

## A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of Secondary School Students with Writing Skills Difficulties in English

**Mohammad Rafiuddin**

Elementary and Secondary Education Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, [rafiuddinsocialengineer@gmail.com](mailto:rafiuddinsocialengineer@gmail.com)

**Shumaila Malik**

Controller of Examinations (A) Assistant professor- Northern University, Nowshera  
[shumaila@northern.edu.pk](mailto:shumaila@northern.edu.pk)

**Dr. Salma Waqar**

Secondary Education Punjab, Pakistan, [s.waqar1967@gmail.com](mailto:s.waqar1967@gmail.com)

### Abstract

The secondary level serves as a transitional step between the elementary and tertiary phases of the educational process. The purpose of this study was to conduct a phenomenological qualitative study that was explore potential hidden factors that could be contributing to secondary school students' academic performance at Government High School Hoti Landaki, Mardan. Qualitative methods include focus groups, participant observations, and in-depth interviews are used in the study methodology. 10 secondary students from Government High School Hoti Landaki, Mardan who struggle with their English writing abilities and have attended the same school for at least the last five years were chosen through the use of purposeful sampling. The importance of making use of the writing workshops, tutoring sessions, and writing centres that were made available by their respective institutions was emphasised by all of them throughout their experiences. By utilising both school resources and direct involvement with teachers, participants were able to enhance their writing skills, which is a collaborative process.

**Keywords:** Phenomenological study, lived experience, secondary school students, writing skills

### Introduction

Twenty percent of people speak English, making it a widely spoken language worldwide. To succeed in the business and educational domains, we need to be proficient in the English language (Armana, 2011). Baron (2002), English serves as a lingua franca and a second language that is utilised in a variety of contexts for communication. Both spoken and unspoken forms of communication Proficiency is essential for academic success. Writing is a fundamental discovery of human history that has greatly contributed to the treasure trove of human knowledge, as it allows for the maintenance of records of various reports, hypotheses, agreements, and beliefs. Pakistan declared English to be its official language at the time of its creation.

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah accorded greater significance to the English language, although Urdu was recognised as the official state language (Government of Pakistan, 1947). According to Mueen (2019), neglecting the functional aspects of English has made language instruction in Pakistan worse, which has led to the current and future generations' loss of the English language. Ahmad et al. (2011) asserted that the secondary English language teaching and learning process is in poor condition and has to be addressed first. Learning a language, like English, is entirely subconscious. Less opportunities exist for learners to take in language from their surroundings. Poor English language acquisition can be attributed to both the student and the academic environment as a whole, which should be improved in accordance with contemporary requirements (Government of Pakistan, 2023).

Westwood (2023), Farkota (2005), and Kershner (2000) investigated students' learning challenges. They discovered that the absence of intrinsic and intellectual aptitude, poor observational and understanding skills, low retention power, and low motivation are the main causes of students' learning challenges. Most research has concentrated on these hard-to-control variables. Lockheed and Komenan (2021), school activities and environments have a significant impact on students' academic performance, which warrants further study. Slobodina (2019) asserts that students who write well in English earn high grades and vice versa.

The current state of public education demonstrates that the majority of students are unable to write effectively. Furthermore, their composition displays erratic, imprecise, and disorganised thought patterns, giving the impression that their writing is misinformed. Textbooks fail to pique students' interest because they use unusual and unresponsive language patterns and provide absolutely no

appropriate audio-visual aids. As a result, it is unable to spark students' interest. It appears that texts place more of an emphasis on learning the fundamentals of grammar than on developing communication skills. One of the prerequisites for the growth of a learner's scholastic abilities in Pakistan is writing ability. Regretfully, most teachers in Pakistan employ the Grammar Translation Method when instructing secondary school students in English writing, which results in a nearly teacher-centered learning environment (Behlol & Anwer, 2011; Shaheen, 2015). The discussion above concerning the impact of students' writing challenges on their performance has significant ramifications for Government High School in Landaki, Mardan. The researcher has noticed that, despite the teachers' seeming diligence, secondary school students' annual results are poor since taking over as a Secondary School Teacher (SST) in May 2017. The majority of students, according to the study, does not write in English and do not practise various writing techniques. Thus, it is critical to look into and study secondary school students' English writing challenges in light of the aforementioned topic and the researcher's experience. Because of this, a transcendental phenomenological technique was used in a qualitative study to find the primary cause of the detrimental effects on students' secondary school writing abilities at Government High School, Landaki, Mardan.

The secondary level serves as a transitional step between the elementary and tertiary phases of the educational process. As a result, this part of the educational process is crucial, which is why the researcher is eager to choose it. Secondary education is the final formal and least independent stage of education, in contrast to college or university education. For their academic growth to be smooth and steady in college and university, individuals who are experiencing difficulties in their studies should be identified and helped at this stage. Because they are directly involved, the researcher was motivated to conduct a phenomenological qualitative study that was explore potential hidden factors (if any) that could be contributing to secondary school students' poor academic performance at Government High School Hoti Landaki, Mardan. The study was investigated and present detailed explanations of the experiences of students having difficulties with their English writing skills. The findings of the research might have significant suggestions particularly for the students having difficulties in writing skills at Government High School Hoti Landaki Mardan and generally for teachers who are facing difficulties in teaching writing skills at secondary level.

### Literature Review

In 1980, academics and theorists studied diverse learning styles and cognitive changes and found different writing methods. Studies demonstrate that writing improves perception and cognition more than prompt recall and improves memory and working memory ability. Writing also organises beliefs, removes bad opinions from working memory, and frees cognitive resources to process information better. Writing clears unwanted emotional issues from working memory, which improves cognitive processing. It also uses first and primary language, which prepares working memory to use the language in the past. Long-term memory depends on working memory; therefore, studies demonstrate that writing, learning, and organising was improve. Written assignments improve reading comprehension, text memory, and long-term and working memory processing.

Klein & Boals (2001) claim that writing can improve cognitive performance (Linderholm & Abrams, 2023) since it involves several cognitive processes and skills. These talents include translating beliefs, remodifying information, identifying correlations between beliefs, extracting conclusions, drawing inferences, building big hierarchical systems, and analysing. Psychologists have long debated the idea that writing develops new knowledge. Writing is a new and powerful thinking instrument with analysing and self-display features (Luria & Yudovich, 2020). Writing symbolises experiences and makes them more memorable (Britton, 1970). Gauge (2022) claims that writing is clearer thinking that can be checked because it is done on pages. Writing is thinking it can be halted and amended. Writing helps us understand better and maintain long-term thinking. Thinking is an individual who travels on a page and attempts to find the words for ourselves. Thus, writing involves several ideas (Mith et al., 2017). Marshall (2017) and Newell (2021) demonstrate that personal and interpersonal writing collaborates in thinking and learning (Kieft, 2023).

Vygotsky (2022) believes that word and cognition are linked since thinking cannot exist without words (Siemens, 2023). Writing helps people combine old and new knowledge (Olson, 1985): "Writers should use their memory to provide what they know, to review the information that has been produced and translated into speech or printed. Professional authors use multiple writing styles and structures. They face genuine obstacles and have a variety of forms, techniques, knowledge, and abilities to attain their writing goals (Graham & Perin, 2007). Studies show that the writers adjust its procedures to be recursive. Writers also think visually and kinaesthetically. They produce diverse information or product deformations using different cognitive methods. Authors find viewpoints and information and examine different document or text production options during exploratory thinking, a creative process. Exploratory writing involves extracting prospective content from long-term memory or external resources and investigating beliefs (Mith et al., 2017). The scene of writing is more often understood not as a room in which a writer is isolated and alone, but as a room in which many voices reside, those that both shape the writer and to which he or she responds in return. The reader can write as an author and gain critical literacy (Baldwin & Hill, 2012; Langer & Flihan, 2000).

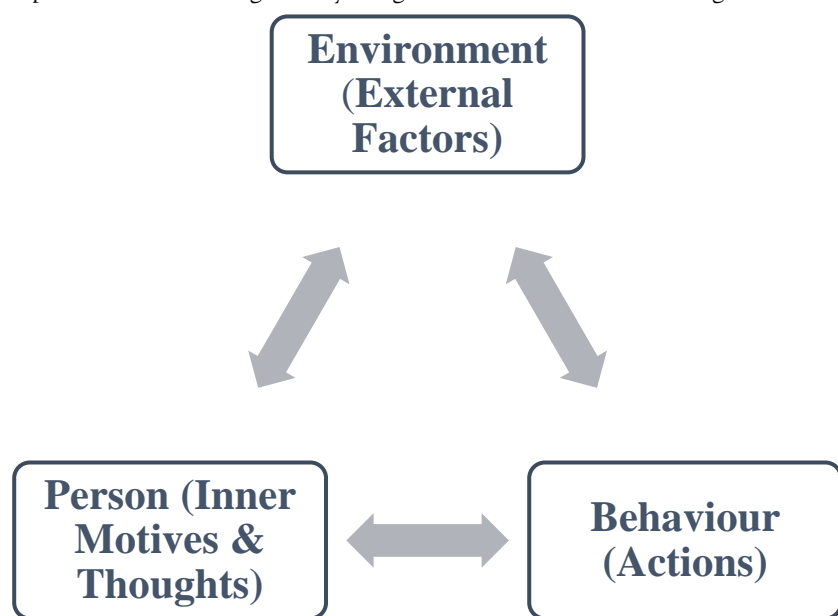
Helene (1997), this does not mean the author is scoffing the readers, but he does not know who the readers are. Writing a love poem appears to ruin and reconstruct a person. Thus, author phenomenology faces darkness to perceive what is not seen. Writing is like falling in darkness. These meanings are strengthened and offered in speculation (Manen & Adams, 2009). Writing moment differs from other language skills. While rewriting, we can evaluate words, meanings, musicality, clarity, reader imagination, assumptions, language, and text reconstruction to gain confidence (Manen & Adams, 2009). Writing is different from listening, reading, and conversation because it demands more analytical thinking and meaning production (Vygotsky, 1962). Emig (1977), writing is a separate operation that shares many of psychologists' learning processes. Writing essays is a unique approach to exhibit

power and a multiple way to learn, according to Emig, because we learn by doing, by prefiguring what we do, and by symbolising experiences. Writing is also language processing. We learn writing by writing. Learning to write and writing to learn.

Many academics feel that writing guarantees learning since it engages the user in linking facts and stating what has not been said. Writing makes a person ponder, split up, and become a different person with a more obvious thinking and attitude (Martin, 2021). Van (2017), writing an essay allows the writer to uncover or develop concepts. Mason (2001) proposes using writing to comment, ponder, and communicate, raise awareness, and encourage people. It is also a good tool for refining information (Akar, 2003) and deforming experiences. Polanyi (2016) believed that writing allows a person to intelligently exploit deep personal knowledge, pursue deep personal interests, and reflect their personal meanings and perceptions. One of the first and most basic social activities, writing can help people grow and explore as a learning tool, mental activity, and sophisticated communication process. Glatthom (1985) says we write to learn (Thomas & Peterson, 1997).

Hayes and Flower (1981) argue that writing is a sophisticated problem-solving process that requires preparation, brainstorming, and simulating a reader's response to generate new ideas. They also view writing as cognitive. Some view it more culturally and socially (Barnard & Campbell). Writers are self-correctors because writing is a great approach to improve mental health (Linderholm & Abrams, 2023) and is thrilling since they create and produce. Writing helps you understand yourself and others (Florio and Clark, 1982; Thomas & Peterson, 1997).

The research was conducted within the theoretical framework of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (2022). According to Bandura, human behaviour is influenced by three factors: the individual, their behaviour, and their environment. The first facet displays an individual's personality and unique characteristics, which may be connected to their psychology and mindset. The second component, behaviour, has to do with the noticeable, outward traits of the individual, such as their behaviours. The third element, or environment, deals with how an individual behaves in response to internal or external problems (i.e., how students perform in the setting of this research). The context, conditions, and viewpoint in which someone performs an activity—in this case, a school—are indicated by the environmental component. This system can be changed because it operates on a give-and-take basis. It implies that even in an ideal setting, a student's own limitations could cause him to do poorly. Similar to this, an experienced teacher might not yield good outcomes in a bad setting.



**Figure 1: Bandura's (2022) Social Cognitive Theory Model**

The conceptual framework of this study is founded on the exploration of three distinct parts, each of which is based on the theoretical framework: examining the challenges faced by students when writing in English. Through revealing the lived experiences of secondary school students who struggle with English writing, this phenomenon was studied. While gathering the data, the investigator was interacted with the students directly. The researcher's close and personal involvement was aid in the identification of the themes that emerge throughout the course and serve as the foundation for the study findings.

#### Research Objectives

The following were objectives of this research:

- To uncover and probe lived experiences and grammatical problems faced by students regarding English writing skills.
- To explore the difficulties of students who are engaged in learning English writing skills and English hand writing.

#### Research Methodology

This qualitative study uses a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology is selected in order to obtain a comprehensive grasp of the real-life experiences of high school students who are struggling with their English writing abilities. Qualitative methods include focus groups, participant observations, and in-depth interviews are used in the study methodology. As per the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2018), the study's population comprises all 233 secondary-level students enrolled in Government High School Hoti Landaki, Mardan. 10 secondary students from Government High School Hoti Landaki, Mardan who struggle with their English writing abilities and have attended the same school for at least the last five years were chosen

through the use of purposeful sampling. 10 secondary school students from Government High School Hoti Landaki, Mardan make up the study's sample. Focus group interviews, observation procedures, and in-depth interview protocols was used as study tools. Interviews were conducted using audio recording equipment, such as an Android smartphone. Focus groups, participant observations, and in-depth interviews were used in the process of gathering data. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher who happens to be a member of the teaching staff engaged with the participants in an active manner to help them gain a better understanding of the phenomenon. Data analysis was conducted using the six-step procedure described by Creswell (2013), which included categorization, textual description and analysis, structural description and analysis, suspending judgement, data horizontalization (enlisting and transcribing data), and identifying the essence of the context (phenomena). This method assisted in revealing the themes and underlying meaning that were present in the data.

## Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore lived experiences of secondary school students who have writing skills difficulties in English. This study used semi-structured interviews to answer the question. An interview methodology was used to interview 10 students under pseudonyms (Participant 1, ....., Participant 10). The following question was used to focus on the phenomenon:

### *What are the lived experiences of secondary school students who have writing skills difficulties in English?*

Interviews with secondary school students who struggle with English writing revealed their experiences. Participant 1 struggled with English writing. They struggled to write coherently. Many participants doubted their writing skills. They doubted their English writing talents. Participant 7 worried about failing and getting bad grades or teacher criticism. They concerned about how their writing might affect their grades and future. Writing challenges isolated and alienated them from peers. Participant 8 avoided group activities and collaborative writing for fear of judgement or criticism. Students believed writing issues prevented academic and professional success. They worried about how their English writing skills might affect their education and careers.

### *Why did you choose to learn English?*

I opted to learn English as a portal to a wider world, according to participant 1. English is spoken worldwide, so I thought learning it would help me travel, study, and grow." Participant 2, "Learning English was practical for me. I knew English would help me succeed in a globalised employment sector." I choose to learn English to expand my horizons, as stated by participant 3. English is a language and a doorway to online and literary knowledge and information." Participant 4, "I set a personal aim to learn English. I challenged myself to better my communication and cultural knowledge by engaging with English-speaking populations." Participant 7, "I chose to learn English strategically. I wanted to learn how to succeed in a globalised economy because of its importance." Participant 10, breaking down barriers was my motivation for studying English. I used technology to overcome linguistic barriers and connect more with the world professionally and emotionally."

### *How did you learn English where most people speak another language?*

Discussion on English language learning revealed varied techniques. Participant 1 chose formal schooling, taking English lessons despite their surroundings speaking a different language. In a foreign language, Participant 2 used private tuition for personalised teaching. Participant 3 used websites, applications, and courses independently. Despite speaking another language, Participant 4 sought English-speaking surroundings through travel and cultural exchanges. Participant 5 participated in language exchange programmes with fluent English speakers to improve language skills. Participants 9 used lessons, language interchange, and immersion to improve skill despite the language situation. Finally, Participant 10 used formal education, online resources, and language exchanges to acquire English in a diverse language environment.

### *Tell me more about the obstacles (writing skills difficulties) you faced during your learning?*

Several participants discussed English writing issues. Participant 6 had trouble with sentence fluency and logical flow, which affected their writing. Participant 2 struggled to show imagination in their writing, resulting in lacklustre prose. Critical thinking in English writing was difficult for Participant 3 and 4, hurting the breadth and sophistication of their assessments. Participant 9 had trouble organising writings and keeping the reader's attention. Participant 10 said self-doubt and writing confidence were major obstacles to their writing growth.

### *How did you manage to solve writing skills difficulties?*

The discussion's participants revealed a variety of techniques they used to improve their English writing abilities. In addition to regular practice and the use of internet grammatical materials, Participant 1 sought advice from peers and teachers. Participant 2 concentrated on increasing her vocabulary by reading a lot, keeping a vocabulary notebook, and doing word choice exercises. Participant 3 focused on using practice, editing, and reading sample writings to enhance sentence structure and organisation. Participant 4 set aside time for spelling and punctuation drills, using checkers to ensure errors were corrected. Participant 5 asked for feedback for development while practicing translating in their mother tongue. Participant 6 placed a high value on consistent writing practice, stressing the improvement of style and sentence flow through reading well-written literature. In order to foster creativity, Participant 7 experimented with exercises and prompts, getting ideas from books and creative writing projects. Through conversations, debates, and analytical writing activities, Participant 8 improved her critical thinking abilities. Participant 9 concentrated on using outlines and feedback integration to organise and structure their writing. Participant 10 overcame self-doubt by embracing the idea of constant development by tenacity and setting realistic goals.

### *What happened after you solved the writing skills difficulties you faced?*

The participants talked about how they overcame obstacles in their writing and how this led to gains in their writing skills. Participant 1 observed improved coherence and structure in their writings, as well as favourable comments from teachers, indicating a notable improvement in the quality of their writing. Participant 3 also saw an increase in proficiency, which led to more coherent and well-organized essays, higher grades, and increased self-assurance when it came to writing in English. Participant 4 noticed a discernible improvement in the precision of their spelling and punctuation, resulting in writing that is polished and professional, which gave them more confidence. Because Participant 6 concentrated on sentence flow and fluidity, their essays were more interesting, received favourable feedback, and increased their writer's confidence. After overcoming their writing obstacles, Participant 7 was able to express themselves more creatively, explore new genres and styles, and become more deeply involved in their love of writing. Ultimately, Participant 8's increased ability to think critically produced essays that were more perceptive and analytical, which raised her grades and increased her preparation for challenging writing assignments.

### ***How would you describe the strategies you employed to solve writing skills difficulties?***

Participants discussed a variety of techniques they used to get beyond obstacles in their writing. In order to improve their command of grammar, Participant 1 used online resources, a regular writing schedule, and advice from teachers and peers. In order to increase accuracy, participant number five translated texts and asked for comments to hone her skills. Participant 6 focused on improving sentence fluency by examining well-written examples and practicing consistently. In order to expand their writing skills, participant 7 experimented with prompts and drew inspiration from creative projects and books. Participant 10 overcame self-doubt by establishing realistic goals, acknowledging accomplishments, and accepting the notion that writing abilities can be improved with commitment and persistence.

### ***Tell me about strategies that were not helpful to solve writing skills difficulties.***

The participants thought back on writing-related tactics that had not worked for them. Participant 1 emphasised the drawbacks of utilising spell checkers only and completing projects quickly without adequate preparation and revision. Participant 3 pointed out that trying to emulate other people's writing styles and emphasising quantity over quality in practice were impediments to advancement. Participant 4 discovered that procrastination and content copying without understanding or attribution hampered the development of skills. Participant 5 came to the realisation that growth was limited when translating without knowledge of grammar rules and while depending only on outside criticism. Participant 6 recognised the disadvantages of utilising too complicated structures without first grasping the fundamentals and ignoring the inclusion of feedback. Finally, Participant 10 noted that a writer's ability to write clearly and progress was hampered by disregarding grammar norms and avoiding difficult assignments.

### ***How did you leverage school management and teachers to solve writing skills problems?***

They discussed how they actively employed writing supplies and support networks at school. Participant 1 actively sought support from teachers and participated in office hours talks on improvement strategies, using school resources including tutoring and writing workshops. Participant 2 solved writing problems with writing centres, online resources, and one-on-one teacher support. Participant 5 used school handbooks, writing workshops, and feedback sessions. Participant number six attended workshops, got comments from teachers, and used guides and sample essays to better their writing. Participant 7 actively sought feedback and workshop participation to better their writing using school-provided materials. Participant 9 also engaged with teachers, attended workshops, and used school resources to improve their writing.

### **Discussion**

All of them stressed the necessity of using their institutions' writing workshops, tutoring, and writing centres (Armana et al., 2011). Participant 1 aggressively solicited feedback and discussed improvement strategies with teachers during office hours. Participant 2 underlined the benefits of writing workshops and one-on-one help to address specific challenges (Gauge, 2022). The examples shown below show how participants grasped the importance of using school resources to improve their writing. All participants stressed the importance of using their institutions' online writing guides and other resources (Linderholm et al., 2023). Participant 5 detailed their attempts to get support from teachers and use writing handbooks and grammatical guides. This technique showed how participants improved their writing skills by using their schools' many resources. Participant 7 agreed with Martin (2021) and stressed the necessity of using writing centres, internet resources, instructor feedback, and workshops. These methods use all available resources to improve writing skills. Participants stressed the importance of getting feedback and attending writing seminars to improve their writing. Participant 6 actively interacted with teachers to obtain assignment feedback and participated in school writing workshops. Participant 9 expressed this feeling by discussing their proactive method of requesting teacher help, attending workshops, and using internet tools (McGinley et al., 2019). Through collaborative use of school resources and instructor interaction, participants improved their writing skills. Participants noticed the collaborative element of writing improvement in these circumstances.

### **Conclusion**

Writing is highly valued in learning environments. This is due to the fact that computers have made it possible for learners to write in any form or by any subject. Writing is considered to be one of the necessary skills for success in both the workplace and in education. In addition, studies have demonstrated that students who are better able to write assignments and who have substituted vocal directions for written instructions in relation to traditional and face-to-face learning are more successful when it comes to learning through the use of information technology. Therefore, the most important instrument for students to use in order to communicate and write creatively is information and communication technology. As a result of the enlargement and diversification of information centres, schools, and virtual universities, as well as the extensive growth of the distance education and e-learning

system in our country over the past few decades, the importance of writing skills and the endeavour to resolve the limitations in its growth path among learners is of utmost significance.

### Recommendations

Recommendations to improve the writing skills of learners:

1. Courses must include writing time and encourage students to write in many forms. Experts believe that students' low-quality writing is related to not being asked enough to write. Students should spend at least an hour writing, designing, rewriting, or publishing. When given the freedom to express themselves, organise, and follow their aims, students write over what teachers expect. Assuring students as writers motivates them to write and lets them manage their learning.
2. The student's writing skills should improve. Obtaining and disseminating information on good writing, its forms, and its aims helps accomplish this. Encourage students to study texts to learn how to organise, describe, and form sentences.
3. Teaching writing basics is important.
4. Students should gain control over language and communication for varied objectives, partners, and contexts to write professionally. Students write for varied reasons and partners to learn about readers' political and philosophical views and go beyond the classroom.
5. Eloquently reading stories to students prepares them for writing. They love the connection between reader and text book and hearing a fascinating and informative story. Expressive reading also demonstrates respect for the writer and his writing. Storytelling also helps students form language and ideas.

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