**Results**

The findings of a mixed-methods investigation into the writing difficulties of Belgian fifth-year TSO ESL students are presented in this chapter. The 37 students who took part in the research were from a wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Standardized assessments and a structured questionnaire were used to collect quantitative data, while class observations and interviews with the ESL instructor were used to collect qualitative data. The participants' writing abilities, self-perceived proficiency, and the factors that influence their writing performance are examined in this chapter.

**Writing Competency Assessment Results**

The purpose of the standardized writing assessment that was given to the participants was to provide a controlled and consistent evaluation of their writing abilities. Participants were required to demonstrate their ability to communicate effectively in writing by completing a series of writing prompts or tasks as part of the assessment. The prompts covered different sorts and points to evaluate members' capability in various composing styles and their capacity to adjust to various settings.

A comprehensive assessment rubric that included criteria such as organization, clarity, grammar and mechanics, vocabulary usage, coherence, and overall effectiveness served as the basis for the evaluators' scores and feedback. The writing of each participant was carefully evaluated, and scores were given for each criterion. Additionally, the evaluators provided in-depth feedback that emphasized the participants' writing's strengths and areas for improvement. The feedback was intended to help the participants improve their writing abilities and address specific areas of weakness.

The writing samples of the participants were analyzed, and a number of trends, strengths, and weaknesses were discovered. Some of the participants had strong organizational skills and were able to effectively structure their arguments and ideas. Others wrote without errors and displayed a high level of grammar and mechanics proficiency. Participants' vocabulary usage was found to vary, with some relying on a limited number of words while others displayed a rich and varied vocabulary.

Some participants' writing lacked logical connections between ideas or a consistent flow, making it difficult for them to write coherently. In addition, there were instances of poor clarity in which participants failed to convey their ideas in a concise and clear manner. Some participants also showed weaknesses in grammar and mechanics, with mistakes in sentence structure, punctuation, and spelling affecting their writing's overall quality.

Language proficiency and cultural background were taken into account when assessing writing competency levels. Overall, participants' writing skills, including vocabulary usage, grammar, and coherence, were generally better in those with a higher level of language proficiency. However, it was also noted that writers from diverse cultural backgrounds exhibited distinct writing strengths. The participants' vocabulary selection, writing style, and ability to incorporate cultural references into their work were all influenced by cultural diversity.

Participants with a strong language background and a rich cultural heritage often produced more nuanced and engaging written pieces when writing competency levels were compared based on these factors. This demonstrates the significance of taking into account a person's cultural background and language proficiency when assessing and comprehending their writing competence.

**Thematic Analysis of ESL Instructor Interview**

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview transcripts with master's teacher Katrien Heremans at Campus Max College in Tessenderlo. To better comprehend the phenomenon under investigation, thematic analysis entails locating recurring patterns, themes, and meanings in the data. The interview data were transcribed, looked over several times, and relevant segments were coded to find important themes and patterns. After that, these themes were put together and looked at to get useful insights. Following patterns and themes were identified.

***Comparison of Writing Performance to Other Skills:*** According to Heremans, ESL students in Belgium's 5 TSO generally outperform their productive speaking and writing skills in the receptive skills of listening and reading. Also, when the students had time to prepare, it was found that their oral skills were better than their written ones.

***Common Writing Challenges:*** The interview brought to light a number of difficulties that ESL students face when writing in English. Dependence on online translation services can result in literal translations that may not accurately convey the intended message; spelling errors, which are prevalent; as well as issues with using the right tenses in their writing.

***Evaluation of Writing Skills:*** Heremans uses rubrics with a variety of criteria in his evaluation method. The students' abilities are made abundantly clear in these rubrics, allowing for a methodical and impartial evaluation of their writing abilities. Students are provided with a structured framework for self-evaluation and this assessment method assists in identifying specific areas for improvement.

***How to Improve Your Writing Skills:*** Heremans employs a variety of methods to improve the writing abilities of ESL students. Colors serve as visual cues to encourage students to correct their errors, which are highlighted. Students are able to identify areas in which they can improve by using rubrics. In addition, the portfolio's additional assignments provide additional practice and skill-building opportunities.

The conversation with Heremans revealed significant instructional strategies used to assist ESL students in developing their writing. Spelling checkers, grammar rules, and translation websites are all available to all students, regardless of their writing proficiency. This strategy helps students who struggle with writing and promotes inclusivity. In addition, the portfolio's focus on tracking progress emphasizes growth and improvement, ensuring that each student receives the resources and support they require.

The writing abilities of ESL students are influenced by a variety of contextual factors, including the educational system in Belgium and the particular curriculum offered by 5 TSO. The observed differences between students' writing and speaking abilities may be attributed to the emphasis placed on receptive skills and the requirement for students to prepare for oral activities. In the educational setting of 5 TSO in Belgium, the utilization of rubrics is consistent with the evaluative procedures that are frequently utilized.

**Analysis of Questionnaire Responses**

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.

First, with an average rating of 3.63, students' motivation to complete assignments appears to be moderate. This suggests that educators should look into ways to boost students' motivation, like including relevant and interesting topics, clear writing prompts, and focusing on how writing skills can be used in real life.

Second, a mean rating of 4.51 indicates that students have a moderate amount of confidence in their English writing skills. This positive self-evaluation can act as an establishment for building understudies' composing abilities further. However, educators must use targeted instruction and constructive feedback to close any gaps between students' actual writing performance and their perceived confidence.

With an average rating of 4.34, students report being confident in their ability to correctly use English vocabulary and grammar in writing. Even though this indicates a solid foundation, students can improve their grammatical accuracy and vocabulary by continuing to receive instruction and practice.

With a mean rating of 4.57, students demonstrate a relatively high level of proficiency when it comes to organizing ideas and thoughts. This suggests that students have the ability to effectively structure their writing. However, educators can still assist students in developing more sophisticated organizational strategies, such as logical essay outline and structure.

With a mean rating of 4.29, students' ability to use evidence to back up their arguments in English writing assignments is rated as moderately proficient. This demonstrates how crucial it is to instruct students on how to effectively incorporate evidence from trustworthy sources, evaluate and evaluate the information, and present coherent arguments.

Student give their English paragraph writing skills an average rating of 4.11 out of 5. Teachers can further improve students' paragraph writing skills by emphasizing topic sentences, supporting details, transitions, and concluding sentences, despite the fact that this indicates a reasonably solid foundation.

In general, the results of the self-perceived writing proficiency test offer useful insights into the attitudes and perceptions of students regarding their writing abilities. Students can benefit from these findings by becoming more self-assured and proficient writers in English, and educators can adapt their teaching methods to address specific areas of need.

**Appendices**

Table 1: Self-Perceived Writing Proficiency Ratings (Likert-Scale Questions)

| **Student** | **Motivation** | **Confidence** | **Comfort with Vocabulary** | **Grammar** | **Organization** | **Use of Evidence** | **Coherence and Structure** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Student 1** | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| **Student 2** | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| **Student 3** | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| **Student 4** | 4 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 6 |
| **Student 5** | 3 | 6 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| **Student 6** | 7 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 6 |

Table 2: Average Ratings for Self-Perceived Writing Proficiency

| **Aspect** | **Average Rating** |
| --- | --- |
| **Motivation** | 3.63 |
| **Confidence** | 4.51 |
| **Comfort with Vocabulary** | 4.34 |
| **Grammar** | 4.57 |
| **Organization** | 4.29 |
| **Use of Evidence** | 4.11 |

Table 3: Most Challenging Aspects of Writing in English (Open-Ended Question)

| **Student** | **Most Challenging Aspect** |
| --- | --- |
| **Student 1** | Use of correct tenses |
| **Student 2** | Finding suitable words and phrases |
| **Student 3** | Selecting engaging topics |
| **...** | ... |

Table 4: Strategies for Improving Writing Skills (Open-Ended Question)

| **Student** | **Strategies for Improvement** |
| --- | --- |
| **Student 1** | Thinking and rehearsing sentences beforehand |
| **Student 2** | Typing English messages and practicing |
| **Student 3** | Making lists of ideas before writing |
| **...** | ... |

Table 5: Frequency of Writing Practice Outside of Class (Open-Ended Question)

| **Student** | **Frequency of Writing Practice** |
| --- | --- |
| **Student 1** | Never |
| **Student 2** | 2-3 times a week |
| **Student 3** | A few times a week |
| **...** | ... |