

Students' Perceptions of the *Journalists' Questions* Strategy in Enhancing EFL Writing Achievement

*Zurina Zora¹, Zulkifli²

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Kebangsaan Indonesia, Bireuen-Aceh, Indonesia

*Email: zurinazora@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates students' perceptions of the *Journalists' Questions* strategy as a means of improving writing achievement in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. While the strategy—built on the “five Ws and one H” framework—has been recognized for its potential to enhance idea generation and text organization, limited empirical evidence exists from Indonesian higher education settings, particularly in culturally distinctive regions such as Aceh. To address this gap, the study employed a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design involving 17 undergraduate students from the Acehese Language and Literature Education program at Universitas Islam Kebangsaan Indonesia. Data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, then analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The results revealed consistently positive perceptions of the strategy across all measured aspects. The majority of students agreed or strongly agreed that *Journalists' Questions* facilitated vocabulary selection, idea development, text organization, critical thinking, and grammatical accuracy. Interview data further illustrated that the strategy made writing tasks more engaging and less intimidating, while also enhancing motivation. Although initial challenges—such as limited vocabulary, sentence construction, and time management—were reported, these difficulties diminished with practice. The findings suggest that *Journalists' Questions* is a practical, adaptable, and culturally relevant pre-writing strategy for EFL writing instruction in higher education. By providing structured guidance, it supports both the cognitive and affective dimensions of writing development. Implications for pedagogy include incorporating the strategy into writing curricula to improve learners' confidence, coherence, and critical thinking skills.

KEYWORDS: *Students' perceptions, Journalists' Questions, writing achievement*

A. INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most essential skills in language learning, enabling individuals to communicate ideas, thoughts, and experiences across time and distance. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), writing serves not only as a means of academic expression but also as a way for students to develop their disciplinary knowledge and construct well-reasoned arguments (Maguire et al., 2013; Spiller & Ferguson, 2011). Mastering this skill requires a combination of linguistic competence, logical organization, and the ability to produce clear and cohesive texts (Hyland, 2021;

Rofiqoh et al., 2022). However, many EFL learners continue to face persistent challenges—limited vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracies, and difficulties in developing ideas—which often affect the quality of their written work (Peter & Singaravelu, 2021).

For university students in Indonesia, strengthening writing skills has become increasingly important in preparing for academic and professional demands in a globalized world. Yet, observations in classrooms and findings from prior research suggest that many students still struggle to generate ideas, structure their writing, and elaborate their arguments effectively. These challenges highlight the importance of using pre-writing strategies that can guide idea development, stimulate critical thinking, and improve the overall organization of students' texts (Asrul et al., 2021; Bachani, 2015). One such strategy is *Journalists' Questions*—the familiar “five Ws and one H” (Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How)—which has long been used as a practical tool for exploring topics and structuring written work (Urquhart & McIver, 2005).

Previous studies have shown that *Journalists' Questions* can help learners clarify their ideas, identify key information, and create a more coherent framework for their writing (Preszler, 2006; Gatz, 2008). By systematically addressing each question, students are encouraged to think more critically, generate richer content, and plan their drafts more effectively. While research in other contexts has reported positive outcomes (Munawwaroh, 2018; Saofi, 2019), there is still limited evidence on how students in specific EFL settings—particularly in Indonesian higher education and culturally distinctive regions like Aceh—perceive and experience this approach.

This study addresses that gap by exploring the perceptions of Acehese Language and Literature Education students at Universitas Islam Kebangsaan Indonesia regarding the use of *Journalists' Questions* to improve writing achievement. Through a combination of questionnaires and interviews, the research seeks to capture students' views and experiences in depth. The findings aim to contribute to the literature on EFL writing instruction and offer practical insights for educators seeking effective strategies to support students' writing development.

B. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design to investigate students' perceptions of the effectiveness of *Journalists' Questions* in improving writing achievement. While the primary emphasis was on qualitative exploration, quantitative

data from a questionnaire were also incorporated to provide complementary insights. The participants were 17 undergraduate students enrolled in the Acehese Language and Literature Education program at Universitas Islam Kebangsaan Indonesia. They were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that all respondents had direct experience with the instructional strategy under investigation.

Two instruments were used for data collection: a closed-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire consisted of five items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. It was designed to capture students' general perceptions of the *Journalists' Questions* strategy as applied in their writing class. To obtain more nuanced perspectives, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five students representing a range of responses from the questionnaire. Each interview lasted approximately 10–15 minutes and was conducted via mobile phone in the Indonesian language to enable participants to express their thoughts more freely and reduce language-related bias. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent.

Data collection took place over the course of one academic term. Participants were first introduced to the *Journalists' Questions* strategy during classroom activities and were given multiple opportunities to apply it in their writing tasks. After several weeks of implementation, the questionnaire was administered, followed by the interviews. The quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed descriptively using frequency counts and percentages to identify trends in students' perceptions. The qualitative interview data were transcribed, translated into English, and subjected to thematic analysis, following Saldaña's (2016) six stages: initial coding, categorization, theme identification, reflection, interpretation, and organization. To enhance the credibility of the findings, triangulation was employed by comparing data from both sources, and member checking was conducted by allowing participants to review the accuracy of the interview summaries and interpretations.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Results

The results are presented in two main sections: the findings from the questionnaire and the findings from the interviews. Together, these data provide a comprehensive

understanding of students' perceptions of the *Journalists' Questions* strategy and how it relates to their writing achievement.

Results of the Questionnaire

The closed-ended questionnaire consisted of five statements designed to measure specific aspects of writing improvement targeted by the strategy: vocabulary selection, idea development, organization, critical thinking, and grammatical accuracy. Students responded using a five-point Likert scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The distribution of responses is shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Students' perceptions of *Journalists' Questions* in improving writing achievement

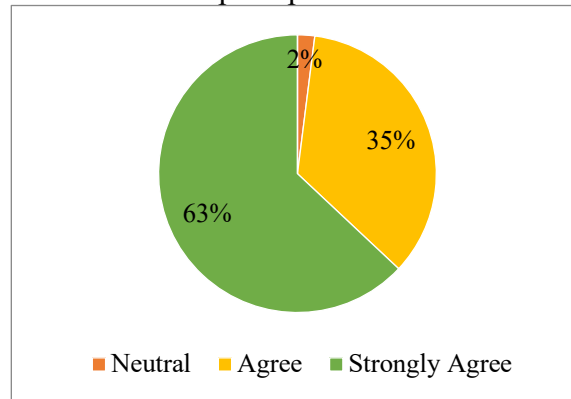
No.	Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Total (%)
1	Makes word choices easier in the writing process	0	0	0	35.0	65.0	100
2	Helps to develop ideas easily during writing	0	0	0	21.7	78.3	100
3	Makes writing well-organized	0	0	0	19.0	81.0	100
4	Builds critical thinking in arranging answers	0	0	2.3	30.4	67.3	100
5	Helps to reduce grammatical errors	0	0	5.0	49.0	46.0	100

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

Across all five statements, no students selected *disagree* or *strongly disagree*, indicating unanimous acknowledgment of the benefits of *Journalists' Questions*. The highest levels of strong agreement were observed for organization (81% strongly agree) and idea development (78.3% strongly agree), suggesting that the strategy was particularly effective in helping students structure their writing and generate content. Vocabulary selection also received strong support, with a combined 100% agreement. The smallest proportion of strong agreement was found for grammatical improvement (46%), although this was still accompanied by 49% agreement, indicating that students recognized progress but perhaps to a lesser degree than in other areas.

The overall distribution is illustrated in Figure 1, where 63% of responses were *strongly agree*, 35% were *agree*, and only 2% were neutral. This trend demonstrates that students' perceptions were overwhelmingly positive, aligning with the study's objective of assessing their attitudes toward the strategy's impact on writing skills.

Figure 1.
Distribution of students' perceptions of *Journalists' Questions*



Results of the Interviews

The interviews provided further depth to the questionnaire results, revealing how students experienced the strategy in practice. Three themes emerged: positive impressions of the strategy, perceived improvements in writing, and challenges encountered during implementation.

Students expressed strong approval of *Journalists' Questions*, frequently describing the learning process as engaging and motivating. They highlighted how the strategy facilitated idea generation and made writing tasks less daunting. For example, one participant remarked, *“The learning process is very fun, and it helped a lot in arranging ideas in completing writing assignments”* (Student 3). Another observed, *“My motivation was improved by the learning process, and it eased the difficulty in resolving writing assignments”* (Student 4). Such comments indicate that beyond cognitive benefits, the strategy also enhanced students' affective engagement with writing.

Interviewees consistently reported that their writing skills improved in multiple dimensions, which directly reflects the focus areas identified in the questionnaire. One student explained, *“The use of Journalists' Questions can increase my understanding of how to write a good paragraph”* (Student 1). Another stated, *“My writing skill was improved. I know a lot of new vocabulary”* (Student 2). Student 5 elaborated, *“Journalists' Questions helped me understand how to write a topic sentence and supporting sentence. I have better understanding, and I can recognize grammatical errors in the text.”* These accounts confirm that the strategy supported both higher-order skills, such as organization and idea development, and lower-order skills, including vocabulary and grammar.

While the general perception was positive, some students described initial challenges, including limited vocabulary, difficulty arranging ideas into coherent paragraphs, and managing time efficiently. For example, Student 1 noted, “*My vocabulary is limited, but in the process of learning by applying Journalists’ Questions, my vocabulary increases.*” Student 3 shared, “*I found it difficult to arrange words into a sentence, ideas into paragraphs, write topic sentences and supporting sentences, also writing a good sentence. But, after experiencing the learning by applying Journalists’ Questions, my difficulties decreased time by time.*” Similarly, Student 4 emphasized time efficiency, stating, “*After the learning with Journalists’ Questions, I can develop ideas easily in a short time.*”

The findings from both the questionnaire and the interviews show a clear alignment between students’ perceptions and the intended goals of this study. The *Journalists’ Questions* strategy was regarded as a valuable tool for generating ideas, improving the logical organization of texts, expanding vocabulary, encouraging critical thinking, and minimizing grammatical errors. Students also emphasized its role in increasing their motivation to write, making the process more approachable and less intimidating. Although some difficulties were reported at the beginning—particularly in vocabulary use, sentence construction, and time management—these challenges tended to diminish as students became more accustomed to the technique. This progression suggests that the strategy has strong potential for long-term application in EFL writing classes, particularly in contexts where students need structured support to develop both linguistic and cognitive aspects of writing.

2. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that students viewed the *Journalists’ Questions* strategy as an effective means of improving their writing achievement. The consistently high levels of agreement in the questionnaire responses, supported by the detailed accounts from interviews, suggest that the strategy successfully addressed several key aspects of writing: generating ideas, organizing text, enriching vocabulary, fostering critical thinking, and reducing grammatical errors. These outcomes are consistent with earlier research, which has emphasized the value of *Journalists’ Questions* as a pre-

writing tool that guides learners in exploring topics systematically and producing more coherent drafts (Urquhart & McIver, 2005; Preszler, 2006; Gatz, 2008).

A particularly strong area of improvement noted by the participants was in idea development and text organization. This aligns with Munawwaroh's (2018) and Saofi's (2019) findings, which demonstrated that structured questioning enables learners to approach a topic from multiple angles, making it easier to arrange ideas logically. The high percentage of strong agreement on these items in the questionnaire reflects the strategy's ability to reduce the cognitive load associated with organizing thoughts, a challenge frequently reported in EFL writing contexts (Hyland, 2021; Rofiqoh et al., 2022). The interviews also confirmed that students felt more confident in structuring paragraphs, indicating that the strategy had a tangible impact on their ability to produce well-organized texts.

Vocabulary development emerged as another benefit, with several students noting that repeated practice with the questions introduced them to new words and expressions. This outcome echoes the view of Bachani (2015) and Asrul et al. (2021), who argue that active engagement with writing tasks can lead to gradual lexical expansion. Importantly, the interviews revealed that students' vocabulary growth was accompanied by increased motivation, suggesting that the strategy supported both linguistic and affective dimensions of learning. Motivation is a critical factor in sustained writing practice, and its improvement here is consistent with previous research linking student engagement to the use of interactive and structured learning techniques (Peter & Singaravelu, 2021).

The enhancement of critical thinking skills was another notable finding. By responding to the five Ws and one H, students were prompted to analyze topics more deeply and consider multiple perspectives. This finding supports the work of Preszler (2006), who noted that *Journalists' Questions* encourage learners to identify essential details and relationships within a topic. The increase in critical thinking also aligns with the broader pedagogical goal of developing higher-order cognitive skills in EFL learners, as highlighted in Spiller and Ferguson's (2011) framework for skill-based instruction.

Despite these positive outcomes, some participants initially encountered difficulties, particularly in arranging words into sentences, constructing topic and supporting sentences, and managing time effectively. These challenges mirror those reported in previous studies on EFL writing difficulties (Peter & Singaravelu, 2021).

However, students in this study noted that such issues diminished with continued exposure to the strategy, reinforcing Brannan's (2003) argument that good writing is developed over time through practice and reflection.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence from this study adds weight to the argument that *Journalists' Questions* can serve as a practical and adaptable strategy in EFL writing classrooms. By providing a clear framework for idea generation and organization, the technique addresses both the mechanical and cognitive demands of writing. In contexts like Aceh, where students may require structured guidance to navigate the complexities of academic writing in English, the strategy offers a culturally adaptable approach that can be integrated into existing curricula without the need for extensive resources.

D. CONCLUSION

This study addressed the limited empirical evidence on the use of *Journalists' Questions* in EFL contexts, particularly in Indonesian higher education and the cultural setting of Aceh. By combining questionnaire and interview data, the research revealed that students perceived the strategy as highly beneficial for multiple dimensions of writing, including vocabulary selection, idea development, text organization, critical thinking, and grammatical accuracy. These findings reaffirm the value of *Journalists' Questions* as a structured and accessible pre-writing technique that can be readily integrated into writing instruction.

Beyond its cognitive benefits, students reported that the strategy increased their motivation and reduced the sense of difficulty often associated with writing tasks. Although challenges such as limited vocabulary, sentence construction, and time management were initially present, these issues diminished with continued practice, suggesting that the approach has the potential to support sustainable improvement in writing skills over time.

The results indicate that *Journalists' Questions* can serve as both a pedagogical tool and a motivational aid in EFL writing classes, especially in contexts where learners require explicit guidance. For practitioners, incorporating this strategy into classroom practice may help students generate ideas more efficiently, structure their texts more effectively, and approach writing with greater confidence. Future research could explore

its application with larger and more diverse samples, or investigate its effectiveness in combination with other pre-writing strategies to further enhance writing achievement.

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