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Examining ESL Undergraduate Academic Writing Challenges: A Qualitative Study at a Pakistani Institute

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the writing skills of English second language (ESL) learners at an Institute, using an exploratory qualitative design to identify challenges, influencing factors, and areas for improvement in academic English. Data from structured interviews with nine students and three instructors revealed common writing deficiencies like grammatical mistakes, limited vocabulary, and coherence issues. These challenges stem from limited exposure to authentic texts, lack of practice, and restrictive curricular practices. The study recommends targeted teaching strategies, curricular changes, and increased teacher support to improve ESL learners' writing proficiency and educational outcomes. The study targeted undergraduate students from various disciplines at the Institute chosen through convenience sampling with 12 respondents (9 students and 3 teachers) representing the population of 40–60 interviewees. Utilising a qualitative research approach, a structured interview questionnaire consisting of 20 open-ended questions (12 for students and 8 for teachers) was employed. Data analysis identified grammatical errors, limited vocabulary, and coherence issues via the Error Analysis Technique to understand ESL learners' writing skills. Results specified factors affecting writing comprehension included lack of exposure to English, insufficient practice, and inadequate emphasis on writing in the curriculum. Addressing these can significantly improve ESL learners' writing proficiency. These findings emphasize the necessity for targeted and systematic interventions to enhance writing proficiency. By prioritizing regular practice, engaging in extensive reading activities, and implementing structured feedback mechanisms, educators can effectively address these issues and foster improved writing capabilities among ESL students. This research offers valuable contributions to the field of ESL education, presenting

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actionable recommendations to advance writing instruction and support the academic success of ESL undergraduates.
Keywords: Academic Writing Challenges; ESL Learners; Writing Skills; Undergraduate; Grammatical Errors

1. Introduction

ESL learners face challenges in developing writing skills, which are essential for language learning. In Pakistan, English is considered important for professional and academic success. This study focuses on Institute undergraduate students in Karachi, aiming to explore the major issues, factors, and methods for improving ESL learners' writing abilities. It also emphasizes the importance of English as a second language in Pakistan. This area regards it as crucial for success and sees it as the foremost global language. In Pakistan, it is recognized as the official language[1–3]. Students must develop the necessary level of proficiency in all aspects of this language, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing, as it can be used as the medium of teaching alongside Urdu. However, writing has its own special meaning; in Pakistan, for example, most official correspondence and educational activities, such as applications, tests, and assignments, are written in English. While it is necessary for Pakistani students to develop a strong enough grasp of English writing, the circumstances are not as ideal as one would like[4]. Based on multiple studies[5, 6], Pakistani students lack significantly strong ESL writing abilities at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Writing assists as a critical point for students' success at the university level context[7, 8]. However, improving writing skills for academic excellence becomes a daunting task for learners when the medium of writing is in L2[9]. For many writers, using a second language (L2) as a medium of writing can complicate their writing[10–12]. Writing skills are the most important of the four essential language skills for students' success, according to[13]. When comparing writing to other language skills, it is evident that writing is a more difficult and complicated talent[14]. It is imperative that people understand the value of having strong writing abilities[15].

It can be quite difficult to learn a second or foreign language in a classroom. Instructors are frequently expected to evaluate the needs of their students, use effective teaching strategies, and create resources that advance their language proficiency. Writing becomes significant in environments where English is being learned as a second language (ESL) since it is commonly utilized for global knowledge transmission[16]. And the degree of linguistic competency of ESL learners depends on how well they write[17]. This writing ability is demonstrated by students' capacity to produce solid, well-structured, logical, and well-organized writing that also demonstrates a broad vocabulary, grasp of technical conventions, and grammatical structures[18]. The study states that the process of writing in a second language was perceived as primarily involving the development of linguistic and lexical knowledge, in addition to being associated with the syntactic patterns and cohesive devices that serve as the basis of texts. To better address writing problems and ESL background in Pakistan specifically at Undergraduate level, it is necessary to identify the factors that contribute to them. Therefore, additional research is needed to investigate the ESL Learners' Writing Skills of Undergraduates in the context of Institute and analyse the factors that negatively impact students' writing abilities[19].

Pakistan is a country that is still developing. Many people there cannot write well, and the country is not doing as well in writing as other countries. When it comes to writing English paragraphs, Pakistani ESL learners struggle more than others. A few of the main problems are the impact of learning English as a second language, the difficulty in finding authentic English texts, and the vast range of student competency in the language[20]. Furthermore, Pakistan's existing assessment practices often prioritize memorization of facts over critical thinking and creative expression, which may hinder students' progress toward improving their writing[21]. Investigating writing issues among students, the causes of these issues, and lastly participant recommendations for enhancing students' proficiency in writing in the English language are the objectives of this study.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

- To investigate the major issues in the writing skills of undergraduate ESL learners.

- To explore the factors that affect writing skills of undergraduate ESL learners.
- To further explore the ways and means for improving their writing skills.

1.2. Key Research Questions

- What are the Major issues in the writing skills of Undergraduate ESL learners?
- What are the factors affecting undergraduate ESL learners' writing skills?
- How can the undergraduate ESL learners improve their writing skills?

1.3. Hypothesis

H1=Alternative Hypothesis: *ESL undergraduates at the Institute struggle with writing due to limited exposure to authentic English texts and assessments that favour memorization over critical thinking.*

1.4. Research Purpose of the Study

This study aims to investigate the writing skills of ESL undergraduates at Institute to identify major issues, factors, and areas needing improvement. By understanding the specific challenges faced by ESL Learners, instructors can develop targeted interventions and instructional strategies to enhance their writing expertise.

1.5. Scope of the Study

This study investigates ESL learners' writing skills among undergraduates at Institute. It explores issues, influencing factors, and improvement strategies. The scope includes undergraduates from various disciplines, using a qualitative approach with convenience sampling. The study duration was six months.

1.6. Significance of Study

The significance of investigating the ESL Learner's Writing Skills of Undergraduates at Institute lies in its potential to enhance educational practices and outcomes. Understanding the major issues hindering, and the factors influencing the development of Writing skills among ESL learners can lead to more targeted and effective teaching methods. This, in turn, can improve learners' comprehension, critical thinking abilities, and overall academic performance. Additionally, insights gained from this research can inform learner's centred curriculum development, teacher training programs, and educational policies aimed at better supporting ESL learners.

1.7. English as a Secondary Language

English is widely recognized as an international language and serves as a Lingua Franca globally, offering a vast repository of information, knowledge, and learning opportunities. In recent years, English has emerged as the language of globalization, exerting significant influence worldwide [22]. In Pakistan, English is not only considered a second language but also an official one [23]. In the context of Pakistan, English is deemed "the language for development at both the individual and national levels and is used extensively in key domains such as administration, judiciary, military, education, and commerce [24, 25]. Despite the considerable emphasis on English language learning in Pakistan and its inclusion as a compulsory subject throughout the education system, many students struggle with writing comprehension in English, even at the post-graduation level [26]. The study found that L1 interference affects the acquisition order of English grammatical morphemes in young Sindhi ESL learners, deviating from the universal order suggested by prior studies [27]. The study found that Sindhi ESL learners experience significant cognitive anxiety while writing in English. Female participants reported higher levels of somatic anxiety compared to males [28].

1.8. Major Issues of Writing Skills at the Undergraduate Level

When learning a second language, writing is the most difficult discipline. According to the studies it focuses on the intelligent and careful use of language with structural accuracy and communicative potential. Because proficient composition of texts indicates successful second language learning Geiser and Studley believe that writing is a cognitive process that tests memory, conceptual ability, and verbal command to successfully express the ideas [29]. For this rea-

son, learning to write has become increasingly important over the past 20 years because of two things first, it can be used as a tool for effective idea communication; second, a lot of research has been done in this area to look at a variety of problems that L2 writers face [30].

In different learning stages, students encounter a variety of writing challenges. Based on the studies, these issues can generally be divided into areas related to language, psychology, cognition, and pedagogy. Students find it difficult to understand English's structural elements since a poorly designed text makes it more difficult to understand the text's content, which readers interpret by using their cognitive abilities [31]. In contrast, even if students have mastered syntactic, lexical, and grammatical mastery over text construction, an unclear text fails to transmit concepts, which generates loss of trust in learners [32]. To adapt teaching strategies to students' cultural backgrounds and learning styles might also contribute to their lack of confidence.

1.9. Factors Influencing ESL Learners' Writing Skills

There is a claim that learners and teachers are the two primary factors of poor writing abilities. Instructors are not using the proper pedagogical method to teach writing, which includes not being able to provide students with timely and useful feedback and above all not being able to inspire students by Rico [33]. However, there are many obstacles that pupils must overcome, including the impacts of L1 transfer, a lack of reading enthusiasm, and practice. When putting thoughts into text, student writers in Pakistan face challenges related to psychology, cognition, society, and language [34]. The literature has found a wide range of factors that impact pupils' writing ability. These have to do with learners' motivation when they don't fully understand the role and importance of their text in their second language study. According to Bilal et al. [35], other factors that have a detrimental effect on students' texts' structural and linguistic accuracy include social media, inconsistent instructor feedback, learners' lack of analytical and evaluative attitude, and huge, unmanageable class numbers. Many students find it extremely difficult to locate adequate and pertinent source material, to summarize or paraphrase information, and to write in an acceptable academic manner [36].

Large class sizes, L1 transfers, students' dissatisfaction with their academic English courses, delayed essay writing instruction, and a lack of communication between students and teachers regarding the positive actions that should be taken to remedy these issues are the main causes of it. There are several variables that have been identified as influencing students' writing skills in Pakistan, including inadequate time for writing instruction, inappropriate A/V aids, packed classrooms, conventional pedagogy, and students' weak backgrounds in academia. Likewise, out-of-date textbooks fail to draw in readers by downplaying the value of writing abilities or providing any opportunities to do so. Above all, it is imperative to alter ideas on writing and addressing associated problems. To help learners develop their verbal skills, teachers must use techniques to get ideas from them to write down on paper. To boost their confidence, they also want prompt and helpful comments on their work [37].

1.10. Enhancing ESL Learners' Writing Skills

Fostering students' optimism, determination, and love of writing through technology can enhance their writing skills [38]. Additionally, Graham and Perin suggest that utilizing metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective tactics might help students understand and engage in the writing process [39]. Furthermore, by allowing students to select themes that interest them, teachers can modify their pedagogical approaches and collaborate to create assignments that inspire and drive their students. With prolonged practice and the use of cognitive and physical skills that offer the writer control over the expression of language and domain-specific information, it will probably change their writing patterns [40].

The Abbasi's study argues that the analysis of twenty paragraph write-ups identified 111 errors across 11 different categories. The most frequent error made by participants was punctuation, accounting for 36.93% of total errors. There was minimal difference between the error patterns of male and female students, with frequencies of 61 and 50 errors respectively. Kellogg and Raulerson argue that the findings indicated that learners instructed using Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) units demonstrated superior vocabulary acquisition compared to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners of the target language [41]. This study is expected to be highly beneficial for researchers focusing on CLIL and its impact on vocabulary acquisition. Memon et al. argue that this study adds important findings

to the existing knowledge on teaching English pronunciation [42]. Sindhi ESL learners and teachers will benefit from studying its findings for both local and global phonetic education.

Abbasi states that academic and social anxiety affects ESL learners' performance and cognitive abilities [43]. The competitive nature of modern academics increases this anxiety, with students fearing failure while striving for success. The study notes that the desire for social acceptance is a significant source of anxiety. Abbasi et al. identify the phonetic and cognitive aspects of communication skills, including pronunciation, grammar, listening, and reading skills [44], as important techniques for university students in Pakistan. Poor English-speaking skills at the university level often stem from ineffective teaching methods in schools and colleges. Abbasi et al. discover ESL teaching strategies in Pakistan, surveying 40 teachers from various sectors using quantitative and qualitative methods [45]. The study found private institutions use more effective strategies than public ones. It highlighted the need for more teacher training programs, workshops, and seminars to improve ESL teachers' methods and students' communication skills.

2. Materials and Methods

The research design selected for this study is a qualitative research method, specifically an Exploratory research design due to the nature of the research topic and objectives of this study [46]. An exploratory research design allows researchers to investigate a research problem that has not been clearly defined. This design is particularly useful for gaining insights and understanding the primary reasons, opinions, and motivations for the research topic. It helps to develop ideas or hypotheses for further qualitative research. In this context, it enables an in-depth examination of Investigating ESL Learner's Writing Skills of Undergraduates at Institute.

2.1. Study Population

The study population is unknown due to the unavailability of the total number of students enrolled in the targeted university. The population is defined as a set of individuals, data, or items from which a statistical sample is taken [47]. The study population includes undergraduate students, particularly enrolled in the 1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year, and 4th year of the respective disciplines at the Institute. Also, instructors who have direct or indirect interactions with the study have been included. The researcher had selected 12 active respondents using convenience sampling, representing 40-60 targeted interviewees from the entire population of SMIU, ensuring representation from different academic backgrounds and levels of proficiency in English as a second language (ESL). Thus, the researcher covered the study population based on sample size, which also makes the study limited.

2.2. Study Duration

This study has been accomplished within the stipulated deadline, i.e., 6 months after acceptance of the proposed research proposal.

2.3. Sampling Methods

In this study, the non-probability sampling technique, i.e., the Convenience sampling technique, is used for accurate results. According to Rahi [48], it is utilized when researchers use a sample that is easily accessible and readily available; this method may be used in practically any type of research. This method will work well for you if you want to find out what individuals think and feel.

2.4. Sampling Size

The Study sample size consists of 12 respondents as active respondents from the selected study interviewees from the Study Inhabitants. The sampling is conducted through the convenience sampling technique. Due to the unavailability of resources and time constraints, it is a challenging task to access each individual personally, therefore to get the required information this sampling can ensure that the chosen participants have the necessary knowledge and experience to contribute insightful responses to the interview research questions because the study population for this topic includes a diverse group of students from diverse disciplines of the institute.

2.5. Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher used convenience sampling for qualitative data, the selected sample size i.e., 12 active respondents

in which 9 are students and three were teachers are surveyed through a structured-interview questionnaire separately for both students and teachers; it is self-developed and easy to reach the students as respondents through physical interactions, face-to-face interview within SMIU premises, but difficult to meet with teachers, due to their busy schedule, that makes limited to include them in a research.

2.6. Data Collection Instrument

The research study makes use of qualitative methods, which are generally considered to build a deep, more personal knowledge of a given topic. Observations and interviews were collected through an open-ended structured interview questionnaire [49]. Nunan recognized questionnaires as a valuable instrument for data collection in ground settings [50]. A Structured interview questionnaire was developed consisting of 20 open-ended questions, divided into 12 student centred questions; to find major issues, factors affecting ESL learners writing skills and 8 teacher-centred questions to focus on the perspectives, practices, and experiences of the teachers in the context of writing skills and how it becomes a way for improvement in context of writing skills, and the researcher can analyse the data via error analysis technique to draw out qualitative research analysis and find the attitude of respondents and kept the written form collected data into a Laptop to achieve positive findings.

2.7. Statistical Analysis

To measure the data collection, Error analysis technique was utilized which was invented in the 1967s by Corder [51]. Error analysis is a qualitative methodology and a sort of linguistic analysis that is considered reliable because it focuses on the linguistic interruption caused by errors that occur in a learner's language usage while they are acquiring a second language.

2.8. Ethical Consideration

The valued study participants were informed of the main subject of the research study and what was required by them. There would be a covering of completely ethical aspects in which the respondent's identity would be kept hidden and his/her whole conversation is confidential as well.

3. Results

3.1. Demographic Characteristics

3.1.1. The Student's Descriptive Profile

The Demographic variables are stated below, which reflect the profiles of the Respondent from the institute, including Current Profession, Semester System, Age, Gender, and Qualification.

3.2. Interpretation

The data in **Table 1** provides descriptive profiles of undergraduate students interviewed. The respondents span various stages of their undergraduate studies, with ages ranging from 20 to 24 years. The majority are male, except for two female respondents. Overall, the sample is diverse in terms of academic progress and qualifications. And this sample size represents our proposed population of 40-60 respondents.

Table 1. Interviewee's (Students) Descriptive Profiles.

Resp. Sr. No	Profession	Semester System	Age of Respondents	Gender	Qualification
1.	Undergraduate	3rd	20 years	Male	BS - English
2.	Undergraduate	7th	24 years	Male	BS - English
3.	Undergraduate	8th	24 years	Male	BS - English
4.	Undergraduate	3rd	22 years	Male	BS - Education
5.	Undergraduate	8th	23 years	Female	BS - English
6.	Undergraduate	5th	22 years	Male	BBA
7.	Undergraduate	4th	21 years	Male	BS - Media Studies
8.	Undergraduate	3rd	21 years	Male	BS - English
9.	Undergraduate	8th	24 years	Female	BS - English

3.3. Teacher's Descriptive Profile

The demographic variables are stated below (**Table 2**), which reflect the profiles of the instructors from institute including Current Profession, Years of Experience, Gender, and Qualification and Department.

3.4. Interpretation

Table 2 provides a concise overview of the demographic profiles of instructors from Institute. The instructors encompass various roles, predominantly Assistant Professor and Lecturer positions, with teaching experience ranging from 6 to 10 years. Their qualifications span Ph.D., M.Phil., and MS degrees, showcasing a diverse educational background. Gender distribution indicates most male instructors, while one female instructor is included in the sample. All instructors belong to the English department, emphasizing the department's focus on English language and literature within SMIU's faculty.

Table 2. Interviewee's (Teachers) Descriptive Profiles.

Resp. Sr. No	Profession	Years of Experience	Qualification	Gender	Department
1.	Assistant Professor	10 years	Ph.D.	Male	English
2.	Lecturer	8 years	M.Phil.	Male	English
3.	Lecturer	6 years	MS	Female	English

3.5. Analysis of the Data

The Researcher used error analysis to further analyses the data and found valuable findings. In the 1967s, Corder initiated the field of error analysis. It defines error analysis as the process of monitoring, assessing, and categorizing variations between the learners' and standard language use. The four processes of error analysis areas follow gathering sample information; identifying errors and describing errors; and explaining errors. Through this flexibility, error analysis allows for rich, detailed, and complex descriptions of your data. Now researchers utilize error analysis in a step-by-step manner.

3.6. Step 1 Collected Data via Interviews (Students)

The first step is to get to know our data. It's important to get a thorough overview of all the data collected before we start analysing individual items (**Appendix A**). The structured-interview responses below are documented in written form and saved as WR (Written Responses) files in a laptop. WR stands for Written Responses, while R1 represents Respondent 1. TR1 stands for Teacher as Respondent 1, and SR1 stands for Student as Respondent 1.

1. Describe your overall experience with writing academic assignments in English?

Response 1. When we write assignments in English, we come to know how English grammar is composed. How to write the structures, how to form the sentences and clauses and what are the conjunctions and other grammatical forms that help us to understand the English language. And by doing assignments, literature assignments, for instance, or let's suppose just like writing about genre or critically analysing any literary piece of a particular genre. Let's suppose, for example, Charles Dickens' work Curiosity Shop. If we analyse it in our assignment, we will come to know about the genre. Actually, yeah, we did come to know about the genre itself. And, by doing assignments on that literary piece, just like novel. So, we come to know what novel is written about and how it reflects the era, the era in which it was written by Charles Dickens. So, yeah, this is my experience when I was when I wrote assignments in English that were assigned by our teachers. So, it helped me to, you know, get deep into the English genres or English language.

2. What types of writing do you find most challenging (essays, research papers, reports) and why?

Response 1. So in between these things, essays, research papers and reports, I found research paper writing somehow difficult other than that, other than those that are mentioned here, essay and reports or articles. Essays are, sorry, research papers are difficult because, you know, there are many of the research methodologies and types that are there to be, you know, to be taken for the research purpose. For example, there are experimental research methods and

within the experiment research methods, we have many other types of experiment design or experiment method. And, we have quantitative and qualitative. And while doing research, we must take care of the sample population and other things that are necessary to, you know, take care of those things while writing a research paper. So, it is somehow difficult because, you know, it is when students enter any department or enter the world of research. So, he or she must know about the methodology of research paper. And there are many methodologies. So somehow students get confused about what methodology they should choose to write a research paper. So, yeah, according to me, this is somehow difficult, just like when we write a research paper.

3. What specific challenges of writing do you struggle with the most (grammar, vocabulary, organization, plagiarism)?

Response 1. Specifically, if you talk about, so I feel that the English grammar is difficult. You know, we must take care of parts of speech, which sentence is used. It's like if I am writing about any novel or critically analysing any novel, so I must take care of grammar, just like I should write in present form or past form, past continuous or other tenses are there. So, yeah, grammar is somehow more difficult than vocabulary organization and plagiarism. We can Google it, and we can ask from others that what word is used in English for that thing. So, vocabulary is, you know, very easy to learn. But grammar is, yeah, these are the rules, you know, we must understand the rules exactly or accurately. What rules are there for, you know, writing in the present situation for the present situation. If we are writing about the present situation, we must take care of the sentence structure and we must use the rules that are used for present for present situation. So, yeah, these are some of the things that create hindrance for the students to speak or talk in English or also write in English.

4. Do you feel your current writing skills adequately prepare you for professional communication needs?

Response 1. Yeah, being part of English department, I do feel that, yeah, I have, you know, average command of skills that is need for communication. I am not too much good, but because of practice, I am practicing it from three years because I am studying in English department. So, yeah, I feel that whenever the situation comes, I can handle it. I can speak in English because, you know, I am practicing it. When I personally, what I think that when I, what we say, when I interface the native speakers of English language, so it will be difficult for me to, you know, face them. It will be difficult for me to understand them first. And then I may be, you know, lacking confidence when speaking, while speaking with the native speakers because, you know, their language is very different. We speak English, that is Pakistan English, but there is, there is, you know, very much natural. So, yeah, I feel that I am somehow, somehow confident in my English communication skills, but not that much great, that much, what we say, that much actually good, that are, you know, needed for, you know, speaking with the native speakers.

5. What are the biggest obstacles you face in developing your writing skills? (Lack of practice, unclear instructions, limited feedback)

Response 1. Lack of practice, unclear instructions and limited feedback. Obstacles are what I think lies in ourselves. There is no need for instructions, limited feedback. Yeah, maybe lack of practice can be chosen, can be selected between these options that have been given here. So, yeah, practice, I bought it because, you know, practice makes man perfect. And by doing practice again and again, I can, or we can, or everyone can remove the obstacles in their mind also. And it will, you know, like opening the, opens the, what we say, the closed door of minds when we practice things. So, we commanded, we became master of the things when we practice it. So, yeah, this is that, yeah, lack of practice may be the cause of obstacles when writing, developing writing skills.

6. How helpful have your writing development?

Response 1. Yeah, so teachers were very helpful, helpful. They were kind of, you know, cooperative. They did their best to help us. But the thing is that I mentioned before those obstacles, hindrances, all are the things of our mind. These are the games that are being played by our mind. Once you are, once you are given instructions, it's up to you that how you are tackling them, how you are, you know, managing those instructions in your mind, and how you are becoming the master of the given instructions. It's like how you are memorizing those instructions. So again, our teachers are there for the guidance, but we must decide what way or what the things we are going to do with those instructions that are given by our teachers.

7. What kinds of resources or interventions would you find most helpful for improving your writing skills? (Workshops, online tools, peer feedback)

Response 1. I think online tools because, you know, online tools are always there. You know, you can just Google it, which sentence is used for that situation, and it will, you know, appear in front of our, actually in our computer screen, and we will come to know that, yeah, these are the things that can help us, or these are the things, or these are the rules that are being used for these situations. So, I think online tools are very great to help us to, you know, understand or improve our writing skills. For workshops and peer feedback, we need someone, or we need some involvement and situations, not situations, but involvement to interact with them, and then we can improve our writing skills. So online tools, I prefer it that these things must be considered. Online tools must be considered for improving writing skills.

8. Do you feel your current English language proficiency impacts your writing abilities?

Response 1. I think that, yeah, this is quite like the knowledge of language that is in your mind, what we call English competence. So, yeah, it affects our writing abilities, but I think that if you're confident while speaking English, so you are maybe, what do you say, you are maybe a bit more confident than writing in English. Let's suppose I am good at communication, but when the time comes of writing, so I may be late then, because of, you know, because of, you know, yeah, taking all of the rules in my mind and selecting each and every rule carefully, it may actually make me confused to, you know, what question we should, not what question, but what structure we should actually use, yeah.

9. Based on your experiences, what suggestions do you have for improving the teaching and learning of writing skills at SMIU?

Response 1. The thing is that I have already mentioned that the things that we need are, you know, motivation to learn anything. If I am not motivated to improve my writing skills, there is no need of any good academy, any good institute, or any good teacher. And that will help me, that will help me to, you know, improve it. But until and unless I am not interested or I am not motivated to improve it. Yeah, if we talk about the teachers that are, you know, are studying in SMI, So, yeah, we can say that teachers are good and somehow or maybe there are some areas that are, you know, lacking. That should be, you know, covered by the teachers. There are some, some, some, some of the areas. Let's suppose that I feel there must be presentations, not presentations, but debates. We need, we should, you know, introduce the new topics for the debates in our you know, in our classrooms. Because, you know, when we, I have any idea of any topic, and you have the idea of any topic. So, when we debate about it, when we will share it, when we speak with each other that I am good at I have this ideology, and you have this ideology. So, I am, I will define my own ideology, and you will be defending your own ideology. So, it will help us to, you know, improve our communication skills and it will also sharpen our, sharpen my idea. It will help us to, you know, improve our critical faculties of, you know, seeing things critically. So, I think that these, these things should be there in our academic institutes, not specifically SMIU, but in all over Pakistan.

10. Please write 5 to 6 lines using any idiom of your choice.

Response 1. There's an idiom that I always use to break a leg. It means "good luck". We can use it to wish someone well before performing any task that is challenging. It's a supportive and friendly kind of wish. We can use it in many contexts like, to support and motivate a friend. So just simply say thanks whenever someone says it to you!

3.7. Step 2 Collected Data via Interviews (Teachers) Supports Improvement

1. What are the most common writing challenges faced by SMIU undergraduate students (**Appendix B**)?

Teacher Response 1. Well, in my experience, one of the challenges that they face the most is writing grammar correctly. This is the something they face the most. And secondly, I think after grammar, they face lack of vocabulary. This is the main issue, right? And third, the main challenge is that, especially with the students of other departments, not with English department, it is that they do not have English as their major subject. So, they focus more on their contents rather than English language. So, they face these difficulties in learning that.

2. How do you assess the writing skills of your students?

Teacher Response 1. Of course, through assignments, through quizzes, through papers, and sometimes I give them

online quizzes as well. So, I assess their language that way. And I have got some rubrics. I go for grammar check, I go for spelling check, I go for correct tense usage. And then, you know, I also look at the depth of ideas also.

3. Do you observe any differences in writing proficiency across different academic disciplines or language backgrounds?

Teacher Response 1. Yes, very much. I mean, significant ones. The departments of business administration and sometimes media and English, they are much better in writing English language than the departments of IT. I mean, computer science, software engineering. They are the poorest of all the students and they face most difficulties in writing English language.

4. What specific areas do you find students struggle with the most in their writing (content, structure, citation)?

Teacher Response 1. Students primarily struggle with content, structure, and citation in their writing. Despite having good ideas, they commonly face challenges with organizing their thoughts coherently within a well-defined structure.

5. Do you feel your current curriculum and resources provide satisfactory opportunities for students to practice and improve their writing skills?

Teacher Response 1. They do. I mean, it is not the problem with the instructions. It's not the problem with the resources. I always tell my students what they lack is the attitude and seriousness. I mean, with the given resources and time that they are being given, I do not think they should be feeling any difficulty. But it's only that they do not practice. They do not invest time in learning English. That's why they face these difficulties.

6. What challenges do you face in effectively teaching writing skills to a diverse student body?

Teacher Response 1. First of all, they have this very low competence level. I mean, sometimes they don't even, and their mixed competencies, of course, most of the students do not even understand the basics. Second challenge I get is that, you know, they do not, as I said, practice. So, they come to the next class after a week, and they repeat the same mistakes. Third challenge that I feel is the time constraint. Assessment is a big challenge. Sometimes the classes are big. And I have got a lot of workloads. So, I cannot give assessment or output very efficiently. That's lacking on my part, I would say.

7. What types of professional development or support would you find helpful in enhancing your writing instruction skills?

Teacher Response 1. I already am a part of many trainings. So, yes, for a general teacher, I would say they need constant support with the materials, with the aids, with the teaching methodologies that are being updated over the time. So, yes, in the sense of, in regard of, I would say, material development and teaching methodology. These are the two areas where I might need the professional development.

8. What is the way you think undergraduates of SMUI can improve their writing skills?

Teacher Response 1. First, university can improve your writing skills by reading a lot, by practicing English at their home, by taking the subject seriously, by being keener towards being more active in the class and taking English language seriously. They do not invest their time and effort into learning English. If they read and write and watch and listen to English for one hour a day, I think they can significantly improve their English language over the time.

3.8. Step 2 and 3 (Identifying and Describing Errors) in a Table form: Phase 1 Errors Identified and Description

Table 3 identifies specific grammatical, structural, and clarity issues within responses.

Table 3. Specific Grammatical, Structural, and Clarity Issues Within Responses.

Response ID	Excerpt/Clusters	Error Identified
R1	"My all over experience with writing academic assignments in English..."	Grammar "all over" should be "overall"
R2	"Actually, when we write assignments in English, we came to know..."	Tense "came" should be "come"
R2	"...and what are the conjunctions and other grammatical forms..."	Redundancy "conjunctions" and "other grammatical forms" are repetitive

Table 3. *Cont.*

Response ID	Excerpt / Clusters	Error Identified
R3	"Writing academic assignments in English has been a mixed experience..."	Punctuation Missing comma after "me"
R4	"My experience with writing academic assignment was productive..."	Number agreement "assignment" should be "assignments"
R5	"...with writing Academy as I am as in English..."	Typo and clarity "Academy as I am as in English" is unclear and likely meant to be "academic assignments in English"
R6	"...been a steep learning curve from me..."	Preposition "from" should be "for"
R7	"...but it takes time and efforts."	Number agreement "efforts" should be "effort"
R8	"...I have learned a lot along along the way."	Repetition "along along" should be "along"
R9	"...through the help of stuff like (ppt, research articles, etc.)"	Informal language "stuff" should be replaced with "resources"
R1	"I find research paper most challenging due to their complexity..."	Number agreement "paper" should be "papers" or "their" should be "its"
R2	"...so I feel that the English grammar is difficult."	Article usage "the English grammar" should be "English grammar"
R3	"...research papers to be the most challenging because they require..."	Redundancy "research papers" and "they" are repetitive; remove one
R4	"...you have to keep your eyes on your writing skills, plagiarism..."	Idiomatic expression "keep your eyes on" should be "focus on"
R5	"...I do find research papers most challenging."	Redundancy "I do find" should be "I find"
R6	"...require high level of critic, thinking, analyzing and organization"	Word choice "critic" should be "critical"
R1	"Grammar and organization are most challenging aspect of writing..."	Number agreement "aspect" should be "aspects"
R5	"I am a biggest struggle. I struggle with conjunctions too."	Clarity and redundancy "I am a biggest struggle" is unclear and redundant with "I struggle"
R6	"...revise and edit my written, but I know I need to work..."	Word choice "written" should be "writing"
R8	"...it gets time to show. Make sure that it going well."	Grammar "it gets time to show" should be "it takes time to show" and "it going well" should be "it is going well"

3.9. Interpretation (Errors Affecting Language, Content, Organization and Format)

The analysis of ESL learners' writing samples at Institute revealed a variety of errors affecting language, content, and organization/format. Language errors included frequent grammar mistakes (e.g., "all over" instead of "overall"), tense issues (e.g., "came" instead of "come"), and redundancy (e.g., "conjunctions and other grammatical forms"). Additional language errors encompassed punctuation mistakes (e.g., missing commas), preposition misuse (e.g., "from" instead of "for"), repetition (e.g., "along along"), informal language (e.g., "stuff" instead of "resources"), and incorrect article usage (e.g., "the English grammar"). Content errors were evident in unclear or incorrect word choices (e.g., "critic" instead of "critical") and typographical errors affecting clarity (e.g., "Academy as I am as in English"). Organization and format errors included issues with number agreement (e.g., "assignment" instead of "assignments") and improper idiomatic expressions (e.g., "keep your eyes on" instead of "focus on"). Addressing these language, content, and organizational errors can significantly improve the writing proficiency of ESL learners.

The analysis of ESL learners' writing samples revealed a total of 128 occurrences of major writing issues (**Table 4**). The most frequent issue was tense errors, with 23 instances. Redundancy and number disagreements were each

noted 14 times. Punctuation errors were observed 10 times, while typo and clarity issues occurred 11 times. Errors in preposition use, repetition, and word choice were each found 7 times. Informal language was used inappropriately in 9 cases, and article usage errors were noted 12 times. Idiomatic expression errors were identified 8 times. This distribution highlights the areas where ESL learners at Institute face the most challenges in their writing (**Table 5**).

Table 4. Total Major Factors and Issues Identified.

Major Writing Issues/Factors	Frequency of Occurrence
Tense	23
Redundancy	14
Punctuation	10
Number of disagreements	14
Typo and Clarity	11
Preposition	7
Repetition	7
Informal Language	9
Article Usage	12
Idiomatic Expression	8
Word Choice	7
Total	128

Table 5. Areas for Improvement via Teachers' Interview Findings.

Improvement Area	Teacher's Suggested Improvement Methodology	Factors Discussed
Grammar	Through regular assignments, quizzes, and papers with specific grammar checks	Grammar, Spelling, Tense Usage
Vocabulary	Encourage extensive reading and practice outside of class	Lack of Vocabulary
Structuring Ideas	Provide structured writing exercises and feedback on organization	Structuring Ideas, Coherence
Punctuation	Specific punctuation exercises and detailed feedback	Punctuation Usage
Critical Thinking	Develop assignments that require well-developed arguments and analysis	Developing Arguments, Critical Thinking
Citation and Evidence	Teach proper citation methods and provide examples	Integrating Evidence, Citation
Content and Structure	Focus on organizing ideas coherently and effectively	Content, Structure
Attitude and Commitment	Emphasize the importance of practice and dedication	Attitude, Practice
Regular Practice	Assign daily reading and writing tasks	Lack of Practice, Consistent Effort
Assessment Methods	Use rubrics to assess various writing components systematically	Assessment, Feedback
Material and Methodology	Continuous professional development in teaching materials and methods	Material Development, Teaching Methodology
Diverse Competence Levels	Tailor instructions to meet varying competence levels	Varying Competence Levels
Time Management	Optimize class time and manage workloads efficiently	Time Constraint, Large Classes

To improve the writing skills of SMIU ESL learners, teachers suggest regular grammar checks through assignments, extensive reading for vocabulary building, and structured writing exercises for better organization. They recommend specific punctuation exercises, assignments focused on critical thinking, and proper citation training. Emphasizing practice and dedication, assigning daily reading and writing tasks, and using rubrics for systematic assessment are key. Continuous professional development and tailoring instructions to diverse competence levels are important, along with optimizing class time and managing workloads efficiently.

3.10. Step 4 Expound the Errors Identified

The analysis of ESL learners' writing samples from SMIU undergraduates reveals several prevalent issues that impede the clarity and effectiveness of their written communication. Problems in ESL learners' writing include frequent grammar errors, such as the misuse of terms like "all over" instead of "overall," indicating a misunderstanding of correct word choices and sentence structures. Tense errors, like using "came" instead of "come," show confusion in verb tense application, disrupting the timeline of events in writing. Redundancy, exemplified by phrases like "conjunctions and other grammatical forms," makes writing less concise by repeating unnecessary information. Punctuation errors, such as missing commas, can alter the meaning of sentences and affect readability. Number agreement issues, such as using "assignment" instead of "assignments," highlight difficulties in matching singular and plural forms. Typos and clarity issues, like the unclear phrase "Academy as I am as in English," often result from typographical mistakes or poor phrasing. Preposition errors, such as using "from" instead of "for," indicate incorrect usage that changes sentence meaning. Repetition, seen in phrases like "along," leads to redundant and less engaging writing. Finally, the use of informal language, such as "stuff" instead of "resources," detracts from the academic tone required in formal writing. Factors responsible for these problems include a lack of exposure to English in everyday contexts, insufficient practice, and a lack of emphasis on writing skills in the curriculum. The findings from the written samples indicate that addressing these issues can significantly enhance the writing proficiency of ESL learners. To improve ESL learners' writing skills, it is crucial to provide targeted feedback, increase practice opportunities, and integrate writing-focused activities into the curriculum. Encouraging students to read extensively, engage in peer reviews, and utilize writing resources can also help mitigate these common writing challenges.

4. Discussion

The findings underscore the importance of examining the writing skills of ESL learners among undergraduates at the Institute to better understand the challenges and factors affecting their proficiency. This research aims to identify the primary issues faced by ESL learners, analyse the underlying factors contributing to these difficulties, and recommend effective strategies for enhancing their writing abilities. By aligning the study's objectives with the analyzed data, it becomes clear how writing challenges among ESL learners are intricately connected to broader influences. Ultimately, the study highlights the diverse and complex nature of these challenges, with a focus on grammar errors, tense misuse, redundancy, and punctuation mistakes as significant hurdles identified in the writing samples of SMIU undergraduate ESL learners.

The data showed that writing skills were influenced by limited vocabulary, informal language use, and difficulties in critical thinking. These findings align with the second objective, revealing factors impacting ESL learners' writing proficiency. Teachers suggested improving this through regular grammar-focused assignments, extensive reading, structured writing exercises, and stressing practice and dedication—addressing the third objective.

The students can enhance their writing skills by implementing the suggested improvement methods. Engaging in extensive reading can help improve vocabulary and expose them to different writing styles. Structured writing exercises and feedback on organization can aid in developing coherent and well-structured essays. Regular practice through assignments and daily writing tasks can improve grammar, punctuation, and overall writing proficiency. Additionally, emphasizing critical thinking and providing guidance on proper citation methods can enhance the quality of their arguments and analysis. The alternative hypothesis suggesting that ESL undergraduates at Institute face writing difficulties due to limited exposure to authentic English texts and assessments promoting memorization over critical thinking is partially accepted. While the data does indicate challenges related to vocabulary, critical thinking, and organization, it does not specifically point to a lack of exposure to authentic texts as a primary factor. Other issues such as grammar errors, tense misuse, and redundancy seem to play a more significant role based on the analysis of the writing samples.

5. Conclusions

In summary, this study has provided a detailed examination of the challenges associated with the writing skills of ESL undergraduate learners at the Institute, identifying 128 instances of significant writing issues. Through com-

prehensive error analysis and qualitative interviews, the investigation revealed key difficulties such as grammatical inaccuracies, limited vocabulary, and problems related to coherence and organization. These findings emphasize the necessity for targeted and systematic interventions to enhance writing proficiency. By prioritizing regular practice, engaging in extensive reading activities, and implementing structured feedback mechanisms, educators can effectively address these issues and foster improved writing capabilities among ESL students. Additionally, the study underlines the importance of recognizing the specific requirements and experiences of ESL learners to devise more effective teaching methodologies. This research offers valuable contributions to the field of ESL education, presenting actionable recommendations to advance writing instruction and support the academic success of ESL undergraduates at the Institute.

This study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The focus on a single institution restricts the generalizability of the findings to other institutions, indicating that the conclusions drawn may not universally apply to all ESL learners. Furthermore, the small sample size of 12 respondents, selected through convenience sampling, may not fully capture the diverse experiences and perspectives of the entire student body. While the qualitative approach provides in-depth insights, it lacks the breadth and statistical power of quantitative methods, limiting the ability to make broader generalizations or identify widespread trends. To address these issues and enhance the efficacy of future studies, several actions are recommended. Expanding the study to include a greater number of institutions and employing stratified random sampling to create a larger, more diverse sample size could provide a more representative picture of the writing difficulties faced by ESL students. Additionally, utilizing a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative data with qualitative observations would result in a more comprehensive study.

Here are some specific suggestions for enhancing ESL students' writing abilities at the Institute:

- Regularly assign and test grammar-focused assignments and quizzes to address common mistakes.
- Encourage extensive reading and structured writing exercises to develop vocabulary and critical thinking skills.
- Ensure that instructors receive ongoing professional development to equip them with the necessary tools to teach ESL students effectively.

5.1. Limitation of the Study

This study has several limitations. It focuses only SMI University subjects restricting the generalizability of the findings to other institutions. This means the conclusions drawn may not apply universally to all ESL learners. Additionally, the small sample size of 12 respondents, selected through convenience sampling, may not fully capture the diverse experiences and perspectives of the entire student body. The qualitative approach, while providing in-depth insights, lacks the breadth and statistical power of quantitative methods, limiting the ability to make broader generalizations or identify more widespread trends.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, D.A.S. and A.M.A.; methodology, A.M.A.; validation, AMA. and D.A.S.; formal analysis, D.A.S.; investigation, D.A.S.; resources, A.M.A.; data curation, A.M.A.; writing—original draft preparation, D.A.S.; writing—review and editing, A.M.A.; visualization, A.M.A.; supervision, A.M.A.; project administration, A.M.A.; the study is not funded. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board of SMI University (protocol code 007 and June 5, 2024).

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data will be available upon request.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Interview Questions for Students

1. Describe your overall experience with writing academic assignments in English?
2. What types of writing do you find most challenging (essays, research papers, reports) and why?
3. What specific challenging of writing do you struggle with the most (grammar, vocabulary, organization, plagiarism)?
4. How confident are you in your ability to revise and edit your writing for clarity and coherence?
5. Do you feel your current writing skills adequately prepare you for professional communication needs?
6. What are the biggest obstacles you face in developing your writing skills? (Lack of practice, unclear instructions, limited feedback)
7. How helpful have your teachers been in supporting your writing development?
8. What kinds of resources or interventions would you find most helpful for improving your writing skills? (Workshops, online tools, peer feedback)
9. Do you feel your current English language proficiency impacts your writing abilities?
10. In what ways do your cultural and linguistic backgrounds impact your approach to writing assignments?
11. Based on your experiences, what suggestions do you have for improving the teaching and learning of writing skills at SMIU?
12. Please write 5 to 6 lines using any idiom of your choice.

Appendix B

Interview

Questions for Teachers

1. What are the most common writing challenges faced by SMIU undergraduate students?
2. How do you assess the writing skills of your students?
3. Do you observe any differences in writing proficiency across different academic disciplines or language backgrounds?
4. What specific areas do you find students struggle with the most in their writing (content, structure, citation)?
5. Do you feel your current curriculum and resources provide satisfactory opportunities for students to practice and improve their writing skills?
6. What challenges do you face in effectively teaching writing skills to a diverse student body?
7. What types of professional development or support would you find helpful in enhancing your writing instruction skills?
8. What is the way you think undergraduates of SMUI can improve their writing skills?

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