride in their accomplishments.

Research supported that writing fostered creativity, emotional health, and cognitive development (Nikutowski, 2019; Jose, 2019). It helped reduce stress, enhanced memory and brought joy through expressive freedom. Moreover, Purwanti (2019) emphasized that a supportive and engaging classroom environment contributed to students’ satisfaction and motivation, making them more open and confident in writing. Most participants reported being either highly satisfied or satisfied with their writing experiences, reflecting only slight differences in satisfaction levels. This reinforced the idea that a positive attitude toward writing in English enriched the learning experience and promoted personal and academic growth.

### Theme 2: Goal-oriented Writing

This theme describes the Grade 12 students’ strong sense of purpose and determination in their writing practices. Their motivation extended beyond merely completing academic tasks—they were driven to improve their skills and gain validation through their accomplishments.

One participant shared: *“Yes. Writing in English can also bring a sense of accomplishment, especially when I have completed a difficult writing assignment or essay.”* – S2. This response indicated that the student experienced a sense of achievement when completing challenging writing tasks, suggesting that overcoming academic difficulties brought personal satisfaction and pride.

Another student reflected on the internal fulfillment that came from meeting writing objectives: *“Fulfillment in English writing comes to me when I have determined that I have reached my goal and purpose to convey a certain message.”* – S3. This response demonstrated a clear, purpose-driven mindset. For this student, effectively communicating a message through writing was key to feeling fulfilled, showing a mature approach to writing centered on intentional expression.

Praise also played a vital role in motivating students to write by reinforcing specific strengths in their work, which boosted confidence and encouraged persistence (George, 2018). According to the Emotional Response Theory (Peng, 2021), positive teacher feedback fosters student happiness and engagement. Intrinsic motivation was likewise essential, driven by factors such as interest in the topic, relevant knowledge, and consistent feedback (Akyol & Aktaş, 2018). However, students’ willingness to write could decline if writing felt dull or burdensome,

making motivation a key element in sustaining growth and success in writing (Sugumlu et al., 2019).

Goal-oriented Writing reflected students’ views of writing as a means of accomplishing personal goals and a tool for meaningful communication. Their drive to reach specific writing outcomes enhanced their performance and deepened their emotional investment in the process.

### Theme 3: Writing Proficiency

This theme encapsulates the students’ reflections on their current skill level in English writing, their awareness of growth, and their ongoing journey of improvement. Their responses showed a recognition of their capabilities and a forward-looking mindset focused on continued development.

One participant acknowledged a sense of uncertainty and a desire to improve: *“I was not too confident or quite uncertain about some of my work because I was still a high school student and could learn more at my future tertiary level.”* – S1. This response reflected an honest self-assessment and highlighted the student’s openness to growth. It showed that writing proficiency was a process and confidence would likely come with more experience and education.

In contrast, another student shared a more confident perspective, describing satisfaction with their writing accomplishments: *“It was great to see my ideas and thoughts come to life on paper cohesively and entertainingly. It was satisfying to watch my thoughts come together and know I had produced something worthwhile. Writing in English also allowed me to hone my language skills and expand my vocabulary, which was a rewarding experience.”* – S2. This narrative illustrated how writing was a creative outlet and a tool for academic growth. The student recognized the joy of expressing ideas clearly and appreciated the opportunity to enhance their vocabulary and linguistic precision.

The students’ reflections supported the idea that writing proficiency was vital to their academic development. Competence in writing enabled them to construct clear, coherent texts and articulate their ideas effectively—skills essential for academic success. According to Alahmadi and Foltz (2020), vocabulary acquisition is a critical component of communicative competence and is central to mastering the four language skills. However, vocabulary learning remained one of the most difficult areas for learners, often requiring deliberate strategies to support retention and use.

Furthermore, Erenler and Cetin (2019) defined “written achievement” as the ability to express thoughts clearly and accurately in a second or foreign language.



Beyond its technical aspects, writing proficiency also contributed to critical thinking and meaningful communication, empowering students to engage with others and participate in academic discourse more effectively.

Writing Proficiency underscored the students' evolving relationship with English writing—from initial uncertainty to growing confidence and skill. Their experiences highlighted the dual role of writing as a measure of academic capability and a means for self-expression and intellectual development.

#### **Theme 4: Self-assessment in Writing**

This theme reflects how students used reflection and evaluation to improve their writing performance. The participants recognized the value of reviewing their work, identifying weaknesses, and applying effective strategies to strengthen their writing skills.

One participant emphasized the importance of revisiting and refining their work: *"I could make any reexamination of all the words or inputs that I extracted."* – S5. This response reflected the student's awareness of the need for continuous improvement through careful review. The act of reexamining their output demonstrated an effort to enhance clarity and accuracy in writing, which was crucial for academic success.

Another student described how self-assessment enabled them to recognize areas of weakness and apply targeted strategies for improvement: *"As a student, I utilized those strategies through self-assessment. Those things or points where I was weak, I tried to help myself to make my learning process effective, particularly in writing English. And the moment I identified the effective way for me, then that was what I focused on to retain my learnings."* – S7. This statement showed a strong sense of self-awareness and responsibility for learning. The student used self-assessment to evaluate outcomes and refine their writing process based on what worked best for them.

The use of self-assessment aligned with the concept of independent learning, where students took an active role in directing their academic growth. Comert and Omer (2018) state that self-assessment helps learners evaluate their performance and shape future learning decisions. Banli (2014) found that writing classes incorporating self-assessment were more effective than traditional approaches, empowering students to take ownership of their learning.

Moreover, Houda (2018) noted that self-assessment fostered critical thinking and reflective skills, allowing students to become more autonomous and intentional in their learning. As students became more aware of their

progress and learning habits, their ability to write more effectively and independently improved.

Self-assessment in Writing underscored the importance of reflection as a tool for self-improvement. The participants demonstrated that, through ongoing evaluation of their writing practices, they could take meaningful steps toward becoming more capable, confident, and independent writers.

#### **Theme 5: Grammar Problems**

This theme reveals one of the most common and persistent challenges faced by Grade 12 students in English writing—the struggle to apply correct grammar consistently and confidently. Participants expressed their frustrations with grammar rules, which resulted in difficulty producing clear and coherent written output.

One participant shared their struggles with basic grammar components: *"I struggled with tenses and the correct choice of words. Then, with the spelling. The most challenging part for me was constructing those sentences and paragraphs."* – S1. This response illustrated the student's difficulty in organizing grammatically accurate content. It reflected the interconnected nature of writing challenges, where issues with vocabulary, structure, and sentence construction compounded the difficulty of writing effectively.

Another student described how the complexity of grammar rules and limited practice created barriers in their writing: *"For me, grammar in writing English was challenging due to its complicated rules, numerous exceptions, and variations between spoken and written English. Furthermore, many people did not have enough practice utilizing proper English grammar, making it difficult to write in English."* – S2. This comment emphasized how grammar was inherently complex and demanded consistent exposure and application for mastery.

Grammar-related difficulties were a significant concern in English writing classes. Students often encountered issues with subject-verb agreement, tenses, pronoun usage, articles, and sentence structure. These challenges led to confusion, anxiety, and reduced confidence in their writing abilities. As Moses and Mohamad (2019) pointed out, poor grammar—such as tense inconsistencies or incorrect spelling—undermines students' ability to convey meaning clearly.

Common problems included the misuse of tenses within sentences or across paragraphs, where students were often unsure which verb form matched the intended message. Spelling errors also occurred frequently, especially when students relied on phonetic spelling rather than learned conventions.

Improving grammar and spelling proficiency was essential for clarity and building writing confidence. According to Fareed et al. (2016) and Nyang'au Benard (2014), strengthening grammar knowledge helped reduce student anxiety and improve writing competence.

Grammar Problems captured the fundamental linguistic challenges that hindered student progress in writing. Addressing these issues through targeted instruction, frequent practice, and constructive feedback remained crucial in supporting students' journey toward proficient and confident English writing.

#### **Theme 6: Disheartening Organizational Skill**

This theme describes students' significant challenges in organizing their ideas and structuring their written work. Participants expressed frustration with translating their thoughts into a coherent and logically arranged composition.

One student participant pointed out the difficulty of arranging their ideas logically: *"How to organize my thoughts and ideas."* – S1. This brief yet insightful response highlighted the student's awareness of a critical challenge in writing: the need to present ideas in a clear, structured form. The difficulty in organizing ideas hindered the student's ability to craft well-structured essays and communicate effectively.

Another participant emphasized the importance of coherence in writing: *"Organization and coherence."* – S2. This comment underscored the struggle with sequencing ideas and ensuring that the flow of sentences and paragraphs made sense to the reader. Coherence was essential for maintaining the logical progression of an argument or narrative, and students struggled with this aspect, affecting their overall ability to write clear and effective essays.

The challenge of organizing ideas was a common issue among students, often leading to essays that lacked cohesion and clarity. The research found that nearly 69% of student essays showed a poor connection between sentences and paragraphs, reflecting a struggle with paragraph structure, topic development, and distinguishing between broad generalizations and specific details (Rahman & Sarker, 2019; Alfaki, 2015). Such organizational issues disrupted the writing flow and made it difficult for readers to follow the intended message.

Academic writing, which demands clarity, proper structure, and vocabulary, poses particular challenges for second-language learners (Ashrab & Rubab, 2020; Lebowitz, 2016). The difficulty of organizing thoughts into cohesive arguments or narratives often led to

frustration, reducing students' overall effectiveness in written communication.

Disheartening Organizational skills highlighted how the inability to organize ideas impacted students' writing performance. Addressing these organizational challenges through focused instruction and practice was essential to improving writing coherence and overall effectiveness.

#### **Theme 7: Scarcity of Time**

This theme highlights students' challenges in managing time effectively during the writing process. Participants expressed how time constraints affected their ability to plan, write, and revise their work, leading to stress and compromised quality.

One student explained the difficulty of managing time during writing activities: *"Time management in writing was difficult because it involved setting priorities, creating a schedule, and sticking to it. Time management did not require complex rules or years of practice to master. Good time management skills could have made writing easier and more efficient by reducing stress, increasing focus, and ensuring deadlines were met."* – S2. This response emphasized the crucial role of time management in writing. The student recognized that poor time management led to unnecessary stress and difficulty completing tasks on time, affecting both the quality and efficiency of their writing.

Another participant reflected on the negative impact of limited learning time on retention: *"The least effective was if we learned English in just a little period. Most likely, we forgot what we had learned. We learned in a little period."* – S4. This statement highlighted the consequences of insufficient instructional time, which hindered the students' ability to retain and apply what they had learned in writing. The lack of time affected their learning process and diminished their ability to master key skills and concepts.

Time constraints in writing are a common challenge for students, particularly when unprepared or do not have enough time to revise and refine their work. According to Foster (2015) and Winarso (2016), physical and mental readiness is vital for success in writing. Without adequate time, students struggle to engage meaningfully in the writing process, often rushing through tasks without the opportunity to reflect, revise, or experiment with different approaches.

Sufficient time is essential for developing ideas, revising drafts, and improving overall writing quality. When students are pressed for time, they may be unable to fully explore their thoughts or ensure their writing is clear

and cohesive, which can undermine the effectiveness of their communication.

Scarcity of Time revealed how limited time for writing tasks impacted students' ability to engage in the writing process fully. Addressing time management skills and ensuring sufficient time for learning and revision were crucial to improving writing quality and reducing stress.

#### Theme 8: Inevitable Ambiguity

This theme highlights how students grappled with ambiguity in writing, particularly when interpreting words in different contexts and dealing with inconsistent guidance. It revealed how uncertainty about word meanings and conflicting advice challenged students' writing clarity.

One participant discussed the difficulty of understanding the meaning of words in various contexts: *"This was not to say that making context clues was the least effective, but sometimes it was not easy to process because of the intention in writing and other factors. Sometimes, the meanings of the words got mixed up when used in various scenarios."* – S3. This response highlighted the challenge of interpreting or using words with multiple meanings, especially in writing that serves diverse purposes. The ambiguity of words in different contexts created confusion and hindered students' ability to convey their intended message.

Another student reflected on the confusion caused by inconsistent advice found online: *"Data and information acquired on the online platform were less applicable when not properly guided by an English writing expert; many trials and errors happened as I was trying to determine what strategy would be compatible and effective in my writing skill, and due to a multiplicity of writing advice found within online platforms, I was not able to arrive at any finality in terms of what strategy would be utilized and applied."* – S5. This comment revealed how the abundance of conflicting suggestions online contributed to confusion, making it difficult for students to adopt a clear, consistent approach to their writing. The overwhelming amount of advice led to a lack of resolution on the most effective strategies, further complicating the writing process.

Ambiguity in writing is a known issue, as it can lead to multiple interpretations that confuse the reader and disrupt the flow of communication (Nwala, 2015). Misunderstandings are common when ambiguous words or phrases are misinterpreted, which results in miscommunication and undermines the clarity of the writing. Studies have shown that many English terms are inaccurately translated or misused (Eddington, Degani, & Tokowicz, 2014), impacting the text's intended meaning.

Furthermore, students, particularly in secondary school, face ongoing challenges with grammar and vocabulary, which hinder their ability to write clearly and effectively (Adams & Keene, 2000). These issues are especially prominent in academic writing, where punctuation, capitalization, and spelling errors contribute to ambiguity and comprehension difficulties (Hajar, 2019; Ahmed, 2017).

Inevitable Ambiguity revealed students' difficulties in overcoming word ambiguity and inconsistent guidance. Addressing these challenges requires focused instruction on vocabulary and context and the application of consistent writing strategies to improve clarity and reduce confusion.

#### Theme 9: Problems with Highfalutin Terms

This theme underscores students' difficulties encountering expressions beyond their literal meaning, such as idiomatic phrases and figurative language. Participants highlighted how such terms posed significant challenges in their writing and comprehension processes.

One student pointed out how idiomatic expressions and pronunciation contributed to their struggles: *"Idiomatic expressions and confusing pronunciation added to the difficulty."* – S2. This response reflected the frustration students felt when encountering phrases that could not be interpreted by looking at the individual meanings of the words; the difficulty in understanding idioms or phrases with non-literal meanings created barriers to clear communication and comprehension.

Another participant emphasized the abstract nature of figurative language, saying: *"Understanding certain figures of speech was the hardest because you could not take the meaning of each word in the phrase. Another was that other parts of the language, such as figures of speech, were difficult to understand. Also, you had to familiarize yourself with various references and the history of these figures of speech."* – S3. This statement illustrated the added complexity of interpreting figurative language, which required understanding the meaning of the phrase itself and having cultural and contextual knowledge to interpret it accurately. Students struggled with understanding the deeper meanings of metaphors, proverbs, and other figurative expressions, which often required familiarity with cultural references and historical context.

Students face difficulties with vocabulary acquisition, especially highfalutin terms and idiomatic expressions. These terms can be particularly challenging because students often struggle to select the correct meaning of words in context and interpret non-literal language. For example, idioms, metaphors, and proverbs require students

to make pragmatic inferences—considering the context, their knowledge of the world, and the speaker’s intent to understand the implied meaning (Sundaray et al., 2020). This process is cognitively demanding as it simultaneously balances the literal and implied meanings.

Despite the challenges, many speakers can interpret non-literal language quickly. However, understanding highfalutin terms and figurative speech can be especially difficult for learners with declining cognitive abilities or limited exposure to certain expressions.

The theme highlighted students' obstacles when encountering idiomatic expressions and figurative language. These challenges were linguistic and cultural, requiring broader knowledge and cognitive skills to decode the intended meaning.

#### **Theme 10: Age and Learning Gap**

This theme explores how students perceived the impact of age and developmental stages on their writing skills, particularly in spelling and vocabulary. The participants reflected on how their age influenced their learning experiences and writing performance.

One student shared that spelling mistakes were often minor and attributed them to their age and the hurried nature of academic tasks: *“The spelling, I think, because it was just a minor problem for my age at that time—just those difficult and unfamiliar words. Sometimes, I forgot the spelling. Sometimes, because I was in a hurry, I wrote the wrong words, like ‘great’ instead of ‘greet.’”* – S2. This response suggested that occasional errors were viewed as natural for their stage of learning, with time pressure and unfamiliarity contributing to mistakes. The student recognized these lapses as typical for their developmental phase rather than significant writing deficiencies.

As students aged, the complexity of writing expectations tended to increase, requiring accurate spelling and advanced sentence structures, expanded vocabulary, and the ability to self-regulate through planning, drafting, and revising (Belsky, n.d.). While younger learners typically excelled in pronunciation and fluency (Georgiou, n.d.), older learners often faced more cognitive demands in writing.

Beirovi and Huri-Beirovi (2017) found that younger students were more motivated and tended to achieve better language learning results than their older counterparts. On the other hand, Ozfidan and Burlbaw (2019) noted that while younger learners performed better in pronunciation and morphosyntax, older learners were stronger in reading and writing skills. Nevertheless, factors such as motivation, language exposure, and socioeconomic

background often play a more influential role in language learning than age alone (Hyland & Hyland, 2019).

Age and Learning Gap captured students’ self-awareness of the developmental challenges in writing. They recognized that age-related factors like cognitive maturity, exposure, and motivation influenced their writing fluency and accuracy. The theme also emphasized the importance of understanding these age-related differences to support learners effectively at every stage.

#### **Theme 11: Technology and Communication**

This theme signifies how technological limitations, particularly unstable internet access, fully affected students’ ability to engage in writing-related tasks and online learning environments. It underscores the challenges of relying on digital platforms for academic communication, instruction, and writing support.

One student explained their difficulty staying connected during critical learning periods: *“Sometimes, we could not access the internet due to intermittent connection. It made it hard to access the online environment.”* – S2. This statement highlighted the impact of unreliable internet connectivity on their ability to participate in writing activities, conduct research, and communicate effectively within virtual classrooms.

Although technology has the potential to enhance writing development by providing access to online tools, feedback, and research materials, poor internet access limits these advantages. Many students struggle with connectivity issues and distractions from non-academic websites, making it difficult to stay focused on educational content (Olatokun, 2016; Siraj, 2015). While mobile technology expanded learning opportunities (Ellore, 2014), its effectiveness was often compromised by barriers such as unstable access, lack of digital literacy, and minimal guidance.

Sahin (2010, as cited in Affum, 2022) argued that students may not fully benefit from online resources without proper supervision and direction. Therefore, educators play a crucial role in guiding learners toward credible academic platforms and fostering responsible use of technology for educational growth.

Technology and Communication shed light on the intersection between infrastructure and education, showing how limitations in connectivity could disrupt students’ writing development and overall learning experience. It also emphasized the importance of digital inclusion and structured guidance in online academic environments.

#### **Theme 12: Language Barrier**

This theme stresses how students’ reliance on translation from native dialects to English hindered their



writing development. It reflects the challenges of translating thoughts into another language, particularly when the translation process does not support personal understanding or internalization of English writing skills.

One participant expressed the difficulty of depending on others for translation: *“For me, the least effective is writing first in our dialect and letting someone translate it because it is not like finding my way how to learn.”* – S6. This statement highlighted the participant’s belief that relying on translation did not facilitate authentic learning, as it removed them from the direct cognitive process of thinking and composing in English.

Students often faced struggles with English due to limited vocabulary, rapid speech patterns, and the mental effort required to shift between languages. While translation served as a bridge to understanding, it was not merely a mechanical process but required sensitivity to cultural and contextual nuances (Simanjuntak, 2019; Bharathi, 2014).

Research supported that effective translation could improve communication and comprehension in multilingual learning environments (Napu & Hasan, 2019; Langga & Alico, 2020). However, successful translation demanded more than linguistic accuracy. It required sociocultural knowledge and the ability to adapt meaning between two languages.

Language Barrier revealed how indirect learning through translation could delay students’ writing fluency and independence. It underscored the need for instructional approaches that encourage students to think and write directly in English, fostering a more intuitive and confident use of the language.

### Theme 13: Negative Outlook

This theme describes how students’ adverse experiences and lack of interest affected their engagement with writing and reading in English. It emphasizes the emotional and motivational barriers that limit their active participation and overall progress in language learning.

One participant shared their lack of fulfillment when writing about unfamiliar topics, stating, *“However, if the subject or topic is something I am not familiar with, I did not feel any fulfillment.”* – S9. This response illustrated how unfamiliar content reduced the student’s motivation and made writing a less satisfying experience, underscoring the importance of relevance and personal connection to writing prompts.

Another participant expressed how reading could become tedious and uninspiring, indicating, *“Writing was challenging. Also, reading books because sometimes I felt sleepy reading books.”* – S10. This statement reflected

how a negative attitude toward reading led to disengagement, likely impacting their writing ability.

Students commonly lack interest in writing when foundational skills—such as grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary—are weak (Anyiendah, 2017). Without these basic competencies, students often struggle to express their thoughts clearly, resulting in frustration and a loss of confidence. Writing, which requires both technical proficiency and critical thinking (Pratiwi, 2015), becomes a source of anxiety for many.

Motivation emerged as a crucial factor in overcoming these negative outlooks. Supportive environments, including encouragement and teacher praise, could rekindle student interest and promote perseverance (Gbollie & Keamu, 2017). Addressing emotional and motivational challenges, alongside skill development, was key to helping students develop a more positive and productive relationship with writing in English.

### Theme 14: Academic Help-Seeking Behavior

This theme characterizes how students actively sought assistance from teachers, tutors, and peers to improve their writing skills and overcome academic challenges. It emphasizes students’ willingness to seek academic guidance and emotional encouragement, demonstrating self-awareness and resilience.

One participant explained how they turned to their teachers, especially those with English expertise, for clarification and support: *“The adaptive strategies that I used, sir, were by asking teachers, especially those who majored in English. If something were missing from the information I got from an acquaintance, I would ask my teacher, the subject teacher, or the adviser for information.”* – S1. This response showed how students recognized and addressed gaps in their understanding by consulting credible sources such as subject experts.

Another participant described how feedback from teachers and peers helped refine their writing skills: *“Seeking assistance from my teachers, tutors, or peers was frequently a highly beneficial method since it allowed me to obtain personalized comments and coaching on my writing. As a student, I could use adaptive strategies by identifying my weak points and getting assistance from teachers, tutors, or peers.”* – S2. This highlighted the importance of tailored feedback in the learning process and the student’s proactive approach to addressing their areas for improvement.

Help-seeking behavior was portrayed not as a weakness but a strength—a sign of students’ commitment to growth and improvement. According to Kwaah and Essilfie (2017), emotional support helps learners manage

stress, while Guevarra and Cimanés (2017) emphasized that social support, especially during academic pressure, is an essential coping mechanism. Participants affirmed that guidance from peers and educators helped them complete tasks and boosted their confidence in writing, underscoring the value of a supportive academic community.

By acknowledging their limitations and turning to others for assistance, students demonstrated autonomy and a positive learning disposition—crucial for long-term academic success.

#### Theme 15: Learning Concepts and Preference

This theme emphasizes how students developed their understanding of English writing through reflective learning, conceptual analysis, and wide reading. It emphasizes the importance of individual learning preferences and strategies in mastering language use and improving writing competence.

One participant explained how they made sense of unfamiliar vocabulary and incorporated it into their writing: *“The easiest to deal with was the changing meaning of words and their usage in the sentence because I could still comprehend them through their root words and nature. I simply had to incorporate them with my thinking abilities in order for me always to apply them in my writing. By doing so, I had programmed myself to convey what I wanted and needed using the necessary languages and intentions without being hampered by the challenges.”* – S3. This response reflected a logical and metacognitive approach to language learning, showing how students applied analytical thinking to overcome linguistic challenges.

Another participant emphasized the role of reading in refining their writing skills: *“I practiced how to gather ideas and inputs by being a wide reader. I utilized those adaptive strategies by making my strengths and weaknesses in writing more visible or identifiable and by ensuring that those adaptive strategies were put into actualization.”* – S5. This statement underscored how exposure to various texts enriched vocabulary and style and enabled self-evaluation and strategic application of learning methods.

Research supports the interdependence of reading and writing in second language acquisition. Extensive reading equips students with vocabulary, sentence structure, and content ideas, which they can transfer into their writing (Foster, 2015). Fareed et al. (2016) noted that students who regularly read gain more access to ideas and expressions, making writing more effective. Moreover, Murray (2020) argued that reading comprehension depends on decoding skills and background knowledge, vocabulary, and

awareness of linguistic patterns—skills that are equally essential for competent writing.

This theme highlighted how students’ learning strategies—whether through morphological analysis, conceptual reflection, or extensive reading—shaped their writing development. Encouraging such preferences and adaptive behaviors helps foster independent learners capable of constructing meaning through input (reading) and output (writing).

#### Theme 16: Language Resource

This theme stresses the diverse tools students utilize to enhance their English writing skills. Without immediate teacher support, students turned to digital and traditional resources to facilitate their learning. Their responses underscored a growing sense of autonomy and adaptability in acquiring and applying language knowledge.

One participant described their reliance on readily available search tools and dictionaries: *“Using those search engines, just like Google and Chrome. Because Google is mostly used because almost all students have mobile phones, and there is a Google application on their cellphones installed, it is more effective to use search engines like Google because not all the time teachers are available to ask them what is correct. Sometimes I use dictionaries when cell phones are prohibited and read articles on various topics.”* – S1. This response highlighted students’ practical use of technology and their resourcefulness in navigating academic challenges independently.

Another participant shared how multimedia resources blended entertainment and education, stating: *“For me, the most effective is watching English movies with subtitles because I can check the meaning of the words from the scene or action of the actors, and at the same time, I can hear the proper pronunciation and correct spelling. I use it whenever I have time at home.”* – S6. This illustrated an innovative learning strategy where visual and auditory cues supported language acquisition, particularly in vocabulary development and pronunciation.

These practices reflect what Alhatmi (2019) emphasized as essential for ESL learners—developing vocabulary and improving grammar through formal and informal means. The use of dictionaries, online platforms, and varied reading materials reinforced students’ understanding of language rules and fostered independence and confidence in writing. Furthermore, reading English texts for leisure and academic purposes helped students reduce errors, as consistent exposure to proper language structures solidified their writing competencies.

The findings suggested that access to digital and print resources empowers students to take ownership of their learning, especially in environments with limited instructional support. Encouraging the effective use of language tools—ranging from dictionaries to media content—can enhance self-directed learning and support long-term language development in writing.

#### Theme 17: Writing Routines

This theme captures the student participants' consistent and deliberate efforts to improve their writing proficiency through habitual practice. Regular writing emerged as a key adaptive strategy that fostered gradual yet meaningful language development.

One participant concisely stated, "*Writing regularly.*" – S2. Although brief, this response conveyed the importance of establishing a writing routine, emphasizing that consistent engagement in the writing process contributed to increased fluency, confidence, and overall familiarity with English.

Scholarly literature supports this view, noting that writing routines are critical in enhancing cognitive clarity, linguistic structure, and communicative competence (Hyatt, 2021; Sulak, 2018). Daily writing practices—such as journaling or free writing—expose learners to sustained language use, facilitating the acquisition of vocabulary, internalizing grammatical forms, and developing syntactic accuracy (Amelia, 2020; Nurmalasari, 2019). Such routines create a low-pressure environment where students can freely express their thoughts, experiment with language, and gradually improve their writing skills.

Furthermore, when complemented by regular reading, writing routines improve technical writing skills and reinforce comprehension and critical thinking, which are essential to academic success. The findings suggest that encouraging students to write consistently—even outside formal classroom settings—can be a powerful tool for cultivating long-term writing competence and self-assurance in English as a second language.

#### Theme 18: English Writing Competence

This theme emphasizes the student participants' capacity to apply effective strategies for organizing and articulating their thoughts in written English. It reflected their growing ability to navigate the complex academic writing process with increasing autonomy and structure.

One participant shared a practical approach that supported their writing development: "*Breaking down writing projects into smaller, more manageable portions and using outlines or graphic organizers to arrange thoughts were all good ways to get started.*" – S2. This statement demonstrated the student's strategic awareness

of initiating and structuring writing tasks, reflecting a foundational competence in managing writing demands.

Writing was recognized as a multifaceted cognitive process that required the coordination of several linguistic and metacognitive skills. It involved the clear organization and expression of thoughts through structured language, demanding attention to grammar, punctuation, syntax, and coherence (Tuba et al., 2019; Harmer, 2016). Moreover, writing served multiple communicative purposes—such as expressing ideas, informing, persuading, and reflecting—and was a core skill in academic contexts, where students were expected to produce essays, reports, and research outputs (McMahan et al., 2016).

The development of writing competence was best understood through its process-oriented nature, typically progressing through distinct but interconnected stages: *prewriting*, where ideas were generated; *organizing*, through outlining or diagramming; *drafting*, where initial versions were created; *revising*, to improve content and structure; and *editing*, where grammatical and mechanical accuracy was addressed. The student's use of outlines and graphic organizers aligned closely with this model, indicating a deepening understanding of writing as an iterative and strategic endeavor.

The participant's ability to break down tasks and employ prewriting tools reflected a maturing approach to writing that balanced creativity with control. It demonstrated a meaningful step toward academic literacy in English.

#### Theme 19: Learning and Writing Styles

This theme underscores the student-participant's strategies as they worked to overcome challenges in English writing. The theme reflected how students adapted their learning and writing approaches to enhance their proficiency, suggesting a growing awareness of their writing styles and needs.

One participant emphasized the importance of comparing linguistic structures to strengthen understanding, stating, "*Going back to the basics of language learning was the most effective since you could always have a comparative point of view from your mother tongue and vernacular to the English language.*" – S3. This approach underscored a metacognitive strategy based on cross-linguistic awareness. By leveraging their knowledge of their native language, the student used a comparative method to facilitate their learning of English, highlighting the role of linguistic structures in understanding writing. This approach allowed the student to connect new concepts in English with their existing language skills, reinforcing their understanding of the target language.

Another participant focused on self-directed learning and review as a key to their writing development, stating, *"I just wanted to be committed to learning such things as writing using English. Self-learning and self-study were also effective for me since we had little time to teach them step-by-step. I thought the most effective was reviewing for myself. Sometimes, we forget the rules of grammar due to circumstances. So, reviewing what I had learned was effective."* – S4. This statement revealed the student's commitment to maintaining and enhancing their writing skills through independent study. The approach reflected a personalized, individualized strategy for learning, where the student took ownership of their progress and used review to reinforce grammar rules and writing techniques. This method emphasized the importance of self-motivation and the ability to assess one's strengths and weaknesses in writing.

These two strategies demonstrated that effective writing development often required a combination of metacognitive, cognitive, and social strategies. The first participant's cross-linguistic approach relied on understanding language structures, while the second participant's focus on self-review involved ongoing reflection and practice. Both approaches aligned with the idea that successful writers engaged in continual learning and adaptation.

Furthermore, the strategies mentioned by the participants also aligned with research showing that effective writers typically used a mix of cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies (Maharani et al., 2018). Studies indicated that expert writers tended to use a broader range of strategies, with some demographic differences, such as women employing more strategies than men (Penuelez, 2017). These findings suggested that writing skills were not only about the technical aspects of writing, such as grammar and structure but also about the learning processes and strategies that writers developed and used to manage and improve their writing.

The theme demonstrated that learning and writing styles are deeply individual and could significantly influence how students approach and improve their writing. The student participants reflected on the importance of developing personalized approaches to enhance writing skills over time by utilizing various strategies, including cross-linguistic comparisons and self-directed review.

#### Theme 20: Teacher's Feedback

This theme highlights the importance of timely and constructive teacher feedback in enhancing students' writing abilities. The significance of feedback in guiding students' development was clearly expressed by one

participant, who stated, *"After these group activities, our teachers provided feedback as a group and individually, and through this, we could know where to improve our writing skills."* – S8. This statement emphasized how immediate and personalized feedback helped the student participants identify specific areas for improvement, allowing them to refine and strengthen their English writing skills.

Feedback plays a crucial role in the writing process, allowing students to recognize their strengths and weaknesses. Research supports the idea that effective feedback can significantly improve students' writing skills, as it helps them understand what they are doing well and where they need to focus more effort (Education Endowment Foundation, 2020a). However, the relationship between feedback and learning is complex; some studies show mixed results. For instance, feedback has had detrimental effects in some cases, suggesting that the mechanisms through which feedback influences learning are not entirely understood (Handley et al., 2017).

Despite these complexities, the importance of feedback remains clear, especially in the context of writing, where students need guidance to improve their skills. The constructive and personalized nature of the feedback provided in this study—whether individually or in groups—served as a powerful tool for guiding students toward writing proficiency. It allowed students to focus their efforts on specific aspects of writing, such as organization, clarity, or grammar, thereby promoting focused improvement.

The study also highlighted some challenges students and teachers face in writing instruction. Teachers are tasked with not only delivering feedback but also ensuring that students are able to engage with and apply it effectively. School administrators play a role in supporting teachers to enhance the effectiveness of their feedback. Educators can improve writing instruction and student outcomes by creating an environment where feedback is meaningful and actionable.

The theme emphasized that teacher feedback is a vital component of the writing process when timely and constructive. It helps students identify areas for growth and refine their skills. However, the challenge remains in ensuring that feedback mechanisms are fully understood and implemented to maximize their impact on student learning.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Writing challenges can significantly impact a student's academic career. Effective writing requires both strong



language skills and critical thinking. Students who neglect foundational writing skills struggle with more advanced tasks, affecting their motivation. This research explored Grade 12 students' experiences with writing in English, highlighting the joys and difficulties they faced. Despite challenges, students maintained a positive attitude and were motivated to improve. Predefined writing topics helped them organize their ideas, leading to greater writing success.

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