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## REVIEW ARTICLE

# MAJOR FACTORS THAT LEAD COLLEGE STUDENTS TO INEFFECTIVE ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS BASED ON REPORTS OF RESEARCH JOURNALS FROM LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITIES

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyze the findings of the major factors that lead college students to ineffective academic writing skills based on reports of research journals from local and international universities.

#### Key Words:

ESL (English as a Second Language), Factor, Writing skill, Complex, Practice, ESL Context, Negative Influence, Ineffective.

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## INTRODUCTION

Writing is a difficult task which requires a high skill to compose a comprehensible wording. Hedge (1988) affirmed that compared with speech, effective writing requires a number of things: a high degree of organization in the development of ideas and information; a high degree of accuracy so that there is no ambiguity of meaning; the use of complex grammatical devices for focus and emphasis; and a careful choice of vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and sentence structures to create a style which is appropriate to the subject matter and the eventual readers. She also satiated that, not even the native speaker would necessarily have the wide language base from which to make the relevant choices. When the writer involved is someone whose home language is not English the problems are intensified. Similar to the above justifications, many of

our second language students fail to write a well organized, grammatically accurate and mechanics error free written works. In addition to this, it becomes difficult for them to select topic relevant vocabularies and even ideas. Thus, in this review manuscript, the author has reviewed the major factors that lead college students to ineffective academic writing skills based on reports of research journals from local and international universities.

### **What Studies confirm about the Major Factors that contribute to Poor Academic Writing Skills of College Students**

#### **Naturally, writing is a complex skill for students**

Scholars believe that writing is a complex skill. According to Heaton (1990), Byrne (1988), Grabe and Kaplan(1996), Kelly(1998) cited in Teshome T. (2007), writing is a complex process because it requires the mastery of grammatical devices, conceptual (thinking) and judgmental (having purpose and acting) elements. According to Krashen (1996) cited in D. Ramya and Dr. O.T. Pongoodi (2017) in

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addition, stated that acquiring language is predicated upon the concept of receiving messages learners can understand. Second language becomes the part of education, so learners need to concentrate much on the phonology, lexical, grammar and pragmatic knowledge [which leads them to complicated and busy work about the language than relaxed and practical works in which they can be provided with meaningful language uses. Nunan (1989, p.36), cited in Ashok Sapkota (2013) affirmed that writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of variables simultaneously. At the sentence level, these include control of contents, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling and letter formation. Beyond the sentence, the writer must be able to structure and integrate information into cohesive and coherent paragraph and text.

Paul D., Nora O., Thomas Q., Mary F., Cyndi W. and Jennifer B. (2008) declared that writing problems arise from the writer's attempt to map language onto his or her own thoughts and feelings as well as the expectations of the reader. This endeavor highlights the complexity of writing, in that problems can range from strategic considerations (such as the organization of ideas) to the implementation of motor plans (such as finding the right keys on the keyboard). A skilled writer can confront a staggering hierarchy of problems, including how to generate and organize task-relevant ideas; phrase grammatically correct sentences that flow; use correct punctuation and spelling; and tailor ideas, tone, and wording to the desired audience, to name some of the more salient rhetorical and linguistic tasks.

### **Learners have lack of writing skills, and they practice less than expected**

Reid (1993) and Langan (1987) cited in Yah Awn Nik, Azizah Hamzah, and Hasif Rafidee (2010) confirmed that writing is a craft and also a skill, which means that it can be taught and learned. Therefore, writing skills must be practiced and learned through experience; however, it takes time to become skillful and proficient writers. This implies that the less the students practice the less they develop their writing skills. Yah A.k. et.al. (2010), moreover, strengthened that all respondents who had good marks or average marks for their English Language paper on items such as mechanics, organizing the text etc have scored lowest mark for language use which implies that there is a gap to manipulate the language meaningfully.

Zelege Arficho Ayele(2017) in his study which had the aim to examine the entrants' writing ability to

discuss relevant contents, organize contents appropriately, use accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary and correct mechanics also found that the students are very poor on each of the aspects of writing as confirmed by the vast majority of the participants. To strengthen his discovery he has statistically presented the following result in a table on Page 15091 which indicated that (71.02%) of the participants could not come up with relevant contents in their writing (62.04%) of them had a very poor ability to use accurate grammar in their writing, (72.24%) of them were very poor with regard to using appropriate vocabulary during writing, (56.32%) of them have a very poor ability in using correct mechanics (56.32%) of them had a poor ability to correctly spell, capitalize and punctuate. In addition to these Ayele E. and Tesfaye Buche B.(2019) found out that 80% of the participants feel uneasy when they express their ideas and thoughts in writing which implies that there is gap of topic knowledge, vocabulary, grammar, ways to organize and how to write (style), etc. Muhammad S. and Jawaaid A. S. (2015) also confirm that majority of EFL learners at higher education level, in Pakistan, show lack of academic writing skills. Even among those who claim to be successful in achieving educational performance must have undergone certain difficulties as noticed in their written tasks the deficiencies in their written works.

### **Learners have internal factors that negatively influence their writing practices**

From the data obtained through interview and field notes, Ayele E. et.al (2019) found out that insecurity, unwillingness to use the target language, lack of knowledge, languages transfer, lack of motivation to writing practices, lack of confidence caused difficulties to the participants' development on writing skills. Siti Khasinah (2014) in her description of the definition of second language acquisition and factors that affect second language acquisition, moreover, concludes that internal factors such as motivation, attitude, age, intelligence, aptitude, learning style, and personality influence the way learners encounter language learning and may hinder or support them in their efforts to master L2. Moreover, these elements seem to be an essential part of the learning process, which can contribute to the success or failure of a second language learner. This implies that writing skill is one aspect of language learning which is influenced by the above factors.

### **Learners are less prepared to ESL Context**

According to Watt-Taffe & Truscott (2000) cited in Jenny Cole and Jay Feng (2015) suggested that

activating prior knowledge is one method in which teachers can assist ESL students before they even begin writing. Making sure students have the opportunity to think about what they already know before the task begins helps ESL students incorporate new information into existing structures of knowledge which activates long-term memory. Moreover, Pour-Mohammadi, Zainol Abidin, & Cheong Lai, (2012) Jenny C. et.al (2015) state that pre-viewing vocabulary is an effective tool when asking an ESL student to attempt any genre of writing. (Vygotsky, 1987) mentioned in Jenny C. et.al (2015) also recommended that there should be contextual, social, and temporary frameworks used to support successful learning with a specific academic domain such as writing.

In contrast to this, learners become less prepared to ESL context because of a number of reasons. As Engstrom (2008:6), Sanchez and Paulson (2008), Granville and Dison 2009:56; Bharuthram and McKenna (2006:504), Schwartz (2004:27) and Carhill, Suárez-Orosco & Puéz (2008:1156) cited in Jack M. Chokwe (2013) contend that students may be unprepared because of inadequate schooling experiences, competing family and work demands, lack of English language competency, marginalization and oppression of minority students, educationally underprepared backgrounds with some having had no access to libraries and attempt some interventions to meet the demands of university reading and writing tasks.

### **Learners have less motivation and interest to language practice**

It is an empirical fact that fitting teacher's methodology, time allocation for language skill practices, school environment, positive teacher student interaction and on time positive feedbacks are some of the factors to motivate and arouse interest of students to second language skill practices. In contrast to these, Ayele E. et.al (2019) found that time allocation, the teachers' methodology, lack of good approach to teaching writing and lack of practice affected the participants' writing skills. Moreover, teachers do not facilitate situations in which students can practice writing skills outside their classrooms.

Lockheed and Komenan (1989) cited in Muhammad S. et.al. (2015) illustrated that school characteristics greatly influence students' academic success where by success can be influenced by the motivation of the students. According to Otoshi & Heffernan (2011) cited in M.Dhanya, C.Alamelu (2019) stated that learners with high levels of motivation take a more active role in their learning, while students who are less motivated to perform, may have difficulty

performing to expectation in the classroom. This implies that teachers are highly expected to facilitate their writing classes and to create an active and positive learning environment to initiate ESL students.

### **Conclusion**

Reading through the above research articles in relation to factors that lead college students to ineffective academic writing skills, the reviewer has come up with the following conclusions. First of all, writing is a complex and a complicated language practice which requires learners' cognitive and psychological readiness and even detailed language manipulation skills in terms of organization, content, accurate grammar, meaningful language use, style and so on. In contrast to this, while second language learners were expected to practice and work for improvements so that they will decrease the complexity levels of writing tasks, students do not seem to seriously take measures and complexity becomes one of the hindrances. Secondly, the internal factors that negatively influence ESL students' writing skills practices such as insecurity because of fear of making errors and criticism, unwillingness to use the target language inside and outside the class, lack of background knowledge (lack of exposure to the target language), language transfer (switch), lack of motivation to writing practice and lack of confidence including lack of emotional intelligence caused challenges to ESL students.

The other influential factor that lead to students' ineffective writing skills is that they are less prepared to ESL context because of inadequate schooling experiences, lack of English language competency, marginalization as well as operation of minority students and educationally unprepared backgrounds [because of inappropriate school environments, shortage of libraries, teaching materials, shortage of capable teachers and unfitting teaching methodologies].

The final major factor in this review article is that ESL learners have less motivation and interest to language skill practices, which means, while ESL teachers' appropriate instructional methodologies, sufficient time allocation for language practices, positive and organized school environments, positive teacher student interaction are some of the positive influences to motivate and initiate students to second language skill practices, researchers such as Ayele E. and Tesfaye B.B.(2019), Lockheed and Komenan(1989) cited in Muhammad S. and Jawaid A.S. (2015), Otoshi & Heffernan (2011) cited in M.Dhanya, C.Alamelu (2019) complained that there is a gap in motivation

and interest of students because of there are problems regarding appropriate use of the mentioned motivating factors to language skill practices.

### Recommendation

Finally as a recommendation to tackle the above factors and to improve college students' writing skills, Jack M. Chokwe (2013) suggested that schools play a critical role in developing students' reading and writing skills. If student writing is not addressed adequately at school level, the higher education sector will always be inundated with students who are academically under-prepared and with poor writing proficiency. Hart (1995:118) cited in Jack M. Chokwe (2013) also reports that such ESL learners seldom use English in their daily lives, and that crowded classrooms and poor facilities dominate their learning and teaching environment and such situation will remain in the schooling context for the vast majority of (students) for the foreseeable future where there will not happen an appropriate practice and improved writing skills which is to mean that students should use English language in daily basis, that class size should be small to manage language classes and school facilities should be improved.

Zelege A. A. (2017), moreover, suggested that students should make use of every opportunity to practice writing, and universities should take responsibilities to create opportunities to enhance students' writing abilities. Based on the improvements that the students had shown, Ashok Sapkota (2013) in his action research recommended that it is essential to provide fitting instructions and techniques on essay writing according to the interest, level and capacity of students.

The different events like: essay competition, spelling contest, puzzle practice could be used as the activities in teaching that facilitates the organization of students writing. Moreover, he has suggested that students should be exposed to continual project works and self-study practices. Siti Khasinah (2014) urged that internal elements such as motivation, attitude, age, intelligence, aptitude, learning style, and personality seem to be essential parts of the learning process, which can contribute to the success or failure of a second language learner. Thus, teachers, students and schools should take care of such influential factors.

### Dedication

I would like to dedicate this review article to both my father, Tessema Woldesenbet and my mother,

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