

Exploring the Reasons Behind Grade 7 Students' Reluctance Toward Writing in ESL Classrooms in Oman

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Abstract

This study investigated Grade 7 students' experiences with writing in English within an ESL classroom context, focusing on their attitudes, perceived challenges, and preferred classroom practices. A qualitative classroom-based action research design was adopted using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to collect data from one Grade 7 class. The findings indicated that students' experiences with writing were shaped by a combination of linguistic difficulty and classroom experience. Many learners reported challenges related to grammar, sentence formation, spelling, vocabulary, and expressing ideas in written English, while some students demonstrated dependence on memorization and uncertainty when writing independently. At the same time, the findings suggested that students respond more positively to writing when lessons include structured support and interactive activities. Participants repeatedly emphasized the value of scaffolding strategies, memorable writing frameworks such as OREO, collaborative activities, and gamified classroom practices that make writing feel less intimidating and more engaging. Overall, the study highlights the importance of creating writing environments that balance language support with student engagement, suggesting that supportive and interactive classroom practices may contribute to improving students' confidence, participation, and willingness to write in English.

Keywords: ESL classroom, collaborative activities, scaffolding strategies

1. Background of the study

Writing is a fundamental skill in learning English as a Second Language (ESL). It enables students to express ideas, organize thoughts, and communicate effectively. It is also essential for developing overall language proficiency. However, writing is often considered one of the most difficult skills for ESL learners because it requires the integration of vocabulary, grammar, and sentence

structure. In Omani schools, many middle school students face noticeable difficulties in writing in English. Grade 7 students, in particular, often struggle with limited vocabulary, incorrect grammar, and difficulties in constructing meaningful sentences. These challenges can make writing tasks feel intimidating and discouraging, leading students to develop negative attitudes toward writing. This issue is also evident in my own grade 7

classroom, where several students show clear reluctance to engage in writing activities. Some students hesitate to start writing, others provide very short responses, and some express that writing in English is "too hard". Such behaviours indicate that there are underlying factors affecting students' motivation, confidence, and attitudes toward writing. Since this study is conducted within the context of classroom-based action research, it focuses on investigating this issue within my grade 7 students while also considering its relevance to similar ESL classrooms in Oman. Understanding the reasons behind students' reluctance to write is essential for improving teaching and creating a more supportive and engaging learning environment.

Research Problem

Despite the importance of writing in ESL learning, many grade 7 students show low motivation and negative attitudes toward writing tasks in English. This issue is not limited to a single classroom but is commonly observed in similar educational contexts. In my grade 7 class, this reluctance is clearly reflected in students' behaviors and responses to writing activities. The fear and hesitation affects students' participation and limits their development in writing skills. However,

the specific reasons behind these negative attitudes are not always clearly identified. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the factors that influence students' attitudes and the challenges they face when writing in English.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore the reasons why Grade 7 ESL students show reluctance toward writing tasks in English, with a focus on my classroom context and its relevance to similar ESL learning environments.

Research Questions

- Why do grade 7 students show negative attitudes toward writing in English?
- What challenges do students face when completing writing tasks?
- How do students feel about writing activities in their English classroom?

Significance of the Study

This research is significant because it addresses a real classroom issue observed among grade 7 students while also reflecting a broader challenge in ESL classrooms in Oman. By identifying the factors that discourage students from writing, the study can help teachers develop practical and effective strategies to support students. The findings may also contribute to improving teaching practices, making writing activities more fun, while sharpening students'

confidence and motivation. In addition, the study may provide useful insights for teachers facing similar challenges in comparable educational contexts.

2. Literature Review

Writing in English as a Second Language (ESL) is often described as one of the most demanding skills for learners. It requires more than simply knowing words and grammar; students must generate ideas, organize them logically, and express them clearly in a language they are still developing. Because of this complexity, many learners struggle with writing and develop negative attitudes toward it.

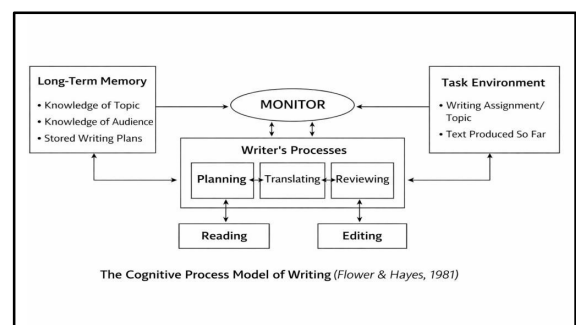
This chapter examines key research related to ESL writing, focusing on how writing works as a process, how students experience it, and the main challenges they face. It also highlights findings from Arab and Omani contexts to show that these difficulties are not limited to one classroom. In addition, the chapter explores teaching approaches that can make writing more accessible and engaging for students.

3. Writing as a Complex Process

Early research challenged the idea that writing is a simple, linear activity. Flower and Hayes (1981) introduced a cognitive model showing that writing involves several interconnected processes, including planning, translating ideas into language,

and revising. These processes do not happen in order; instead, writers move back and forth between them (as shown in Figure 1).

For ESL learners, this process becomes even more demanding. Students must think about what to say while also focusing on how to say it correctly. This often creates a heavy cognitive load, especially for learners with limited vocabulary or weak grammar. When students are unable to manage these demands, they may simplify their ideas or avoid writing altogether. Later studies confirmed that students who lack clear strategies for planning and organizing their writing often feel overwhelmed during writing tasks (Bayat, 2014). This highlights the importance of supporting students not only linguistically, but also cognitively.



(Figure 1)

Cognitive Process Model of Writing
(adapted from Flower & Hayes, 1981;
generated using AI

Students' attitudes toward writing play a major role in their performance. When writing is associated with difficulty or

failure, students are more likely to avoid it or participate minimally. Research in Arab contexts shows that many students develop negative perceptions of writing as a challenging and stressful activity, particularly when they lack confidence in their language abilities. Motivation is another key factor. Qashoa (2006) reported that low motivation among learners in Gulf countries reduces their engagement in language tasks, including writing. In Oman, similar patterns have been observed. Al-Balushi (2016) found that students' confidence and self-efficacy strongly influence their willingness to write. When students repeatedly struggle, their motivation decreases, and writing becomes something they try to avoid rather than improve.

Linguistic Challenges in Writing

In addition to attitudes, students face concrete linguistic challenges. Writing requires control over vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure, and weakness in any of these areas can affect the entire writing process. Limited vocabulary is one of the most common difficulties. Students may have ideas but lack the words to express them. Fareed et al. (2016) found that insufficient vocabulary often leads to frustration and task avoidance among ESL learners. Grammar also represents a major

obstacle. Many students focus heavily on avoiding mistakes, especially in sentence construction and verb usage. Studies on Arab learners show that grammatical errors are frequent and can negatively affect students' confidence (Abdelmohsen, 2022; Al-Fozan, 2018).

These challenges are evident to be interconnected. Difficulty with vocabulary often leads to weak sentence formation, resulting in short or unclear writing. Over time, this reinforces students' negative attitudes toward writing.

Writing Anxiety and Fear of Mistakes

Beyond linguistic difficulties, emotional factors also play a significant role. Writing anxiety refers to the fear or tension students experience when requested to write. The concept of writing apprehension was introduced by Daly and Miller (1975), who showed that anxiety can affect both performance and participation. Students who feel anxious are more likely to avoid writing or produce minimal responses. In ESL contexts, writing anxiety is often linked to fear of making mistakes. Sabti et al. (2024) found that students who struggle with grammar and vocabulary tend to experience higher levels of anxiety. This fear can prevent students from expressing their ideas freely. Research in Arab contexts supports these findings as well. Al-Asmari (2013) reported that students' lack of

effective writing strategies contributes to increased anxiety, especially when they are unsure how to begin or organize their writing.

4. Writing in the Omani Context and Effective Teaching Approaches

Studies conducted in Oman reflect many of the challenges identified in broader ESL research. Students often struggle with written expression due to limited language proficiency and low confidence. Al Sharoufi (2022) highlighted that writing remains a difficult skill for many Omani learners, particularly when tasks require extended responses. At the same time, research suggests that teaching methods can significantly influence students' experiences.

Providing students with clear structures can help them organize their ideas and reduce the complexity of writing tasks. Structured approaches, such as guided frameworks, allow students to focus on content without feeling overwhelmed by language demands. Furthermore, engaging students can improve students' attitudes toward writing. Memon et al. (2026) found that collaborative and interactive activities increase students' participation and reduce anxiety in Omani classrooms. Similarly, approaches such as gamification can make

writing more enjoyable and encourage students to take part more actively. These findings suggest that when writing is presented in a structured and engaging way, students are more likely to feel confident and willing to participate.

5. Summary

The literature shows that writing in ESL contexts is influenced by a combination of cognitive, linguistic, and emotional factors. Writing is a complex process that requires planning, organization, and language control. Students often develop negative attitudes due to repeated difficulties, limited vocabulary, and fear of making mistakes. Research I found regarding Arab and Omani contexts confirms that these challenges are common among learners.

However, studies also highlight the importance of effective teaching strategies, such as providing clear structures and using engaging activities, to support students' writing development. This study aims to build on these revelations by examining how these factors appear among my grade 7 students.

6. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, classroom-based action research design to investigate grade 7 students' attitudes toward writing in English. The purpose of this approach is to investigate a real issue

observed in the classroom and to better understand students' experiences in order to improve teaching practices. The participants in this study were students from one of my grade 7 classes. I teach two grade 7 groups (7/2 and 7/3). However, the data for this study were collected from grade 7/2. This class was selected because it includes students with varying levels of ability and performance, allowing for a wider range of responses.

In contrast, the other class is more similar in level, which may not provide the same diversity of perspectives. Data were collected using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was designed to explore students' attitudes toward writing, the challenges they face, and their suggestions for improvement. It included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions provided general information about students' perceptions of writing, while the open-ended questions allowed students to express their thoughts more freely.

In addition to the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a small group of students to gain deeper insights into their experiences. A total of six students were selected for the interviews, representing different levels of ability. Each interview lasted approximately 5 minutes and included open-ended questions that

allowed students to elaborate on their feelings and challenges related to writing.

The data from the questionnaire were analyzed in two ways. First, responses to closed-ended questions were counted and organized to identify general trends. Second, responses to open-ended questions were examined and grouped into common themes, such as writing difficulties, students' feelings, and suggested strategies for improvement. The interview data were analyzed similarly, with key themes identified and compared to the questionnaire findings to ensure consistency.

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the study. Students were informed that their responses would be used for research purposes only, and their identities were kept anonymous to ensure confidentiality.

Findings & Discussion

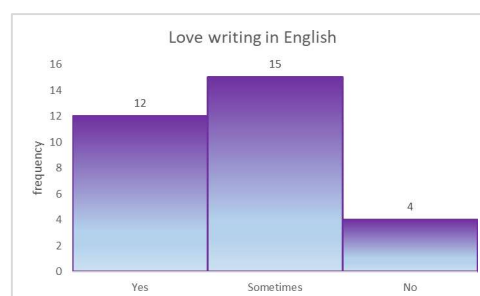
This chapter presents and discusses the findings collected through the questionnaire and interviews conducted with Grade 7 students regarding their attitudes toward writing in English. The findings are organized around the main patterns that emerged from the data, including students' experiences with writing, the linguistic and emotional challenges they face, and the classroom practices they believe support their learning

most effectively.

The discussion combines both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' perspectives. The questionnaire findings are supported by interview responses, allowing recurring themes and trends to be explored in greater depth. In addition, the findings are connected to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two to examine how the current study aligns with previous research conducted in ESL, Arab, and Omani contexts.

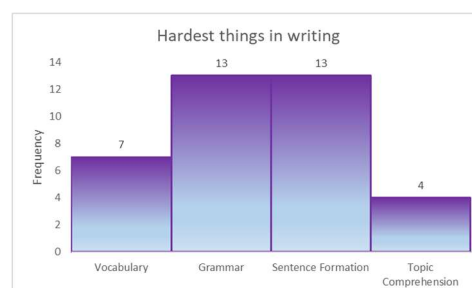
7. Students' Attitudes and Experiences Toward Writing

The findings suggest that students' attitudes toward writing in English are relatively nuanced rather than entirely positive or negative. As illustrated in Figure 2, the dominant response toward enjoying writing was "sometimes," while only a small proportion of students expressed complete dislike toward writing activities. This pattern may reflect fluctuating levels of engagement, suggesting that students' experiences with writing are influenced by contextual factors such as task type, topic familiarity, and classroom atmosphere rather than by writing itself alone.



(Figure 2: Students' enjoyment of writing in English)

A similar trend emerged in students' emotional responses toward writing tasks. Figure 3 shows that most learners described their feelings toward writing as "normal" rather than nervous or enthusiastic. While this could indicate that writing is often perceived as a routine classroom activity, it may also suggest the presence of underlying disengagement. Students did not appear to reject writing completely; however, the findings imply that writing tasks do not consistently generate confidence or excitement among learners.



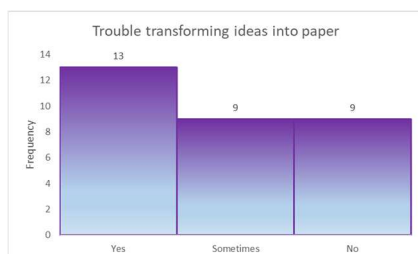
(Figure 3: Students' emotional responses toward writing tasks)

This interpretation becomes more apparent when examining the challenges students associate with writing. Figure 4

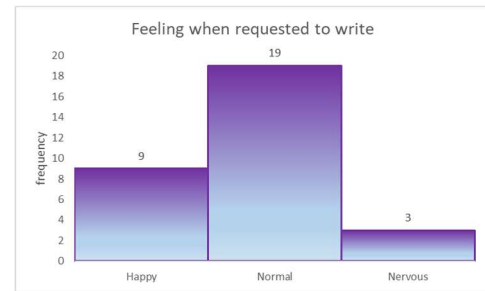
reveals that grammar and sentence formation represented the most recurring difficulties among participants, while Figure 5 demonstrates that many students struggle to translate their ideas into written English. In addition, Figure 6 indicates that fear of making mistakes remains prevalent among a considerable number of learners, even if severe anxiety did not dominate the responses overall. Taken together, these patterns suggest that students' difficulties with writing extend beyond language accuracy alone and may involve uncertainty, limited confidence, and difficulty managing the cognitive demands of writing simultaneously.



(Figure 4: Students' perceived difficulties)



(Figure 5: Students' difficulty in expressing ideas)



(Figure 6: Students' fear of making mistakes during writing)

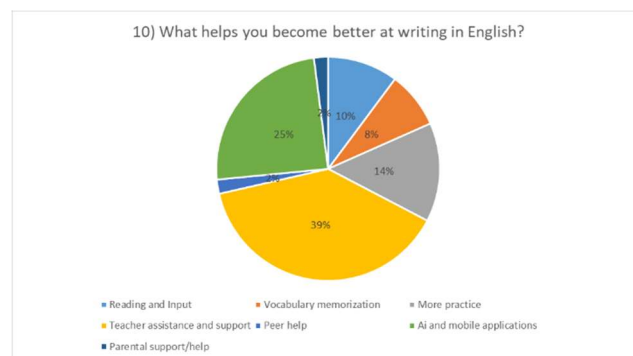
The interview findings strongly reinforced these trends. Several participants explained that they hesitate when spelling unfamiliar words or attempting to construct sentences independently. One student stated, "I can write half of what I memorized, but then I have to continue from myself," reflecting dependence on memorization as well as difficulty sustaining written production without support. Other learners referred to silent letters, unfamiliar vocabulary, and limited grammar knowledge as factors that reduce their confidence during writing activities.

These findings closely align with Flower and Hayes' (1981) cognitive model of writing, which conceptualizes writing as a recursive process involving planning, organization, and linguistic control simultaneously. They also reflect the findings of Fareed et al. (2016), Abdelmohsen (2022), and Al-Fozan (2018), all of whom identified grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction as

persistent challenges among Arab ESL learners. At the same time, the current findings suggest that students' perceptions of writing may be shaped not only by linguistic proficiency, but also by the way writing activities are experienced within the classroom environment.

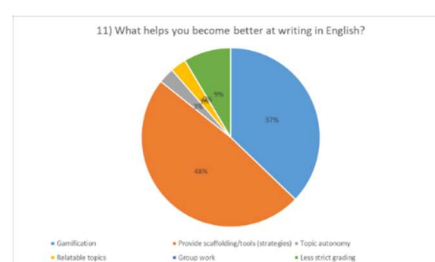
8. Students' Suggested Strategies and Classroom Preferences

One of the most significant patterns emerging from the findings was students' strong preference for supportive and engaging writing practices. As illustrated in Figure 7, teacher support represented the most frequently mentioned factor that students believed contributed to improving their writing skills. Students also referred to practice opportunities, reading activities, and the use of AI or mobile applications as helpful tools for developing vocabulary, grammar, and idea generation. These responses may reflect students' need for reassurance and guided support during writing tasks, particularly when they encounter linguistic difficulties or struggle to organize their ideas independently.



(Figure 7: Factors students believe help improve writing skills)

An even more revealing trend appeared in students' suggestions for improving writing lessons. Figure 8 demonstrates that a large proportion of responses focused on scaffolding tools and structured writing strategies, while another substantial proportion emphasized gamification and interactive classroom activities. Students repeatedly referred to memorable frameworks, such as the OREO strategy for opinion writing, as useful techniques that simplify the writing process and help organize ideas more effectively. This recurring emphasis on structure may suggest that students experience less pressure when writing tasks are broken into manageable and predictable stages.



(Figure 8: Students' suggested strategies for improving writing lessons)

At the same time, the repeated references to games, competitions, creative tasks, and collaborative activities highlight students' desire for a more interactive classroom environment. Several interview participants explained that they feel more comfortable participating in writing activities when lessons feel enjoyable rather than heavily focused on accuracy or word limits. Some learners also suggested allowing students to choose their own writing topics, arguing that familiar or personally relevant topics make it easier to generate ideas and participate confidently.

These findings strongly align with Memon et al. (2026), who found that collaborative and interactive writing practices contributed to increased student engagement and reduced anxiety in Omani ESL classrooms. The findings also resonate with broader research on gamification in language learning. Hamari et al. (2014) argued that gamified learning environments can enhance motivation and participation by making educational tasks feel more rewarding and less intimidating. Similarly, Deterding et al. (2011) emphasized that game-based elements in educational contexts may increase learner engagement by creating a stronger sense of participation and achievement.

The findings may also connect to Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding,

particularly students' repeated emphasis on guided support and structured frameworks. Learners appeared more confident when writing tasks included models, organizational tools, or step-by-step guidance that reduced the cognitive demands associated with writing in a second language. Overall, the findings suggest that students are more willing to engage with writing when classroom practices make the writing process feel structured, supportive, and interactive rather than overly restrictive or centered primarily on accuracy.

Overall Discussion

Overall, the findings reveal that students' experiences with writing are shaped by a combination of linguistic, cognitive, and emotional factors. While grammar, sentence construction, vocabulary limitations, and idea organization emerged as recurring challenges, the findings also indicate that students' attitudes toward writing are not entirely negative or fixed. Instead, students appeared to fluctuate between engagement and frustration depending on the nature of the writing task and the level of classroom support provided.

The findings consistently suggest that students respond more positively to writing environments that reduce pressure and encourage participation. The repeated

emphasis on scaffolding strategies, gamification, and interactive activities indicates that students value writing lessons that feel manageable, creative, and supportive. This may explain why many students selected “sometimes” rather than extreme positive or negative responses throughout the questionnaire, reflecting nuanced and shifting attitudes toward writing rather than complete rejection of it.

Taken together, the findings support the argument that improving students’ writing experiences may require more than focusing on language accuracy alone. Creating engaging and supportive classroom environments appears equally important in increasing students’ confidence, motivation, and willingness to participate in writing activities.

9. Conclusion

This study explored Grade 7 students’ attitudes toward writing in English, the challenges they experience during writing tasks, and the classroom practices they believe support their learning most effectively. The findings revealed that students’ experiences with writing are relatively nuanced rather than entirely positive or negative. Although many students did not express complete dislike toward writing, their responses suggested fluctuating levels of confidence and engagement depending on the nature of the

writing activity and the support available in the classroom.

The findings also showed that grammar, sentence formation, vocabulary limitations, and difficulty expressing ideas were among the most recurring challenges students faced during writing tasks. Several learners appeared to struggle with transforming ideas into written English, while others demonstrated dependence on memorization due to limited confidence in independent writing. In addition, fear of making mistakes emerged as a noticeable factor influencing students’ participation and comfort during writing activities.

At the same time, one of the most significant findings of the study was students’ strong preference for supportive and engaging classroom practices. Many students emphasized the importance of teacher guidance, structured writing frameworks, and interactive activities that make writing feel more manageable and enjoyable. Strategies such as scaffolding, gamification, collaborative activities, and memorable writing structures were repeatedly identified as helpful approaches that increase motivation and participation.

Overall, the findings suggest that students’ difficulties with writing are influenced not only by linguistic challenges but also by emotional and classroom-related factors. The study, therefore, highlights the

importance of creating writing environments that are supportive, interactive, and less intimidating for learners.

10. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations can be made to support students' writing development in ESL classrooms. First, teachers should provide students with clear and structured writing frameworks that help organize ideas and reduce confusion during writing tasks. Strategies such as the OREO structure may support students who struggle with planning and sentence organization.

Second, writing lessons should incorporate more engaging and interactive activities. Since many students responded positively toward games and collaborative tasks, integrating elements of gamification into writing instruction may increase motivation and participation.

Third, teachers should create supportive classroom environments that reduce excessive pressure related to mistakes and word limits. Encouraging students to experiment with language and express ideas freely may help improve confidence and reduce writing apprehension.

In addition, allowing students some flexibility in choosing writing topics could increase engagement, particularly when

topics feel familiar or personally relevant. Students may participate more actively when writing tasks connect to their interests and experiences.

Finally, teachers should continue providing vocabulary and language support during writing lessons, especially for lower-achieving learners who struggle with spelling, grammar, and sentence formation.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to one Grade 7 classroom, which means the findings may not fully represent students in different schools or educational contexts. In addition, the interviews were conducted with a relatively small number of participants, which may have limited the range of perspectives included in the study. Time constraints also affected the duration of the research and reduced the opportunity to observe long-term changes in students' writing attitudes and performance.

Another limitation was related to the method of data collection and analysis. Since the questionnaire was conducted in paper form rather than digitally, organizing and analyzing the responses became considerably time-consuming. The data had to be entered manually into Excel, which required learning how to use the software more effectively in order to organize figures, categorize responses, and analyze patterns accurately. This process consumed

a significant amount of time and effort that could have been directed toward other areas of the research. However, it also provided valuable experience in managing and analyzing research data more systematically.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could investigate the impact of gamification and structured writing strategies on students' motivation and writing performance over a longer period of time. Further studies could also explore students' attitudes toward writing across different grade levels or compare the experiences of learners in different classroom contexts. In addition, future research may examine how technology and AI-based tools influence students' confidence and engagement in ESL writing activities.

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