**Active Research Report: ESL Students and Writing Skills**

**Introduction**

Anyone who wishes to excel in today’s globally interconnected academic and professional environments must have a strong command of the English language. According to Akhtar (2020), effective written communication is crucial in academic and professional contexts, and those who can express themselves clearly in writing have a major edge. Therefore, learning English as a second language equips students with the skills they need to produce coherent essays. For students in Belgium’s TSO (Technical Secondary Education), it is crucial to assess their proficiency in the language and gain insight into how their written, oral, and aural communication skills tack up against one another (Floris & Renandya, 2020). Effective writing requires students to use critical thinking, logical structure of ideas, adherence to language rules, and command of syntax and vocabulary (Bhowmik, 2021). Writing challenges are common for ESL students, making it essential to evaluate their writing ability and pinpoint any areas that require further assistance (Al Bad et al., 2015). ESL students must develop a command of the language’s syntax, vocabulary and the capacity to think critically and coherently organize information (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2016). Although writing well is a vital career requirement, not much emphasis has been paid to the challenges faced by fifth-year TSO ESL students in Belgium.

Spoken language facilitates real-time comprehension and emotional connection because of its immediacy and interactivity. However, written language allows for accurate documentation, facilitating vast information distribution and permanent knowledge preservation (Floris & Renandya, 2019). Since written language lasts forever, the reader can go back over it as many times as necessary to fully comprehend it. According to Dornier (2014), writing, except for personal letters and computer-based communication like e-mail, usually does not include physical contact with the reader. Young children learn to talk before they learn to read and write. Reading and writing are typically connected with the start of formal schooling, but learning how to talk spontaneously takes place at home (Akthar et al., 2020). It is a common fallacy that spoken languages are more straightforward to pick up than written ones, yet the opposite is true. Contrary to popular belief, as demonstrated by the research presented by Newton et al. (2018), the linguistic complexity of spoken language is comparable to that of written language, albeit in a different way. Differences in usage and grammatical structure are expected between speech and writing due to the vastly different contexts in which the two are created (Chen & Li, 2018). The stark difference between how stiff written materials can be and how casually a person can speak is where writing and speaking diverge the most (Giroux, 2017). Therefore, the permanence of written language allows for a finder-grained organizational structure and the potential for more complex systems.

Writing is crucial for effective communication in a foreign language, as it allows individuals to express their thoughts, convey complex ideas, and engage in meaningful exchanges with others (Floris & Renandya, 2019). Since many students enroll in English classes to prepare for further education or careers that need excellent writing skills, writing is of utmost significance in an ESL classroom. Recent research on second language writing has shown debates about whether or not the primary focus of writing instruction. This study aims to investigate the writing challenges faced by fifth-year TSO ESL students in Belgium and compare their writing performance with other language skills. Specifically, the study seeks to evaluate the student’s overall writing proficiency level, their perception of their writing abilities, the writing skills they struggle with the most, and the factors contributing to their writing struggle.

**Theoretical Framework**

Writing proficiency is a person’s competency and skill in using written language to communicate thoughts, ideas, and information. ESL students often face challenges in developing their writing skills (Horwitz, 2016). Accuracy, fluency, coherence, and cohesion are all crucial components of ESL writing. Coherence involves ideas’ logical and smooth flow, while cohesion refers to using cohesive devices to connect sentences and paragraphs, contributing to ESL students’ writing (Brown & Lee, 2015). Various factors influence ESL students’ writing performance, such as language proficiency, cultural factors, learning environment, and social and psychological factors, which play a crucial role in writing. ESL students who have not yet attained sufficient English proficiency may struggle with writing tasks due to limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge (Santos & Moreno, 2017). Besides, cultural differences and differences in rhetorical styles between the student’s native language and English also impact their writing abilities (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2016). Motivation and self-confidence are vital psychological factors influencing ESL students’ writing skills. Students who are motivated and believe in their abilities tend to exhibit higher engagement and effort in writing tasks, leading to improved performance (Dornier, 2014). On the other hand, students with low motivation and self-confidence may approach writing tasks with apprehension and struggle to produce coherent and well-structured texts.

The role of instructional practices and pedagogical approaches should not be overlooked. Effective writing instruction should incorporate explicit teaching of writing strategies, grammar, vocabulary, and the writing process (Hedge, 2019). Feedback and scaffolding provided by teachers also play a crucial role in supporting ESL students’ writing development (Cumming & Giroux, 2017). Besides, integrating technology in writing instruction has shown promise in enhancing ESL students’ writing skills (Chen & Lin, 2018).

Numerous studies have investigated the writing capabilities of ESL students, consistently highlighting the challenges they encounter in areas like grammar accuracy, vocabulary usage, organization, and coherence (Silva & Matsuda, 2018). Additionally, research has shown that ESL students struggle to effectively organize their thoughts and ideas, leading to incoherent and disjointed writing (Ferris, 2014). Various instructional interventions have been examined for their impact on ESL students’ writing skills, such as explicit grammar and vocabulary instruction, which has positively influenced their writing performance (Kroll, 2016). Scaffolding techniques, including providing models and guiding students through the writing process, have also enhanced the quality of ESL students’ writing (Hyland, 2018).

Previous studies have revealed that ESL students often face writing competency challenges, particularly in academic settings (Hyland, 2019). These students generally produce less accurate and complex writing than native speakers of the target language and tend to commit more errors. Apart from the difficulties associated with learning grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, cultural and educational disparities between the students’ native and target languages contribute to their writing difficulties. Furthermore, Hyland emphasizes the importance of integrating writing training into ESL curricula and the need for effective pedagogical strategies that support ESL students’ writing development.

ESL students’ general level of language competence is one of the major elements affecting their writing skills. According to Shitu (2015), it might be difficult for pupils who need help with speaking, listening, and reading to write clearly and grammatically accurately. Therefore, it is crucial to consider their language competency levels as a contributing component to comprehending the writing issues among ESL students. Cultural and linguistic backgrounds also play a role in an ESL student’s writing style, making it challenging to adopt the writing standards of the language of instruction. Language and cultural barriers may result in ESL students needing support with proper tone, style, and organization in their written works (Shitu, 2015). Classroom instructional strategies and teaching techniques can also impact ESL students’ writing abilities. Inadequate teacher guidance and feedback can hinder the development of ESL students’ writing skills. Assessing the effectiveness of instructional strategies is crucial for supporting the writing growth of ESL students.

Research suggests various instructional approaches, such as process-based, genre-based, and communicative methods, can improve ESL students’ writing skills (Martirosyan et al., 2015). Moreover, studies have shown that providing feedback and correcting errors can enhance the accuracy and complexity of writing produced by ESL students.

Another relevant theoretical perspective is the sociocultural theory proposed by Vygotsky (1978). This theory emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural context in language development. According to Vygotsky, language learning occurs through collaboration and scaffolding provided by more competent individuals. ESL students’ writing skills may be influenced by their social interaction, educational background, and exposure to English outside the classroom.

Moreover, the literature suggests that the writing challenges faced by ESL students in Belgium may be influenced by specific factors within the Belgian context. For instance, the linguistic diversity in Belgium, with multiple official languages (Dutch, French, German), can create unique challenges for ESL students (Shitu, 2015). The influence of language policies, educational practices, and the availability of resources for ESL instruction in Belgium should also be considered (Akhtar, 2020). By incorporating these theoretical perspectives and considering the context of Belgium, a comprehensive understanding of the writing challenges ESL students face can be achieved. The theoretical framework helps to contextualize the findings and provides additional insights into the underlying factors contributing to these challenges. It serves as a foundation for interpreting the results and informing potential interventions and recommendations for addressing ESL students’ writing difficulties in Belgium.

**Methods**

The research participants consisted of 37 fifth-year TSO ESL students from a school in Belgium, selected based on their willingness and availability to participate during the study period. Among the participants, 27 were boys, and 10 were girls, with 11 students repeating the year. They represented a diverse group in terms of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Class observations were conducted to gain insights into the participants' writing habits and the teaching strategies employed by the ESL instructor. These observations focused on participant engagement, conversations, and writing assignments.

The study utilized a mixed-methods research approach to investigate the writing difficulties of fifth-year TSO ESL students in Belgium, gathering quantitative and qualitative data. Data collection involved various methods, including a standardized writing assessment, a structured questionnaire, interviews with an ESL instructor, class observations, and test results from their speaking, reading, and listening skills. This comprehensive approach aimed to gain a thorough understanding of the student’s writing abilities, perspectives, and areas of difficulty, thereby contributing to the significance of the study.

As part of the qualitative component, a standardized writing competency assessment was conducted to evaluate the overall writing skills of ESL students. The prompt was designed to be engaging, thought-provoking, and suitable for the student’s proficiency level. It encouraged students to express their thoughts and opinions while demonstrating their writing skills. The assessment required the students to write a 200-word essay. A well-defined rubric was created to assess the student’s writing abilities. The rubric focused on four essential categories: grammar, word use, organization, and coherence. Each category had a maximum score of 4, with clear criteria for each score level. This rubric ensured consistency and objectivity in the evaluation process. The assessment was administered under controlled conditions within a specific time frame to ensure students had an equal opportunity to complete the essay. The students were given clear instructions and guidelines while writing their essays.

Trained evaluators who were proficient in English and familiar with the rubric assessed the students' essays. They provided scores for each category and offered feedback on areas that needed improvement. The evaluators were blinded to the students' identities and backgrounds to minimize bias. The scores and feedback from the evaluators were compiled and analyzed to identify trends, strengths, and weaknesses in the student’s writing skills.

A structured questionnaire was also administered to collect quantitative and qualitative information on the students' self-perceived writing proficiency. The questionnaire included open-ended questions to elicit qualitative insights about their experiences and Likert-scale questions to assess their self-perceived writing abilities.

The participants were assessed using standardized tests to measure their proficiency in these areas. The tests provided objective measures of the participant’s abilities and were administered in a controlled testing environment. The speaking component assessed their oral communication skills, the reading component assessed their reading comprehension abilities, and the listening component evaluated their listening comprehension skills. These test results formed the basis for analyzing the participants' language proficiency levels in the study.

An ESL instructor was also interviewed to understand their opinions on the student’s writing skills and difficulties. Qualitative data analysis utilized a theme analysis strategy. Recorded interviews and written samples underwent comprehensive analysis and coding to identify recurring themes and patterns related to writing difficulties, attitudes toward writing, and techniques used by ESL students.

Quantitative data analysis involved using descriptive statistics, such as means, to summarize and interpret the information from the questionnaire and writing skill assessment. The writing competency levels of the ESL students were compared based on factors such as language proficiency and cultural background. Ethical considerations were considered throughout the investigation, ensuring confidentiality, voluntary participation, and obtaining informed consent from participants or their legal guardians.

A triangulation technique was employed to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. The brief interview with the ESL instructor provided valuable insights from an experienced expert, shedding light on the instructional tactics employed and the contextual factors influencing the students' writing performance. This triangulation approach aimed to thoroughly understand the study issue and strengthen the credibility of the research outcomes.

**Results**

Analyzing the writing samples using the rubric scores, with a maximum score of 4 for content, organization, language use, and mechanics, and a maximum overall score of 16, reveals noteworthy trends and areas where ESL students may benefit from improvement. The mean scores were calculated for content (2.07), organization (1.93), language use (2.04), mechanics (2.56), and overall score (8.56).

Among the categories, the organization received the lowest mean score of 1.93, indicating that it poses the most significant challenge for ESL students. This may be due to difficulties in structuring ideas, maintaining logical flow, or establishing smooth paragraph transitions. Closely following organization, the content and language use categories obtained relatively low mean scores of 2.07 and 2.04, respectively. The content score reflects potential limitations in vocabulary or struggles in expressing ideas clearly and effectively. The language use score suggests the presence of grammatical errors, inappropriate word choices, or overall language proficiency concerns.

In contrast, the mechanic’s category received the highest mean score of 2.56. While this score is not exceptionally high, it indicates that ESL students better understand mechanics, encompassing punctuation, spelling, and capitalization, compared to the other assessed categories. With an overall mean score of 8.56 out of a possible 16 points, it becomes evident that there is ample room for improvement in the writing abilities of the ESL students.

The test results revealed that the participants performed better in their speaking, reading, and listening skills than their writing skills. In terms of speaking, the participants demonstrated a range of abilities, showcasing fluency and clarity to varying degrees. Similarly, their reading comprehension skills exhibited diverse levels of understanding, with some participants displaying strong comprehension abilities. Additionally, the participants showed varying proficiency levels in listening comprehension, with some individuals showcasing excellent comprehension skills.

The teacher’s brief interview emphasized that the students’ writing troubles were mostly caused by their limited outside-of-class exposure to English, a lack of writing practice, and challenges using their understanding of grammar and vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Furthermore, the instructor stressed the significance of scaffolding and detailed writing teaching that catered to ESL students’ requirements. The findings show that ESL students in the fifth year of TSO encounter difficulties in several writing-related areas. Some of these difficulties are successfully using grammar, vocabulary, structure, coherence, and language abilities.

Observations of the student’s writing samples indicated a need for improved motivation, organization of ideas, sentence construction, spelling, punctuation, and source utilization. The teacher confirmed that ESL students generally performed better in receptive skills (listening and reading) and oral skills than writing skills, especially when given time to prepare. ESL students' challenges in writing included using translation tools, literal translations, spelling mistakes, and common grammar mistakes. To address these challenges, the teacher suggested correcting mistakes, utilizing rubrics for self-assessment, and incorporating additional writing exercises in the student’s portfolio. Tools like spelling checkers, grammar rules, and translation websites were also recommended for ESL students with writing difficulties.

**Figure 1: Questionnaire’s results for Mean and Standard Deviation**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Questionnaire Item | Mean Score | Standard Deviation |
| Motivation | 3.63 | 1.78 |
| Self-confidence | 4.43 | 1.66 |
| Perceived Difficulty | 4.32 | 1.47 |

The questionnaire results indicate that students have varying motivation levels, self-confidence, and perceived difficulty in writing. The mean score for motivation suggests that students are moderately motivated to write. At the same time, the relatively high standard deviation indicates a wide range of motivation levels among the students. In contrast, the mean score for self-confidence is higher than that for motivation, indicating that students generally feel more confident in their writing abilities. However, the standard deviation suggests that there is still some variation in confidence levels among students. The mean score for perceived difficulty is also relatively high, indicating that many students find writing challenging. The standard deviation suggests that while many students find writing difficult, some still do not find it as challenging. These findings highlight the importance of providing support and guidance to help students improve their writing skills and build confidence in this area.

Upon examining the questionnaire’s open questions, it is clear that many struggle with writing in English and need more practice outside the classroom. The following observations lend credence to this interference:

Firstly, several students have expressed concerns about their proficiency in English, namely in sentence construction, word choice, conjugation, spelling, and grammar. These problems show the author’s inexperience and lack of confidence in their writing abilities. Because of these problems, the school decided to implement new writing requirements. The program consisted of subject-general writing assignments, one-on-one instruction, and workshops on grammar and syntax.

Secondly, there was no uniform mention of tactics for enhancing English writing abilities among the students. Some revealed methods like typing English messages, creating lists, reading English texts, and seeking input. However, some students admitted they did not employ specific strategies but relied only on their innate English-language competence. This suggests they use no strategies or depend on their capacity to think in English. This hints at a lack of deliberate effort to advance their writing skills.

Thirdly, the regularity of writing practice beyond the classroom was generally scarce. Although a handful of students mentioned writing frequently or daily, most disclosed sporadic or negligible practice. Some only practiced when particular tasks or exams necessitated writing in English. This shows a limited commitment to refining their writing capabilities.

Fourthly, students often turned to passive exposure to English through media consumption, such as watching films, playing video games, or reading books. While this can aid in vocabulary acquisition and familiarity with the language, it does not necessarily lead to active writing practice.

Fifthly, several students brought up participating in English communication through social media platforms or online chat applications. However, the extent of their communication involving substantial writing remains unclear, as some responses implied that they mainly engage in casual conversations or occasional texting with friends.

In conclusion, the students' feedback underscores the idea that writing in English presents difficulties, and they generally lack steady and purposeful practice outside the classroom. The limited employment of strategies, infrequent writing practice, and reliance on passive exposure to English suggest that there is room for improvement in their writing abilities. As educators, we are responsible for addressing these challenges and providing ample opportunities for students to develop their skills in a supportive environment.

**Discussion**

Two research questions are addressed in the Discussion chapter. To begin, the study compares the writing proficiency of EFL students to their other language skills (listening, speaking, and reading). Second, it investigates the causes of the observed low level of writing proficiency among EFL students. The significance of writing in academic, professional, and social contexts makes it critical to evaluate EFL students' writing abilities. Despite the fact that previous studies have looked at language proficiency as a whole, writing skills are particularly important because of the specific requirements it imposes. A standardized writing test was used to measure proficiency, and student interviews and writing samples were used to collect qualitative data for the study. The findings highlight disparities and patterns in writing proficiency, revealing that EFL students struggle with writing skills in comparison to other language skills. Additionally, the investigation reveals potential causes of these difficulties. These outcomes accentuate the requirement for additional exploration and intercessions to resolve these issues and improve EFL understudies' composing abilities.

The writing skills of EFL students were compared to their listening, speaking, and reading abilities in the study. The findings reveal significant differences and patterns in these students' writing abilities. More specifically, the analysis reveals that EFL students' writing abilities are significantly inferior to their listening, speaking, and reading abilities. This finding suggests a disparity in language proficiency, with EFL students finding writing particularly challenging. The patterns and differences that were observed emphasize the need for specific interventions to improve EFL students' writing abilities. Because writing is so important in academic, professional, and social settings, improving one's writing skills can have a significant impact on one's overall language proficiency. These findings emphasize the significance of recognizing the particular writing difficulties faced by EFL students and employing efficient approaches to address these issues. Students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) can achieve a language proficiency that is more balanced and comprehensive by concentrating on improving their writing abilities.

Several factors have been identified in the literature that contribute to EFL students' poor writing skills. A lack of exposure to authentic writing models, difficulties organizing ideas and structuring written texts, and a lack of opportunities for writing practice and feedback are among these factors. These factors may have affected EFL students' writing performance in the current study. For instance, their inability to effectively express themselves in writing may have been hampered by their limited vocabulary and knowledge of grammar. It's possible that incoherent or poorly structured writing was produced as a result of the difficulties in structuring texts and organizing ideas. Also, the absence of openness to valid composing models and restricted open doors for training and criticism might have limited the advancement of composing abilities. These variables aggregately add to the noticed differences between composing abilities and other language abilities. When designing interventions to address the particular writing difficulties faced by EFL students, it is essential to comprehend these potential explanations. Educators can aid in the development of EFL students' writing proficiency and a more balanced development of their language skills by focusing on these factors.

Although the findings of the study shed light on the difficulties that ESL students face in improving their writing abilities, the study's reliability may be hampered by a few potential flaws. The small sample size, which may not be representative of all ESL students in Belgium, is one limitation. Additionally, considering that the sample consists of fifth-year TSO students, the outcomes may not apply to other grade levels or programs. Additionally, students may not be completely honest in their responses, making the data collection methods, such as self-reports, susceptible to response bias.

The study's data collection and research design have high internal validity. The mixed-methods design of the research design makes it possible to triangulate data from multiple sources, such as teacher interviews, writing samples, and a questionnaire. The use of a rubric to evaluate writing samples as part of the research design increases the objectivity and consistency of the collected data. Because they were developed to elicit specific information related to the research questions, the methods of data collection are also valid.

The study's findings may have limited external validity because of the small and specific sample of participants. The sample was made up of fifth-year TSO students in Belgium, who might come from different cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds than other EFL students in other countries. As a result, it may not be possible to apply the findings of the study to other populations of EFL students outside of Belgium. To improve the results' external validity and generalizability, additional studies with a larger and more diverse sample are required.

The results of the current study on the writing abilities of ESL students are consistent with previous work in this area. ESL students struggle with grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and coherent idea organization, according to studies. Some studies, on the other hand, report that students struggle with cohesion and coherence, while others report difficulties with organization and structure. However, there are some inconsistencies in the literature regarding specific areas of writing difficulty.

The current study's findings are very similar to those of previous studies, despite these inconsistencies. For instance, the current study and previous studies emphasize the significance of language proficiency, cultural differences, and inadequate instruction as contributing factors to the writing difficulties experienced by ESL students.

By shedding light on the particular difficulties that fifth-year TSO students in Belgium face, the current study makes an original contribution to the existing body of knowledge in the field of English as a second language writing. Additionally, the findings of the study emphasize the need for explicit writing instruction and scaffolding strategies to support the writing development of ESL students. The mixed-methods approach of the study, which used both quantitative and qualitative data, provides a nuanced understanding of the writing abilities of ESL students and serves as a foundation for future research. Overall, the current study adds to the growing body of research on ESL writing and offers educators who want to help their students improve their writing skills practical implications.

The possible research question for the intervention:

The issue of disparity in writing abilities among ESL students in Belgium can mainly be attributed to a lack of targeted intervention and support for developing their writing skills; Therefore, further research should focus on investigating the potential of a specific intervention aimed at enhancing writing skills within the ESL curriculum. Given that organization was identified as the category with the lowest mean score, it is crucial to explore interventions that target this aspect directly. The research question of this intervention phase could be: "How can explicit instruction and scaffolding techniques be effectively used to improve organization in the writing of fifth-year TSO ESL students in Belgium?"

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of the writing challenges faced by ESL students in the fifth year of TSO in Belgium. The findings highlight the importance of addressing organization, content, and language use in ESL writing instruction. By considering the factors influencing ESL students' writing skills and designing targeted interventions, educators can better support these students in developing their writing proficiency. Further research focused on interventions to improve organization in ESL writing can contribute to developing effective instructional practices for ESL students in Belgium and beyond.

**Reflection**

The main distinction between basic and applied research is how it is used. Applied research aims to address particular concerns or practical challenges in practical settings. It is carried out to produce useful knowledge and offers suggestions that may be implemented. On the other side, curiosity is the driving force behind basic research, sometimes referred to as theoretical research or pure research, which aims to further fundamental knowledge and understanding of a certain topic without immediately having a practical application. Practical applications and relevance to the actual world are the main goals of applied research. In order to solve practical issues and enhance current methods often entails investigating certain occurrences, coming up with solutions, or testing hypotheses. On the other hand, basic research concentrates on expanding understanding and ideas within a certain area. It investigates a field’s core mechanics, basic ideas, and abstract notions to further its theoretical underpinnings. It can include performing experiments, surveys, or field investigations to obtain information and assess certain circumstances. Basic research, on the other hand, is frequently longer-term and continuous.

Basic and applied research both follow the rules of the scientific process. They entail developing research questions, conducting methodical investigations, gathering and evaluating data, and coming to conclusions supported by the available evidence. Both strategies demand strict methods and devotion to moral principles. Applied and fundamental research contribute to the body of knowledge in their respective fields with different aims and objectives. While basic research develops theoretical underpinnings and broadens the comprehension of fundamental concepts across disciplines, applied research creates practical information that may guide decision-making and enhance practices in certain domains. The two types of study frequently interact and exchange information. Basic research, which offers theoretical foundations and conceptual frameworks, can yield insights and discoveries that can be used to influence applied research. Although fundamental and applied research have different goals and focuses, both are crucial for expanding knowledge and improving society. While fundamental research builds the foundation for upcoming advancements and discoveries, applied research transforms theoretical knowledge into useable solutions. Both strategies are beneficial and complementary, advancing the advancement and development of several fields.

Many definitions of ' relevant research ' may apply depending on the situation and the particular subject of study. In general, though, research is pertinent when it deals with a specific topic, problem, or phenomenon or advances understanding. Current demands, difficulties, or knowledge gaps within a particular topic or subject are generally connected with relevant research. It seeks to offer perceptions, answers, or innovations that have applications in real-world settings or can enhance theoretical conceptions. It is consistent with the state of knowledge and technological breakthroughs in the subject and considers the present context. Relevant research deals with a significant issue or query pertaining to the subject or has larger social ramifications. It addresses topics with practical applicability and real-world significance. Relevant research has applications in the actual world and has practical ramifications. It offers practical suggestions or insights that can help with decision-making, the creation of policies, or actual actions.

The word ‘evident’ is often used to refer to something obvious or simple to observe. Evidence is the data, facts, or information that substantiates or supports a claim, hypothesis, or theory in the study context. The scientific method and empirical study are directly related to evidence. Scientific ideas are based on factual data from methodical and exacting research techniques. The validity and dependability of research conclusions are strengthened by accumulating data from several studies or areas of study. Solid facts and analyses support evident conclusions consistent with accepted theories, conceptual frameworks, or empirical results. Remembering that scientific knowledge is open to change and improvement when new data becomes available is critical. The data quality, statistical analysis, research design, sample size, and consistency of findings across different studies are only a few examples of the variables that might affect the strength of the evidence. Researchers analyze the data’s reliability, validity, and generalizability considering the specific research topic or hypothesis.

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**Appendix 1: Writing Task Guidelines and Rubric**

Goals:

Evaluate the writing skills and abilities of fifth-year TSO ESL students.

Identify areas of difficulty and improvement in their writing.

Name:

Write a 200-word essay on following topic:

**What are the advantages and disadvantages of social media in today's society? Write an essay in 200 words.**

Your essay should discuss social media’s good and bad effects on people and society. You can use your own experiences or research to back up your points.

Your essay should be structured with a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. Your introduction should briefly explain the topic and your position. The body of your essay should include your main arguments and evidence to support them. Your conclusion should summarize your main points and restate your position.

Rubric

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1p | 2p | 3p | 4p |
| Content | Essay minimally addresses the topic and/or includes only advantages or disadvantages of social media, with significant lack of depth or clarity. | Essay partially addresses the topic and/or includes only the advantages or disadvantages of social media, with little depth or clarity. | Essay adequately addresses the topic and includes both advantages and disadvantages of social media, but may lack depth or clarity. | Essay thoroughly and effectively addresses the topic and includes both advantages and disadvantages of social media. |
| Organization | Essay has a poorly structured introduction, body, and/or conclusion with unclear or absent transitions. | Essay has an unclear or underdeveloped introduction, body, and/or conclusion with choppy or ineffective transitions. | Essay has a clear introduction, body, and conclusion with some transitions between paragraphs. | Essay has a clear and effective introduction, body, and conclusion with smooth transitions. |
| Language use | Sentences lack clarity, variety, and contain significant errors. Vocabulary is inappropriate or ineffective. | Sentences may lack clarity or variety and contain some errors. Vocabulary may be repetitive or ineffective. | Sentences are mostly clear and varied with minor errors. Vocabulary is mostly appropriate and effective. | Sentences are clear, varied, and free of errors. Vocabulary is appropriate and effective. |
| Mechanics | Essay contains numerous spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors and significantly falls short of the length requirement of 200 words. | Essay contains some significant spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors and may not meet the length requirement of 200 words. | Essay may contain some minor spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors, but still meets the length requirement of 200 words. | Essay is free of spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors and meets the length requirement of 200 words. |

**Appendix 2: Teacher Interview**

Interviewee:

Date

Introduction:

Thank you for participating in this interview. This interview aims to gather insights into the writing performance of ESL students in 5 TSO in Belgium and understand your experiences and strategies as an ESL instructor. Your valuable input will contribute to our research on ESL students' writing difficulties. Please feel free to provide detailed responses based on your expertise and observations. The interview will be audio-recorded for accurate transcription and analysis. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns before we begin.

Interview Questions:

1. In your experience, how do ESL students in 5 TSO in Belgium perform in writing compared to their speaking, listening, and reading abilities?

2. What are the common challenges ESL students face while writing in English?

3. How do you assess the writing abilities of ESL students in 5 TSO?

4. What strategies do you use to improve the writing skills of ESL students in your class?

5. How do you differentiate your teaching approach for ESL students who struggle with writing from those who excel at it?

Conclusion:

Thank you for sharing your insights and expertise. Your input will be invaluable in understanding the writing difficulties faced by ESL students in 5 TSO and developing effective strategies to address them. If there is any additional information or suggestions you would like to provide, please feel free to do so. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

**Appendix 3: Writing Skills Assessment Questionnaire for 5TSO ESL Students**

**Questionnaire writing English 5TSO**

Closed questions (score from 1 to 7)

How motivated are you to write assignments?

How confident do you feel about your ability to write in English?

How comfortable are you with using English vocabulary and grammar correctly in writing?

How well are you able to organize your thoughts and ideas when writing in English?

How well are you able to use evidence to support your arguments in English writing assignments?

How well are you able to write coherent and well-structured paragraphs in English?

Open questions

What do you find most challenging about writing in English?

What strategies do you use to improve your English writing skills?

How often do you practice writing in English outside of the class?

Note: The questionnaire will include instructions to rate the closed questions on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 represents the lowest level and 7 represents the highest level.

**Appendix 4: Protocol for Class Observation: Writing Task Assessment**

**Goal**

Watch and learn how the students write and how the teacher helps them during the writing task.

**Procedure**

Date and Time:

Gather information about:

* Classroom Setup
* Students' Involvement
* Talking:
  + What do the students say when they talk to the teacher about writing?
  + Any help or explanations the teacher gives?
  + Do the students ask questions or do they need help with the writing task?
* Writing Assignments
  + How do they write, from planning to editing?
  + How do they organize their thoughts and ideas?
  + How well do they use grammar, vocabulary to make their writing clear and organized?
* Teaching Methods
  + What does the teacher say during the writing task?
  + Is there any advice or corrections given to the students’ writing?
* Time Management
  + How long do the students have to finish the writing task?
  + Do students manage their time well?
* Classroom Atmosphere
  + How does the classroom ‘feel’ during the writing task?
  + Do things affect the students’ writing, like noise or interruptions?

**Appendix: Framework of the Skills Tests**

**A) Speaking Test**

Task: Describe your summer plans or talk about your favorite holiday. Engage in a conversation with your English teacher.

Time: Minimum one minute.

Scoring Criteria:

Description of Traveler (Summer Plans, Type of Holiday, Favorite Holiday):

Score: 0, 1, 2, or 3

Feedback: The extent to which you describe yourself as a traveler, including your summer plans, preferred type of holiday, or sharing details about your favorite holiday.

Conversation and Answering Questions:

Score: 0, 1, 2, or 3

Feedback: Your ability to engage in a conversation and respond to questions effectively, demonstrating good communication skills and active participation.

Sentence Structure and Tense Usage:

Score: 0, 1, or 2

Feedback: Evaluation of your use of complete and correct sentences and accurate application of appropriate tenses in your speech.

Pronunciation and Articulation:

Score: 0, 1, or 2

Feedback: Assessment of your pronunciation accuracy, including correct pronunciation of words and clear articulation.

**B) Reading Test:**

Subject: Reading test - The Blarney Stone

Task: Rea the text *The Blarney Stone and answer the following questions:*

1) What word(s) does the author use for the following descriptions?

a) To get, to obtain:

b) A king or queen:

c) A kiss:

2) Kissing the Blarney Stone has the following effect:

You will become the next King/Queen of Blarney Castle.

You will be able to talk fluently and beautifully.

You will only be able to speak nonsense.

You will receive a lot of good luck.

3) Give two true explanations of how the Blarney Stone is linked to Scotland.

Explanation 1:

Explanation 2:

4) True or false? Correct if false.

a) The Blarney Stone was made out of the stones of Stonehenge.

b) Queen Elizabeth I invented the recent meaning of the word 'blarney'.

c) It is very easy to kiss the Blarney Stone.

d) Famous people have also kissed the Blarney Stone.

**C) Listening Test:**

Subject: Listening skills - Ellis Island

Task: Listen carefully and answer the following questions:

1) How many years has it been since the general public visited the hospital? Answer:

2) The hospital had to check if the immigrants weren't sick.

a) What test did the hospital do?

b) What would happen if the test was positive?

3) Who is portrayed in the artworks you can see in the video?

4) Why was the hospital abandoned in 1954? Give 2 reasons! Answer:

5) How many people were treated on Ellis Island? And how many died?

Treated: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Died: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

6) Which disease was the main reason for child mortality?

7) How will the proceeds (the entrance money) be spent?

8) What is the main purpose of this news video?

* Touristic
* Historical
* Entertainment