

Development of factors contributing to barriers to paragraph writing for EFL learners

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ABSTRACT

Paragraph writing is an important aspect in the performance of English as a foreign language (EFL) learner, but most of them face significant barriers that hinder their writing performance. Though the importance of this skill is beyond doubt, there is an inadequate understanding of the factors leading to such challenges. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the barriers to paragraph writing for EFL learners. The validated 27-item questionnaire was administered to 619 EFL Thai students. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) approach was employed to identify latent factors contributing to the barriers to paragraph writing. The results showed six key barriers to paragraph writing, explaining 60.224% of the total variance: structure and clarity challenges (SAC), focus and organizational barriers (FOB), writing process issues (WPI), timing and assessment worries (TAW), logical ideas challenges (LIC), and motivation and expression difficulties (MED). The findings suggest that there is a need to for greater emphasis on the learning environment, through proper planning and appropriate development of writing skills, to address the issues. Such factors are crucial for the improvement and success of EFL learners' expectations in writing, which can go a long way towards building their confidence in paragraph writing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Writing paragraphs is of great importance for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) because it facilitates a fundamental aspect of communication at both academic and professional levels [1]. Through the process of paragraph writing, students can employ advanced levels of thinking as they order ideas and provide explanations. Nevertheless, there are several factors that can prevent writing from happening, be they linguistic, structural, or psychological challenges. Such barriers not only hinder a student from writing but also lead to negative effects such as frustration, low self-esteem, and poor academic success [2], [3].

There have been several researchers who have worked on the barriers to paragraph writing [4]. Cummins [5] emphasizes that complex grammar and vocabulary acquisition constitutes a linguistic challenge, particularly to non-native speakers. Likewise, Swales [6] draws attention to the problems of rhetorical structures and conventions of academic writing that can baffle many EFL learners. Bandura [7] on the other hand, lays emphasis on the psychological barriers such as low self-efficacy and the fear of making errors which interfere greatly with learners' readiness to do their writing activities. Furthermore, research by Kaplan [8] identifies the cultural context in which a writing style is implanted as another potential source of problems and effective communication breakdowns. So, understanding and appreciating these barriers is the first step towards solving them.

In terms of linguistic challenges, researchers have identified major writing problems such as lack of vocabulary, poor grammar, poor use of sentences, and generally poor ability to articulate thoughts in English. Notably, Hyland [3] analyzed the concept of genre and its application in academic writing, arguing that EFL learners do not always acquire the language and structural aspects relevant to a wide range of writing. Also, Swales [6] lamented that non-native academic writers have some issues with rhetorical frameworks and parameters in academic writing, holding them back from fully articulating their arguments. Furthermore, Ellis [2] explained some of the factors affecting language learners, especially the cognitive linguistics and the syntax structures that should be employed. Nation [9] further emphasized that a lack of adequate vocabulary is a major hurdle as it can hinder a learner from expressing thoughts in the manner intended. Besides these language barriers, apprehension about forming complex sentences also limits both the depth and variety of students' writing. This was substantiated by Skehan [10], who found that EFL learners tend to utilize less complex sentence structures to circumvent mistakes, leading to drier and less attractive writing. Also, due to lack of confidence, focusing on simple sentence forms reduces the depth and diversity of written output. Such constraints prevent EFL students from writing high quality, well-structured and interesting pieces of writing in English [2]–[5], [9], [10]. All in all, surmounting these obstacles is a prerequisite to assist EFL learners in their language writing as a means of expressing themselves and their opinions in a more efficient manner and with greater confidence in an academic environment. As Cummins [5] puts it, language proficiency in an academic environment is one of the success factors for EFL learners, and effective educators need to integrate the right support and intervention strategies to support learners' growth.

Writing skills of an organizational and structural nature encompass the following elements: articulating the focus, writing the central idea, logically ordering ideas and arguments, maintaining a single focus throughout, and offering effective paragraph endings. These skills are paramount in writing paragraphs in a well-structured and coherent manner. EFL learners oftentimes have difficulty in crafting a focused and succinct thesis statement, which is the essence of any single paragraph. As Swales and Feak [11] explain, one of the critical factors in effective composition is the ability to devise a straightforward and narrowed thesis. However, this remains a significant barrier for most EFL students. In the absence of a clear focus, it is very common for learners to write unrelated paragraphs [3]. Hyland [3] also observed that focus and coherence are some of the skills that many EFL writers never quite master. According to research by Grabe and Kaplan [12], one reason why EFL learners find this aspect challenging is that they are often socialized cross-culturally to use different rhetorical structures, which means that they approach their writing with different expectations regarding the organization of information. Furthermore, many EFL students find it rather challenging to write conclusions which are succinct and effectively summarize the central arguments that are presented in the text. As mentioned by Raimes [13], sentences are crucial in reiterating the major concepts of the paragraph and providing a last word on the subject matter.

This research considers writing at a higher level as enabled by such skills as thesis statement development, concentration on one's core arguments, logical structuring, unity of impression and effective paragraph ending skills. These are very important in ensuring that paragraphs are written in a well-organized and coherent manner. EFL learners most often struggle with beginning a paragraph with a broader main idea formulated in a thesis statement. Another major issue that causes a paragraph to be poorly constructed is a lack of focus on the primary idea, which causes a lot of extraneous information to be included. Logical structuring of the content is also a big issue which results in poorly written paragraphs. Also, quite a few learners experience difficulties in formulating ideas when they are asked to write, and this hinders the writing process right from the start. There are learners who have a problem with being consistent in their point of view, which can cause a mess and disrupt coherence. One more problem is omitting an effective concluding statement which would reflect the discussed issues and present the final remark [3], [12]–[16].

Psychological and emotional barriers pertaining to writing include worrying and apprehension about making erroneous mistakes, poor self-esteem, struggling with the pressure of consistent effort, and paucity of interest in the writing topic. Anxieties and worries about errors restrict a writer's range by promoting an overly careful approach to writing. Horwitz *et al.* [17] provided a detailed discussion of the phenomenon of language anxiety and how it impacts learners' confidence in risk-taking while conducting writing tasks, which in turn affects their creativity and expression. A lack of assurance in one's ability to express one's thoughts aloud also aggravates the problem and affects learners' willpower. As Bandura [7] argued, self-efficacy is crucial in language work, and learners with weak self-efficacy have increased uneasiness and decreased self-motivation, contributing to poorer writing skills. Dörnyei [18] views practice as the most important factor in learning a new language, but those with low stress and confidence may struggle to find the motivation to practice effectively. Additionally, low interest and low involvement in writing itself may dampen learners' motivation, which may cause shallow sentences and uninteresting compositions. Deci and Ryan [19] concluded that students who are not interested in writing are unlikely to make a significant effort in the writing process. Additionally, there is the problem of self-doubt which is compounded by the lack of confidence to express

one's thoughts in English language fluently. The high expectations of regular writing performance may demotivate the learners to practice writing regularly, which complicates the acquisition of the target skills. Furthermore, maintaining a certain degree of interest and investment regarding the writing topic is very crucial; otherwise, motivation will be very low, leading to very poor and trivial writing [7], [16]–[22].

As for cultural and contextual challenges, the process of writing is embedded within a specific context and culture which could pose a barrier. These barriers could include differences in language style, misunderstanding how to adopt the English language approach to academic work, or lack of multicultural writing exposure, among others. Differences in culture can result in misinterpretation and improper application of principles governing writing, which hinders the meaningfulness and relevance of EFL learners' written work. Kaplan [8] has highlighted cultural differences in what is considered appropriate structural organization of a text, which can encourage EFL students to transfer their L1 rhetorical devices into L2, endangering the intelligibility and sequence of the content. Adjusting to the formal style, the linear flow of ideas and the guidelines set for academic English writing creates substantial problems, particularly for those who are used to different academic cultures. Research by Hyland [3] notes the crucial importance of abiding by disciplinary standards in academic writing; while stating that for EFL students, this is often a challenge, which in turn affects their potential to formulate credible arguments that are coherent and pleasing to the readers. Owing to this, limited exposure to standard writing styles hampers students' abilities to perceive proper writing conventions and consequently create pieces that fit into the required frameworks and contexts. Grabe and Kaplan [12] spoke of the role of exposure to varying writing styles in the ability to successfully construct and compose written texts in a wide variety of writing styles, arguing that having limited exposure to various styles stifles students' ability to be functional in a range of genres and writing tasks. Also, a lack of diverse writing models makes it difficult for learners to understand acceptable writing structures across various contexts and rhetorical purposes [8], [12], [16].

In terms of feedback and conceptual application, barriers include difficulties in feedback's incorporation and usage, understanding and applying theoretical concepts, and effective idea comparison. Many EFL learners have difficulties responding to any sort of feedback from others because they either do not understand it or have problems applying such suggestions. EFL learners often differ in their language and educational expectations and hence find it very difficult to understand and utilize teacher feedback. It can be perplexing to try to apply past feedback in order to be able to understand and use it in future writing tasks. According to Ferris [23], feedback is beneficial in writing, but students must learn how to generalize feedback across different writing tasks and this is not very straightforward. Additionally, this kind of transfer is not easy to predict or ensure, because knowing how to write requires a solid foundation of theory that has been put into practice. Canagarajah [24] spoke about how difficult it is to apply linguistic and especially rhetorical theory to writing and pointed out that for many EFL students, theory and practice do not correlate, particularly in the context of academic writing. What is more, the topics addressed in writing, such as the comparison of different angles or viewpoints, can be seen as central to critical thinking development. The need for critical thinking skills as well as genre awareness training is important so that learners can compare ideas efficiently, which would therefore help improve their level of analytic writing [16], [24], [25].

The background of Thai EFL students could be a further source of pressure. In Thailand's education system, it is not uncommon for students to struggle when making the shift from high school, with little use of English in the curriculum, to the anxiety-inducing, high-expectation environment of university where they are required to compose cohesive, well-organized paragraphs in English. Moreover, their prior learning experiences may not have adequately supported the development of effective English writing skills, especially with reliance on rote learning where language usually becomes a tool for problem-solving rather than constructive learning [26]. The result is that many Thai students reach post-secondary school with no experience in composing paragraphs, which leads to paragraph construction becoming an almost impossible task owing to extreme anxiety, lack of self-assurance and motivation.

It is important to highlight that it remains unclear as to the specific factors that constitute these barriers. As an improved understanding of these barriers would assist all teachers and the students greatly, attempts should be made to isolate the paragraph writing challenges and subsequently intervene. This would not only help learners enhance their writing but also improve their general academic performance and confidence in English learning.

Although previous research has explored different types of challenges in paragraph writing for EFL learners, very few studies have sought to integrate these challenges into empirically validated latent constructs. Thus, this research aims to fill this gap by applying exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to uncover systematically the multidimensional constructs that constitute barriers to paragraph writing. Such an approach enables us to comprehend these barriers in a more structured way and provides a statistical framework for planning appropriate future action. Specifically, the research concentrates on the difficulties Thai EFL learners face in paragraph writing under the intersection of language, organization, emotion, culture, feedback, and other domains.

This research contributes towards forming a well-structured and empirically verified framework of paragraph writing difficulties by integrating theory and context. This should address a gap in writing research and offer a useful resource to aid instructional design for EFL educators aiming to determine and assist EFL learners in developing their academic writing skills. Therefore, the primary focus of the study is based on the question: What are the underlying factors that lead to the difficulties EFL learners encounter in paragraph writing?

2. METHOD

2.1 Sample

The sample for this study was chosen because the students studying EFL in a Thai university represented a range of backgrounds. A random sample was employed owing to the need to capture varying levels of proficiency, a wide range of academic disciplines and a variety of linguistic backgrounds to provide a thorough investigation of the challenges faced by Thai EFL learners towards paragraph writing. The sample size was determined based on Hair *et al.* [27], who recommend that to generate reliable research results, 5-20 samples must be taken for every variable. Because there were 27 variables that were analyzed, the required number of samples for the study was at least 540. To guarantee accuracy and coverage of unlikely data loss, a further 10% was included, making a total of 600 participants. As a result of the over sampling or over estimation, 619 EFL learners completed the investigation which was greater than the total sample size that was aimed at achieving. Participants were informed of the aims of the research and the language learning perspectives one would gain and were assured that their responses would be treated with confidentiality and anonymity. Also, all respondents gave consent prior to completion of the questionnaire in compliance with ethical considerations in research dealing with human beings.

2.2 Research instrument

To investigate the barriers that EFL students encounter in writing paragraphs, this study conducted a survey which attempted to identify these challenges. The 27-item questionnaire contained closed-ended questions which pertained to the most common challenges such as poor grammar, lack of vocabulary, inability to structure a paragraph, and struggles with generating ideas. To reach a wide audience, the questionnaire was completed online. The researchers opted to have this distributed among EFL students from various faculties to cover a wide range of opinions.

The questionnaire consisted of 27 items, each using a four-point Likert scale, aimed at determining the respondents' perspectives about factors such as grammar, vocabulary, paragraph structuring, and idea development which, in their opinion, contribute to the barriers of writing paragraphs. These questions also measured beliefs about students' writing, including their confidence in writing, their general outlook on writing and their perceptions of how they write. A panel of three experts evaluated the questionnaire using the item-objective congruence index (IOC), with all items scoring from 0.67 to 1.00, thus demonstrating moderate to high content validity. The language of the questionnaire was appropriate for EFL students of different levels, without sophisticated terminology or any vague phrases that might have generated misconceptions for respondents and affected the results.

The questionnaire was subjected to a pilot test with a group of EFL students before its wider use in order to test the clarity, length, and usability of the questionnaire. The comments gathered from this group allowed researchers to improve the survey, making it even more effective and clearer. The reliability of the questionnaire was established through the computation of Cronbach's alpha which was found to be 0.923, indicating excellent reliability. Moreover, the item-total correlation was computed, with all the items scoring greater than 0.3, confirming that all items were appropriate and were indeed measuring the same thing.

2.3 Data collection

The selection of a proper platform for distributing the questionnaire is essential to maximize the response rate. In this study, online surveys—which can be completed from various devices—were employed so that the students could respond from any place and at any time. Moreover, this questionnaire was posted through resources popular among the target group, for instance, social media language learning groups or announcements during lectures. As a means of attracting participation, the introduction of the questionnaire contained detailed information about the objectives of the study, the significance of the contributions made by the respondents, and the guarantee of privacy and anonymity.

2.4. Data analysis

The respondents' replies gathered through the questionnaire with the aim of examining the barriers to paragraph writing of EFL students was the focus of the data analysis in this study. To identify the factors

constituting barriers to paragraph writing, an EFA was performed. There were several criteria for defining the quantity of elements. Firstly, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy. This index compares the magnitude of observed correlation coefficients with that of partial correlation coefficients among pairs of variables, indicating whether the data are suitable for factor analysis. If the adequacy of the data is equal to or greater than 0.5, and approaches 1, then the data is considered reliable for factor analysis. Values approaching 1 imply that there are more squared multiple correlations compared to squared partial correlations, implying that a factor analysis can be used. KMO values of less than 0.5 often mean that the factor analysis is not appropriate for the data. Secondly, the data is said to be appropriate for factor analysis if the p -value is less than 0.05. This was established by Bartlett's test of sphericity.

To analyze results, variables that had substantial relationships with other variables were selected for consideration for factor extraction using the principal component analysis (PCA) method. This reduced the number of variables and the dimensionality of the data for ease of explanation. The analysis involved computing the correlation matrix, together with the actual eigenvalues and eigenvectors of the symmetrical matrix [28]. Components were retained based on eigenvalues equal to or greater than 1 (Kaiser's criterion) and a variance proportion of 60% or more. For factor rotation, an orthogonal rotation method was employed; in this case, Varimax. The fundamental principle on which this rotation method is based is that all components are uncorrelated.

Next, the factor loadings of the variables were examined using the factor pattern matrix, variables with factor loadings of 0.3 or higher were selected for each component. These factors were found to be statistically significant in the literature reviewed [27]. In addition, the communality values (h^2)—which represent the squared multiple correlation coefficients of a variable or variables—were assessed. These values range from 0 to 1, where a value of 0 means that the common component fails to explain any of the variance and values below 0.5 suggest that a variable is unsuitable for further factor analysis. The results of the factor analysis were interpreted by grouping variables under their respective factors. This step demanded some degree of expertise in naming or assigning names that captured the essence of each factor, and this was done with regard to what the variables in that factor represented.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the KMO measure for sampling adequacy and the Bartlett test for sphericity are presented in Table 1. These tests serve an important purpose in establishing the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis. The KMO index attained was 0.881, which was far greater than the acceptable limit of 0.6 [29]. This means that the sample was appropriate for performing the factor analysis and that the constituent factors of correlation pairs of variables within the sample can be adequately decomposed into the rest of the variables in the sample. In the same context, the Bartlett's test of sphericity returned an approximate chi-square value of 7397.896 with 351 degrees of freedom and a p -value of <0.001 . The indicated p -value was significant (less than 0.05), and this implies that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix, meaning that there existed considerable relationships among the variables which warrant the application of factor analysis [30]. So, it is implied that the tested data were appropriate for EFA. Table 2 provides the results of an EFA, which dealt with the amount of variance accounting for different components in the data.

Table 1. KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO measure of sampling adequacy		0.881
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-square	7397.896
	df	351
	Sig.	$<0.001^*$

* $p < 0.05$

Table 2. Total variance explained

Component	Initial eigenvalues			Extraction sums of squared loadings			Rotation sums of squared loadings		
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative (%)	Total	% of variance	Cumulative (%)	Total	% of variance	Cumulative (%)
1	8.775	32.500	32.500	8.775	32.500	32.500	3.478	12.882	12.882
2	2.249	8.330	40.831	2.249	8.330	40.831	3.269	12.109	24.991
3	1.566	5.802	46.632	1.566	5.802	46.632	3.028	11.216	36.206
4	1.354	5.017	51.649	1.354	5.017	51.649	2.374	8.792	44.999
5	1.209	4.478	56.127	1.209	4.478	56.127	2.104	7.791	52.790
6	1.106	4.097	60.224	1.106	4.097	60.224	2.007	7.434	60.224
...									
27	0.196	0.725	100.000						

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The analysis started by enumerating the component eigenvalues. The eigenvalues suggested the proportion of the variance explained by respective components. One of the rules in the factor analysis was that a component with an eigenvalue greater than one (i.e., more than unity) was deemed to be important. In this case, the first six factors had eigenvalues greater than one and therefore were the most significant factors. The largest such component had an exceptionally high eigenvalue of 8.775 and accounted for 12.882% of total variance. This implies that this component was responsible for a sizeable share of the variance in the data. These six components together explained 60.224% of the total variance, which was lower than the limit obtainable for a good factor analysis. Table 3 presents the rotated component matrix resulting from the application of PCA using the Varimax method, which involved orthogonal rotation. This matrix demonstrated the loadings of the individual items on the six identified components after rotation and thus aided in the interpretation of the factors.

Table 3. Rotated component matrix

Variables	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
26. I avoid using complex sentence structures due to uncertainty about their correctness.	0.744					
1. I have problems with using a diverse vocabulary when writing paragraphs in English.	0.661					
2. I often make grammatical errors that affect the clarity of my writing.	0.648					
21. Expressing myself clearly in written English is more difficult than in my native language.	0.645					
14. Adapting to academic writing styles required in English is challenging.	0.630					
22. I lack confidence in my ability to express thoughts clearly when writing in English.	0.495					
4. Maintaining focus on the main idea throughout the paragraph is difficult.		0.673				
3. Developing a clear topic sentence for a paragraph is challenging for me.		0.654				
15. Cultural differences in writing styles sometimes confuse me and affect how I write, such as varying levels of formality.		0.554				
19. I find it hard to compare and contrast different ideas or topics of argument in my writing.		0.531				
8. Keeping my writing concise and avoiding unnecessary repetition are difficult.		0.526				
7. Putting personal experiences into my writing is challenging.		0.526				
6. I find it difficult to use varied sentence structures in my writing.		0.475				
23. Practicing writing regularly to improve my skills feels overwhelming.			0.723			
18. Utilizing feedback constructively to improve future writing tasks is difficult for me.			0.655			
24. Brainstorming effectively to generate ideas for writing is difficult for me.			0.647			
17. Applying theoretical concepts effectively in my writing is difficult.			0.643			
27. Writing in English often feels like solving a puzzle with incomplete understanding.			0.524			
11. Meeting deadlines and writing under time constraints is a major challenge.				0.698		
10. I have problems with incorporating feedback from others into improving my writing.				0.652		
13. Anxiety or fear of making mistakes prevents me from writing freely to express my ideas.				0.625		
20. Maintaining a consistent point of view throughout the paragraph is challenging.					0.687	
9. Organizing my ideas logically in a paragraph is difficult.					0.351	
16. If the writing topic is uninteresting or beyond my expertise, it will lead to a lack of motivation for me to write.						0.781
25. Limited exposure to diverse writing styles hinders my understanding of good writing practices.						0.591
5. Writing an engaging opening sentence that captures the reader's attention is hard for me.						0.491
12. Concluding a paragraph with clear sentences that summarize the main point is difficult.						0.382

The rotated component matrix provided a clear explanation of barriers to paragraph writing, identifying six major factors associated with writing barriers among EFL learners. These factors were derived by grouping the various difficulties according to their loadings, which denote the strength of the relationship of each element with a particular factor. The first factor encompasses limitations connected with the sophistication of sentence formation and vocabulary expansion. Such items as the aversion to complex sentences because of uncertainty (0.744) or limited vocabulary (0.661) indicated the problems these students endured with using more sophisticated language, which could enhance the clarity and effectiveness of their

texts. From the results, EFL learners have problems related to structure and clarity challenges (SAC) barriers, which were not only technical in nature but also included psychological, cognitive and even mental problems. These problems occur in areas such as forming complex structures, expanding the repertoire of new words, minimizing grammatical errors, and articulating ideas clearly. This inability aligns with Cummins [5] assertion that linguistic limitations are the main problem for EFL learners. The tendency to shorten utterances to avoid errors [10] restricts learners to a limited form of language that does not allow them to articulate their ideas in a more advanced way. One possible explanation is these tendencies point to an important link between language and thinking skills. Learners' inability to write according to the established conventions of academic writing further complicates matters. As Hyland [3] mentioned, the requirement of well-structured English for academic purposes is very difficult for many non-native speakers. This complexity is even worse for learners who come from a different language and culture, as greater variance in clarity and coherence can be expected due to differences in aspects of rhetorical structures [12].

In addition, Bandura [7] explains that low self-efficacy, where students who are not confident in their writing skills tend to be anxious and feel tense, leads them to perform poorly due to anxiety about difficult tasks. This study highlights the need for specific measures to address these issues. For example, targeted instruction on sentence formation, vocabulary development, and practicing academic writing style in a low-threat context could reduce these limitations. At the same time, improving self-efficacy through encouragement and reducing fear of failure could increase the willingness to take risks in writing, which would lead to better performance. These implications point to the need for comprehensive teaching methods that combine technical, cognitive and psychological aspects to improve learners' writing skills. Therefore, although SAC is a major barrier for EFL learners, it is also an area where effective interventions could be made.

The second factor revolved around the problems of focusing, arranging one's thoughts, incorporating differences in culture in writing, and employing different styles of sentences. Items such as keeping attention on the main point (0.673) as well as the problem of crafting a clear topic sentence (0.654) highlight how critical organization skills were in effective writing. From the results, it could be said that focus and organizational skills are essential qualities that increase the quality of writing. However, some writers find these skills very difficult, which can cause organizational problems. Consequently, their text loses coherence. This problem of loss of focus has been so profoundly researched that it afflicts every conceivable form of writing. It seems that the inability to focus leads to confusion in one paragraph or another and even makes it overly vague or unconvincing in its intent.

Effective paragraphs require clear topic sentences, but this raises the task of writing them in the first place, and this is still a huge obstacle for countless EFL writers. Lacking a real commonality of ideas in the structure results in disorganized paragraphs without adequate supporting information. In addition, rhetorical style seems to be a cultural feature that is a problem for EFL learners as well. Kaplan [8] has pointed out that inconsistencies in paragraph structure may arise due to differences in the rhetorical conventions of different cultures. For example, learners may adopt rhetorical strategies from their native language, resulting in paragraph organization that is inconsistent with the norms of English academic writing. Furthermore, although a simpler sentence pattern can avoid errors, it can also make the text boring and unattractive to the audience [12]. These findings draw attention to ways of planning instructional strategies to deal with focus and organization barriers. In addition, learners need to be taught how to form strong topic sentences, how to ensure tight coherence within paragraphs, and even how to write in the required style. Exposure to different rhetorical styles and functional training in different sentence patterns may also enable learners to understand organizational concepts of writing and thus improve their writing skills [31]. To help EFL learners, a suitable learning space should be created where learners feel free to try new things and receive feedback on the results of such attempts. Once these barriers are addressed, students would be able to produce more coherent and focused writing necessary for success in academic and professional settings.

The third issue concerns the problems of regular writing practice, using feedback, the writing itself as well as the application of concepts of social construction in the writing task. High-score for practice-related items such as: "practicing writing regularly to improve my skills feels overwhelming" (0.723) and "brainstorming effectively to generate ideas for writing is difficult for me" (0.647) tended to demonstrate that what hindered paragraph writing was the writing process. As this study has shown, writing by EFL learners involves various tasks and obstacles that learners struggle with when writing. These obstacles include irregular writing activities, an inability to use feedback, an overemphasis on brainstorming, and difficulties with the application of writing theories. This seems to be both a cognitive and a practical problem, as several scholars have pointed out that this is one of the reasons why paragraphs might be poorly developed and organized. The first problem is that students do not organize their written language consistently. Study by Flower and Hayes [32] emphasize the fact that writing as a skill requires practice. However, unrealistic goals or demanding requirements discourage students from practicing regularly, which in turn prevents them from developing good writing skills. Furthermore, students who believe that they will not improve over time

because whether they excel depends solely on their effort could refrain from engaging in writing, so the skill will stagnate due to lack of motivation [7]. The other critical issue is the use of feedback. As mentioned earlier, feedback is very important in writing as it is one of the ways to improve writing practice. However, Ferris [23] points out that effective feedback requires a certain level of metacognitive understanding, which many learners do not seem to possess. In such cases, feedback may impede progress or paralyze the learner with confusion, rendering feedback useless and leaving many learners struggling to understand how to improve their writing. In this regard, it is important that students might receive targeted support so that they understand the reasons and appropriate context for using feedback in a meaningful way.

Moreover, Swales and Feak [11] point out that while it is necessary to understand theoretical ideas in academic subjects, integrating such ideas into well-structured essays is a daunting task. It could reasonably be argued that learners who are unable to translate theoretical perspectives into writing tend to write very general and abstract paragraphs that lack focus. It is therefore necessary to provide targeted support for these students, especially as there are specific solutions to such problems. Interventions in the form of scaffolded writing, systematic brainstorming and feedback can be introduced and implemented by teachers. Encouraging learners to believe in their abilities, for example, could encourage them to practice frequently and be confident in their writing. That is, the writing process issues (WPI) factor can be a major factor explaining writing stagnation in EFL learners. Further studies should examine the effectiveness of addressing specific challenges by introducing strategies such as peer brainstorming activities or technology-mediated feedback systems in writing exercises. When these challenges are addressed in a comprehensive way, learners can write with more confidence and competence.

The fourth factor also relates to time management, incorporating feedback and the fear of failure when writing. Tough time management tasks within this group, such as the need to meet deadlines and to write under time constraints (0.698), as well as difficulties incorporating feedback from others (0.625), indicated that time and feedback anxiety were significant barriers in the performance of writing a paragraph. This indicates the types of concerns that EFL learners experience regarding emotional and psychological factors while writing. These include fear of feedback, fear of making mistakes, and anxiety about deadlines. Such concerns extend beyond the technical aspects of writing and affect much more learners' ability to devise, organize and express their thoughts appropriately. Deadlines significantly increase anxiety related to writing. As Ferris and Hedgcock [33] observe, one extension of time is unlikely to be a solution; rather, it is likely to raise tensions because learners will still work under the newly set time constraints set. This type of anxiety is health-threatening and explains why a document that is written under pressure is often fraught with errors.

Anxiety regarding feedback is another worry mentioned by many respondents. Hyland [3] suggests that feedback should be included in the process of learning strategies, but learners frequently consider feedback harsh, unreasonable or too complicated to understand, thus causing such learners to feel stressed and discouraged. This may start an avoidance cycle where the learners actively avoid getting feedback or using it which worsens their challenges and potential ways of overcoming them. The fear of making mistakes is arguably a widespread phenomenon among EFL learners and closely relates to self-efficacy. Bandura [7] points out that low self-efficacy mostly causes avoidance behaviors, for example, avoiding the use of complex sentence structures or a wider vocabulary. Although such a strategy can reduce errors, it also curtails what the learners can say in the construction of ideas and the way they can develop their writing styles. Thus, it could be said that learners' fear of making mistakes causes them to adopt error avoidance strategies which in turn make this writing ineffective as it does not capture valuable content.

From the perspective of writing pedagogy, it is important to note these results because they help conceptualize at least one concentrated intervention that targets writing both in an emotional and technical way. Activities including workshops on time management, rehearsed planning of writing and structured peer feedback could assist learners in reducing their anxiety towards writing and taking a more problem-solving attitude. Additionally, encouraging situations for risk-taking and perceiving errors positively may lessen the learners' fear of failure and increase their self-esteem in writing. Thus, timing and assessment worries (TAW) are critical hindrances to writing improvement for EFL learners. Future studies might assess the effectiveness of anxiety-reduction treatment such as mindfulness-based approach or games-based learning strategies in alleviating the challenges.

The fifth aspect pertains to difficulties in maintaining a unifying theme and logically developing ideas in a single paragraph. A high loading of such subscale items as maintaining a consistent point of view in a paragraph (0.687) indicated that students often experience difficulties in idea integration making structural barriers a major hindrance to logical ideas integration. The finding highlights those logical ideas challenges (LIC) are a major barrier for EFL learners. Such challenges include organizing ideas, relevance and continuity of arguments, and writing of the topic sentences. Such issues indicate that learners still have problems with the logical and structural requirements for the writing of integrated and functional paragraphs. As Hyland [3] states, ideas relating to a single theme are essential to the coherence of a paragraph because

such a focus makes the argument clear and useful. Lacking skill in this area leads to paragraphs and essays which are poorly organized and lacking in clear focus.

Another area of weakness for many EFL learners is the ability to systematically organize ideas in a logical order. Swales and Feak [11] observe that writing clearly on one theme throughout a paragraph makes the paragraph cohesive in all its contents. In most cases, however, learners have difficulties in developing their arguments or narratives in an organized way. Kaplan [8] also notes that poor comprehension among learners of the generic structures of a discourse community deepens this problem of producing good paragraphs. Crafting clear, concise topic sentences is crucial because those sentences convey the core idea of the paragraph and ensure a logical connection with the details that follow. According to Beily [34], if the topic sentence is not clearly stated, the learner is likely to develop off topic or irrelevant paragraph content, and this, in turn, leads to unfocused and unclear writing. Clear and explicit models, guidance and practice in the writing process are particularly important for improving learners' abilities to logically develop ideas. Paragraph organization and use of topic sentences could be taught to learners so that they are able to use appropriate strategies in idea development. Learners can also acquire these skills and use them in their writing through mind mapping, guided outlining, and even peer review. Future studies may examine the effect of various scaffolding strategies on learners' problem-solving ability such as graphic organizers or digital tools. In addition, understanding the cultural dimension of rhetorical organization may offer more detailed understanding of the challenges of target groups of learners. Thus, tackling these issues would enable teachers to assist learners in overcoming LIC barriers and improving their general writing skills.

The sixth group concerns motivation, variety of exposure to different writing styles and authors' abilities to craft opening sentences in a paragraph. High scores for items such as lack of motivation due to uninteresting topics (0.781) show that motivation plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of writing. Two factors stand out which may also be interrelated. Within the motivation and expression difficulties (MED) factor, the two critical points are the writer's intent to perform the task in the first place and their ability to write sufficient and meaningful sentences. Overcoming these challenges is important for learning how to write since it helps the learners to struggle through challenges like complex written sentences. When learners have very low motivation for engaging with the topic, students may find it exceedingly challenging to convey their thoughts in a rational manner, resulting in essays or paragraphs that are illogical and dull.

While working on writing tasks, students' problems may worsen if they have poor sentence writing skills. If students have a negative perception of their writing competence, according to Bandura [7] viewpoint, such students might have low or no confidence and will be less motivated to work on improving their skills. This loss or absence of confidence can discourage students even more, creating a situation where they wish to avoid writing all together. Writing involves basic techniques and requires complex thinking processes that are creative, imaginary, and conceptual. Overexertion of thoughts is common for students who have few writing experiences from different genres and have received insufficient feedback, so writing a meaningful sentence is a challenge, and maintaining motivation to do so can be even harder. The results draw attention to how important motivation is for the development of EFL learners' writing skills.

There is potential for learners to improve their writing skills if assisted with writing structured sentences, feedback from peers and guidance in understanding writing genres. Additionally, emphasizing a developmental approach to construction can possibly help in elevating the negative outlook towards mistakes, encouraging students to explore the direction of very complex sentences. Considering these findings, it can be stated that it is crucial to address MED barriers to improve the general level of engagement of learners with writing tasks. Future research may consider the challenges of sentence formation as well as the low level of motivation to participate in self-paced gamified writing alternatives or interest-based writing projects. Moreover, longitudinal studies which try to establish the relationship between motivation and writing growth may also be useful in understanding the development of students' attitudes and skills over the years. Addressing these interrelated barriers will enable students to achieve significantly improved writing outcomes.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the barriers EFL students encounter when engaging in paragraph writing. Through EFA, six significant factors were identified: SAC, focus and organizational barriers (FOB), WPI, TAW, LIC, and MED. These findings underscore the cross-disciplinary nature of the writing process, encompassing technical skills, cognitive processes, and emotional factors. EFL students often face challenges in logical development, sentence formulation, and meeting the demands of academic writing, compounded by time constraints, apprehension towards feedback, and lack of motivation. The implications of these findings are significant for educators and curriculum designers. They should take a comprehensive approach that combines skill development exercises and psychological and motivational mechanisms. Practical

implications involve creating workshops that target specific problems—for example, constructing sentences, brainstorming, and feedback. They can act in such a way so that learners will be in a more encouraging atmosphere, thus enabling them to gain confidence and enhance their writing performance.

However, this study has some limitations. For instance, the study is cross-sectional and as such, it does not show how barriers can change at different moments or under different conditions or treatments. These limitations should be tackled in future studies which should incorporate more diverse designs, participant samples, and data collection techniques such as writing task analysis or interviews. Recommendations for further research include determining the effectiveness of instructional interventions for eliminating these barriers, assessing the perspective of such strategies on writing effectiveness from a time longitudinal approach, and incorporating cultural and linguistic diversity factors in the consideration of EFL learners' writing difficulties. Furthermore, future research should be directed towards the development and successful use of technology and artificial intelligence-based applications for individualized feedback and assistance in writing, which may meet the requirements of learners. These insights will enable educators and policy makers to formulate better writing instruction and, consequently, enhance EFL learners' communicative academic and professional capabilities.

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C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

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Fu : Funding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that supports the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author [PS], upon reasonable request.




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