

## Dealing with English writing skills: Through the eyes of vocational students

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### Abstract

Students in vocational programs must have English writing abilities, following industry standards. Despite this, writing is a challenging skill. This article examines the voice of vocational students in connection to their English writing proficiency. Sixty-one students from a private vocational school are involved in the research. This study was designed as descriptive research. Data on students' voices are collected using a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Additionally, they are evaluated utilizing triangulation techniques. According to the research, the majority of students continue to struggle with communicating their thoughts in writing. In addition, they struggle to organize their sentences into paragraphs. Moreover, their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary is weak, as is their understanding of writing mechanisms. These conditions decrease their motivation to participate in the writing process actively. It is vital because vocational students should be the source of industrial employment. Therefore, the English teacher is strongly urged to develop a lesson plan that considers the students' requirements, profiles, and prior writing skills, using need analysis and diagnostic evaluation. In addition, it is strongly recommended that students engage in collaborative writing through any medium, including technology, to assist them. In addition, it is crucial to frequently assess the material in light of the industry's requirements for writing abilities competencies. The concept of differentiated teaching can also be employed to assist students' distinct development of writing skills.

### Keywords

English for vocational purposes, english writing skills, vocational school.

### INTRODUCTION

English is a global language that substantially affects how the sector views its employees and how individuals communicate. Excellent English communication abilities lead to a more favorable impression of an individual in a professional setting. Therefore, the output of vocational senior high schools (VSHS) should match the requirements of the working field. Since it is expanding in specialization, English instruction in VSHS should emphasize professionalism, applicability, and specialization [1]. Therefore, the English vocational teacher must evaluate the

relevant programs at the VSHS based on their efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, and capacity to meet industry standards to assist vocational students in articulating their field-specific knowledge, skills, and experiences in English. It should play a crucial role in satisfying the rising need for skilled workers.

The goal of teaching English in VSHS is to build the capability of the students to have good communication competence in interpersonal, transactional, and functional. They are required to be able to employ a variety of text that is



spoken and written. Furthermore, according to the national standard boards of Indonesia, the purpose of teaching English at vocational high schools is to enable the student in reaching their competencies to develop their communicative competencies and achieve functional literacy levels. Moreover, they should be mindful of the competitiveness with other nations and develop students' awareness of language and culture.

English for vocational purposes (EVP) provides a linguistic description of English in the context of the vocational sector and analyzes the use of English in real-world settings. Under the umbrella of English for specified purposes (ESP), EVP stresses the language used to prepare students for participation in professional contexts. The demand for vocational education training in Indonesia increased, with EVP being the primary skill required to compete in the global market. It becomes essential while teaching English in vocational subjects and settings. It also indicates an educational strategy in which curriculum information is taught in English [2]. In conclusion, the EVP enables students to enhance their knowledge and discipline through English as a medium.

English writing proficiency for vocational reasons is required of students. It is the mental activity in which students generate their ideas, consider how to communicate them, and organize their thoughts into sentences that can be read. In addition, writing communicates thoughts, ideas, and facts in clear and concise language [3]–[5]. Students in VSHS must master the art of good writing, which is vital for professional success. They must possess strong writing skills to meet employment standards through technical documents to present accurate facts and information. Additionally, it can be used for job hunting and acquisition, creating presentations and reports, and developing communication skills, creativity, and exploration, and it is essential for self-understanding [6], [7].

The stages of the writing process are not sequential nor arranged sequentially, and many writers choose a recursive, non-linear manner since the building of a draft may be interrupted by additional planning. Revision can result in reformulation, with extensive recycling occurring during earlier phases [8]. Students should be familiar with the significant writing stages, including planning, drafting, revising, and editing [9], [10]. It creates process-oriented instruction that influences students' writing

performance and guides them through the various stages of the writing process.

Writing skills assist students in acquiring things and adapting to their environments; hence, they must be able to manage a variety of scenarios utilizing the proper genre for the workplace. A genre is a style of productive writing and speaking skills that facilitates human interaction, communication, and collaboration. Moreover, it is an effective pedagogical strategy in various circumstances because it serves a crucial instructional purpose: revealing the restrictions of social context on language use [11]. Viewing texts as socially placed attempts to interact with readers is essential to defining a genre since it goes beyond content, generating techniques, and grammatical structures. Because writing is a profession founded on expectations, the writer must create a text that the reader will recognize and anticipate. In addition, the reading process entails making assumptions about the writer's intentions.

Writing can be seen as an expressive activity that enables students to successfully express their ideas and knowledge by organizing their thoughts into good sentences and writing forms. This enables writing to be viewed as an activity that enables students to express their ideas and knowledge successfully. In addition, writing skill indicators include content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanism [12]. However, writing is a complex process and one of the most challenging skills for second and foreign-language learners to acquire, as it demands mastery of numerous linguistic, cognitive, and social abilities [13], [14]. In addition, the students have difficulty formulating and organizing ideas and transforming them into understandable text. Moreover, the absence of vocabulary mastery, word order, and paragraph development skills among VSHS students contributes to their lack of enthusiasm for writing courses. As a result, students have not met the objective, which includes the work requirement. Despite this, many VSHS students find it challenging to learn to write, particularly in EFL situations with minimal exposure to authentic English usage [15]. Therefore, inadequate English writing skills are typically the leading cause of employment failure following graduation from VSHS.

Studies about writing skills in English as vocational purposes have been well-investigated almost in a few decades. Chantoem and

Rattanavich found that some Thai educators have highlighted two primary causes of inadequate English learning in Thai vocational institutions. First, due to their concerns over grammar, most Thai vocational students seek to learn English but do not use it frequently in daily life. In addition, students have minimal time outside of class to practice English [16]. In addition, Ratnaningsih and Azizah [17] found that most students at a State Vocational High School in Jakarta were unaware of the errors in their writing and did not always know the appropriate word choice for constructing their sentences. This was one of the findings of their research. As a result, they consistently committed these writing errors, which appeared to have become a habit.

Other research conducted by Yolanda, Ngadiso, and Sumardi [18] revealed that the Vocational High School attempts to strengthen the students' specific language abilities to the requirements of the target industry. The learning objectives are for students can handle and compose letters, documents, and reports. So, high writing competency is needed to develop a solid relationship based on an effective and efficient transmission of information. However, the students discover a significant number of challenges in learning to write, and as a result, writing is regarded as the most challenging ability to acquire among them. Another study that Rovikasari, Suparno, and Supri [19] conducted concluded that teaching writing, particularly in vocational institutions, motivates students to generate written work such as reports, cover letters, resumes, and other similar documents. In addition, students can use the writing skills they develop in vocational school to advance their profession. For instance, students can study how to compose actual letters, simple instructions for specific procedures, and how to fill out basic forms. However, writing is problematic since it demands reflection, experience, and perseverance to complete successfully.

Based on the preceding description, the title of this study is, "Dealing with English Writing Skills: Through the Eyes of Vocational Students". As a result, this study aims to analyze the perspectives of vocational students regarding English writing skills. Hereby, the research question could be interpreted as follow, what are VSHS students' perceptions regarding writing skills in Vocational School?

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study aimed to investigate the opinions and experiences of vocational students concerning their views of English writing skills. Sixty-one students from a private vocational school are involved in the research. This research aimed to gather descriptive information through a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview as the data collection methods. Data from real life situations of vocational students' perceptions related to writing skills was collected, described, and analyze.

Students were given the questionnaire to gauge their perceptions of their writing abilities. Thus, it is possible to get reliable data from them. In addition, each participant completed the questionnaire in class under the supervision of their teacher. The responses of each student to each question were determined by analyzing the data obtained from the questionnaire after filling it out.

The interview was also conducted with three respondents ( $N$ =two female and one male). The interview guide included a variety of questioning subjects. The subjects were connected to the students' voices related to writing skills. Interviews are a method for professional development in which student examine the reality through the lens of their narratives [20]. The interview, which was only partially organized, was used to investigate the participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs concerning a particular matter [21]. After that, the information was analyzed, the findings were discussed, and the literature was used to support the findings. Then, finally, some recommendations were made. The findings are displayed right following the question.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study explores the perceptions of vocational students regarding their English writing skills along the dimensions of content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanism. The findings of the inquiry based on questionnaires are detailed in Table 1.

A vocational school's students' perspectives on writing abilities are presented in Table 1. Students generally disagree with eleven positive claims. In the content dimension, there are three statements; however, 75%, or 46 students, indicated that generating and elaborating thoughts is challenging. In addition, 69% of the

students, or 42 people, reported having difficulty organizing their writing based on the structure of the composition. Regarding grammatical competency, 70%, or 43 students, say that structuring their work with the correct grammatical features is difficult. In addition, 62% of students, or 38 individuals, struggle to articulate their thoughts using the appropriate terminology. In addition, 49% of students, or 30 individuals, reported that they struggle to use

punctuation, spelling, and capitalization in a manner that does not diminish the meaning.

Three students, two females and one male, are interviewed using purposeful sampling to complement the questionnaire results. In addition, a semi-structured interview script that was based on writing skills indicators was developed. These indicators included content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanism.

Table 1. Students' insights related to writing skills in vocational school

Dimensions	No	Statements	SA (%)	A (%)	DA (%)	SDA (%)
Content	1	I can generate ideas and elaborate on them.	0	3	75	21
	2	I can develop and organize the ideas.	3	5	61	31
	3	I perform my critical thinking and creativity.	10	3	44	43
Organization	4	I can develop sentences into paragraphs.	15	21	36	28
	5	I can organize my writing based on its' structure.	5	8	69	18
	6	I can build sentence structure and word order.	7	36	44	13
Grammar	7	I can organize my writing using the appropriate grammatical features.	0	5	70	25
Vocabulary	8	I can express my ideas in writing using the right words.	11	8	62	18
	9	I can read back what is written.	13	21	34	31
Mechanism	10	I can compose correctly spelled words.	10	20	30	41
	11	I employ correct punctuation, spelling, and capitalization that does not diminish the meaning.	15	15	49	21

### Content

In the language skills, students should know that the content having a particular role since it is impossible performing the language skills without having any content, including in writing skills. Content is a message which presents the ideas of thought that should be readable and meaningful. However, the students found that presenting and developing a content is challenging based on the interview results on the Excerpt 1.

The first excerpt described the struggle of the students to generate writing content. They have difficulty understanding how to produce and develop ideas. Nonetheless, in terms of writing skills, students must not only apply their knowledge of the writing process (i.e., planning, drafting, revising, and editing) but also their knowledge of the topic they are writing about [22]. In addition to this, writing is a process that allows students to investigate their thoughts and ideas while also making them visible [23], it is crucial to offer students any teaching tools that will aid them in examining the ideas presented in the writing's content. It can be done through

picture [24]–[26], Instagram [27], [28], storyboard [29], [30], and many more. However, ensuring that the tool aligns with the student's needs and profile is crucial.

In addition, it is difficult for students to acquire the content because they tend to find it independently, depending on the teacher's instructions. Therefore, the teacher must conduct a collaborative prewriting activity in order to generate ideas for the students. The prewriting activity can be conducted using any engaging instructional techniques. It may involve question and answer sessions, brainstorming, mind-mapping, brainwriting, Etc [31]–[33]. The first step in the writing process is called prewriting, whose purpose is to generate and clarify ideas. The students must develop their concepts as the writing's content.

To further assist students in the generation of ideas and the exploration of those ideas, it is possible to use a method known as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). It refers to the study of another subject or topic through the medium of a foreign language. It is also the study of a foreign language through the study of a

content-based subject. In addition, it mixes L2 language instruction with subject-based instruction. The content relates to students' subject knowledge in class and their non-subject

interests [34], [35]. CLIL promotes second language acquisition through collaboration, authentic resources, and effective communication.

### Excerpt 1

- R<sub>1</sub> "I am sure that writing is a challenging skill. When the teacher asks me to write, *I am confused. I have difficulty grasping the concept. I am unsure of what I must write.* Therefore, *I never participate in writing-related activities.* However, *I force myself to create sentences when I am uncertain of their correctness.*"
- R<sub>2</sub> "I began writing; *I had no idea what to write, but I continued. When I experience writer's block, I try to visualize anything that can help me write.* Having an image as an idea is simple, but *I struggle to convey it in words.* Occasionally, *I lack confidence when the teacher orders me to write. I prefer speaking to writing* because mistakes are still permitted when speaking. *It is unacceptable to make mistakes in written work.*"
- R<sub>3</sub> "I do not know how to demonstrate critical thinking and creativity in written form. The themes expressed in my writing are ones that I am unsure of and investigating more. I believe I can compose sentences, but *I am uncertain about my ability to develop them into paragraphs.* As a result, *I am incapable of developing and crafting the written content offered.*"

(Interview transcript. Respondent 1, 2 and 3 translated by the author)

### Organization

The organization is the second component of writing skills. It pertains to how ideas are expressed, how paragraphs and sentences are written, and determining how well writers understand and present concepts. Students have

difficulty developing their capacity to create appropriate sentence structures. It is an act of rhetoric that conveys the cognitive framework that the students have. Excerpt 2 describes the student's insights regarding the organization.

### Excerpt 2

- R<sub>1</sub> "I think that organizing writing is how I have to construct a sentence reasonably, but I realize that it is more than that. It is challenging since I have to develop sentences in paragraphs, including ensuring word order. In addition, it is like presenting my ideas in writing with the correct structure to make them readable. *I get confused when I have to develop the sentence into paragraphs. I am afraid my writing is not understandable.*"
- R<sub>2</sub> "I cannot organize writing based on the type of material and its intended function. When my teacher requested me to create a descriptive or a narrative text, *I continued writing without considering the type of text.* I remember that with descriptive writing, I describe something, whereas, in narrative writing, I relate an event. *My teacher only requested me to write by providing a topic without instructing me on how to organize my essay.* My teacher occasionally clarifies the distinctions between text types, but *I am still confused.* So, I believe there is no distinction between written and written forms."
- R<sub>3</sub> "When I must write, I adhere to my teacher's instructions. I continue to build a paragraph, but *it is not easy. It is hard to organize a thought into paragraphs.* I continue to read my writing to comprehend and improve it. *When I am confused, I continue crafting a sentence by ensuring that the subject and predicate are present.* My sentence is simple."

(Interview transcript. Respondent 1, 2 and 3 translated by the author)

Excerpt 2 shows that most students face difficulties in dealing with writing organization. It relates to the type of writing. The student's inability to differentiate between topic and concluding phrases, failure to construct a paragraph effectively, and failure to focus on a single idea in their paragraphs were all problems

with their sentence structure and paragraph organization, which were also important issues. Teachers' pedagogy and feedback considerably impact the paragraph organization of students' English language writing to address the issue [36]. Students cannot compose well-organized and creative paragraphs because their teachers

employ a teacher-centered educational style and provide minimal feedback for enhancing students' writing skills [37], [38]. It is a requirement to implement students centered teaching activities since writing is a process. In addition, the Genre-based approach (GBA), which is capable of being utilized since it concentrates on the generic structure of the text throughout the stage of modeling text (MoT), can be utilized [39], [40]. Teachers provide students with examples of texts to examine the social function, generic structures, and language features during the MoT stage. In addition, it introduces students to the particulars of the text's generic structure [41]. Therefore, students will have a better understanding of the structure of the text and will be able to copy it into their work. In

addition, teachers need access to various texts that can be used as models.

### Grammar

The rules and practices that control how writers communicate through the use of words are referred to as grammar. These rules and practices include morphological, structural, and formation rules, as well as word roots, prefixes, and morphemes. The development of links and connections between linguistic choices and their meanings can be facilitated by combining grammar and writing instruction. Grammar is a tool for constructing meaning [42]. However, the results of the interviews indicate that dealing with grammar in writing is difficult. The third Excerpt describes the students' perspectives on grammar as a component of writing skills.

### Excerpt 3

- R<sub>1</sub> *"I face issues in dealing with grammatical aspects. I realize that grammar is not only about the tenses but more. I do not know whether the grammar in my writing text is correct or not since the score did not highlight my error."*
- R<sub>2</sub> *"I am confused by the grammatical features. I attempt to apply grammar rules despite my lack of knowledge of their accuracy. I occasionally use Google Translate to translate sentences. Without considering the grammar, I replicate the sentences."*
- R<sub>3</sub> *"When composing a sentence, I consider the tenses, article, preposition, pronoun, Etc. However, I have trouble using the correct grammatical rule. Therefore, I frequently ignore the guideline and continue to write English words. However, when I consider grammatical features, I cannot write due to my confusion and fear of committing errors."*

(Interview transcript. Respondent 1, 2 and 3 translated by the author)

The results of the interviews indicate that students struggle with grammar patterns when writing. In addition, they are unsuccessful because they lack sufficient grammar understanding. It may also be due to the teacher's lack of feedback, as there is no opportunity to assess students' blunders to identify their weaknesses systematically. In addition, dealing with grammar in connection with writing may be perceived as time-consuming, so students do not receive sufficient education on grammar points [43]. Since writing courses and grammar-based assignments discourage students from attending class, imaginative grammar instruction and proper writing techniques are essential for attracting students. Technology-based learning processes may be utilized through the learning management system Edmodo, PBworks, Schoology, and many more. In addition, it is advised that collaborative writing be included as the interaction between students throughout the

entire writing process, including brainstorming, drafting, and revising.

Since grammar is thus considered a resource for constructing meaning in written texts, students should make grammatical choices to create meaning. Therefore, it is crucial to help them recognize the connection between grammar and writing and to view grammar as a resource for creating meaning they may rely upon when making linguistic decisions for their writing. In addition, there should be a greater awareness of the necessity of grammatical topic expertise among teachers in order to provide efficient grammar education in writing instruction [44].

### Vocabulary

Students are expected to demonstrate mastery of a component of writing skills known as vocabulary. If they have an extensive vocabulary, they will be able to produce sentences that are more interesting to read and will be able to avoid

using the exact words multiple times inside the same sentence or paragraph. In addition, the skill of being able to vary one's terminology and use a variety of phrases can result in a sentence or paragraph that is more engaging and easier to

understand, making it more delightful to read. The Excerpt 4 describes the opinions held by the students regarding the problem of vocabulary mastery in the writing process.

#### Excerpt 4

- R<sub>1</sub> "When I find the word above my understanding, *I turn to Google Translate and dictionaries. It is much more convenient for me to compose my article in Indonesian and then use google translate to convert it into English.* For me, this works better. *The majority of English vocabulary is difficult for me to memorize.* On the other hand, one of the ways *I increase my knowledge of English vocabulary is by listening to English music.* The act of writing, I believe, is beneficial to me."
- R<sub>2</sub> "I am aware that having a solid mastery of my vocabulary helps me when I am writing sentences. However, *the words are occasionally misspelled when I write due to my carelessness.* When unsure of a word's meaning, *I will consult my friends.* On the other hand, *I translate through my gadget and Google Translate.* On my smartphone, *I also have a dictionary of the English language.*"
- R<sub>3</sub> "*I am unable to write since I have a restricted vocabulary in English.* I have also concluded that vocabulary is connected to grammar or structure because if I continue to write using the primary form of vocabulary, it will not be correct. *The difficulty of the task limits my efforts to improve my vocabulary.* I *do not read written English* since I am too lazy to do so, but *I enjoy watching English movies.* I hope that it will assist me in expanding my vocabulary."

(Interview transcript. Respondent 1, 2 and 3 translated by the author).

The student's writing skill is affected by their vocabulary knowledge. There is a relationship between the number of students' receptive vocabulary and their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) ability in reading, writing, listening, and speaking, particularly in word knowledge and the four abilities [45]. Since writing skills rely significantly on vocabulary, it is necessary to enhance vocabulary through different activities that provide students with meaningful opportunities to practice new terms utilizing any learning tool, such as Duolingo. Facebook can also create monolingual groups, share content, engage with students and teachers, and manage other technological equipment [46]. Further, classroom vocabulary games such as checkerboard, vocabulary bingo, Pictionary, charades, and many more can be applied, including adventure video games and other digital-based vocabulary games [47], [48]. It will boost the students' motivation and interest in increasing their vocabulary mastery. However, it is also essential to consider the learning goal and the student's profile.

#### Mechanism

Compositional writing mechanisms are the rules that regulate the technical components of writing, such as spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and

abbreviations. Examples of compositional writing mechanisms include abbreviations, punctuation, and periods. As a writing mechanism, punctuation is one of the key elements of writing. Therefore, proper punctuation usage is an essential ability. The fifth Excerpt describes the students' perspectives on the mechanism, including their use of punctuation.

Students are expected to perform well and produce well-written papers. They must also consider other ground principles and writing components, such as comprehending the writing mechanism. The reader judges the quality of what is written based not only on the content and language but also on the use of punctuation, such as capital letters, commas, periods, sentence and paragraph boundaries, Etc [49]. Punctuation is, therefore, one of the essential features of written English, although it is regarded the least seriously.

According to Excerpt 5, most students struggle in handling writing mechanisms. However, they can handle the mechanism by using Grammarly. Nonetheless, the teacher must assess the student's comprehension of proper writing mechanisms, such as punctuation marks. In addition, teachers are required to employ various methods, such as discussion methods,

and to teach the subject in sentence and paragraph form. Then, teachers and students must view punctuation as an integral aspect of writing and employ it effectively. Lastly, the teacher should have immediately corrected the students' misuse of punctuation by providing immediate feedback

[50]. Since writing is a process, students must focus on the writing mechanism in addition to the content, grammar, vocabulary, and organization. Collaborative writing is also a strategy to reduce the occurrence of improper application of writing mechanisms.

### Excerpt 5

- R<sub>1</sub> "When writing, I am concerned about punctuation. Nevertheless, *I sometimes become confused. Additionally, I use Grammarly to verify the punctuation.*"
- R<sub>2</sub> "For example, when I desire to highlight a statement, I am aware that I should consider the appropriate punctuation when writing. I understand that the writing mechanism brings accuracy and clarity to writing. However, *I lack a thorough comprehension of the English writing system, as I utilize the same concept when writing in Indonesia.*"
- R<sub>3</sub> "In English classes, *I never studied or discussed writing mechanisms.* I am aware of its importance, yet *I do not doubt that my peers struggle with applying the proper writing mechanism.*"

(Interview transcript. Respondent 1, 2 and 3 translated by the author)

## CONCLUSION

This study investigates vocational students' perceptions of their English writing skills in terms of content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanism. According to the data, most students continue to confront obstacles while employing their writing skills for vocational purposes. It is challenging to generate and develop the idea. In addition, they struggle with the structure and grammar of writing and the writing process. Their shortcoming demotivates them from participating in the process.

Moreover, many are unaware that writing is a process requiring planning, drafting, revising, and editing. The majority of students have only experience with personal writing. They have never collaborated on a writing project. In addition, they lack knowledge of the text's generic structure, particularly its grammatical features. Therefore, it is essential to do a needs analysis before developing a lesson plan, instructional material, and teaching procedure. Recommendations include applying the English learning process through authentic materials

emphasizing a real-world environment based on the required content and contexts. GBA and CLIL are applicable since they emphasize writing products by addressing the text's purpose and integrating the contexts.

Writing skills for vocational purposes aims to prepare the students being part of the industrial field focus on communicative competence. They are expected to communicate in written based on the expertise.

This study's only focus was on writing skills for vocational purposes and students' perceptions, which is a limitation. Further research can examine English listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills for vocational purposes. In addition, English for specific purposes can incorporate the concept of differentiated instruction through designing English courses for vocational purposes.

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