

Understanding Writing Challenges and Performance among First-Year Military Students: A Study at Ethiopian Defense University

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Abstract

The main objective of this study was to investigate students' writing challenges and performance at Ethiopian Defense University/EDU/. For the study, the researcher used an explanatory sequential mixed method design. English language instructors and first-year students of EDU provided data for the study. Particularly, first-year students of the university's colleges of Engineering and Resource Management produced the replies. The researcher used a questionnaire to determine students' writing challenges, a paragraph writing test to determine their level of writing performance, and interviews with first-year students and English language instructors. Therefore, 108 students completed the questionnaire and took writing test. As a consequence, 8 students and 6 English language instructors were interviewed. According to the study's findings, the main writing challenges that students encountered were: insufficient linguistic background, a lack of writing practices, traumatic past experiences, a lack of writing motivation, carelessness in writing, scarcity of resources, shortage of time, and unsupportive English courses and modules. Additionally, the findings of the correlation analysis showed that the association between the students' writing challenges and writing performance is statistically insignificant. Lastly, it was proposed that bridging English language trainings, revisions to English courses and course modules, and increased awareness of traumatic experience on writing among the university community could all help improve students' writing performance.

Keywords

Challenges of writing, Performance of Writing, Traumatic Experience

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INTRODUCTION

Under the Ethiopia's current educational framework, English language instruction is a mandatory subject in all institutions, from elementary schools to universities. For this reason, in order for Ethiopian students to succeed academically and advance in their careers, they must take the language as a subject or a course. Consequently, many Ethiopians may find it easier to interact and collaborate with people from around the globe if they are good at writing in English.

Good writing abilities are especially important for professional military works like foreign purchasing, diplomatic engagements, peacekeeping operations, operational planning, report writing, and the like. Likaj (2015, p. 102) uses the Armed Forces Academy of Albania to highlight the importance of writing skill development. Likaj states, "writing in military English is considered as a difficult skill for cadets and officers who come from non-native English countries." Military students in any branch of the army always use their writing skills as a communication tool while interacting with their colleagues abroad. These specialists can be incapable to operate and carry out their duties efficiently without writing.

In educating qualified military personnel, therefore, military universities have a critical contribution to equip learners with necessary knowledge and skills for effective military operations. However, just like any other students, students in uniform have difficulties to improve their writing abilities. Students may be forced to give less focus on writing since writing takes a lot of time to practice due to the particular circumstances of the military setting. Accordingly, teaching communicative English language is mandated in the military (Likaj, 2013). Therefore, knowing the challenges military university students have in improving their writing skills, can help educators and policymakers in creating effective plans and interventions that can improve their writing abilities.

Even if ELT ought to be a top priority for college students, putting it into practice is just very challenging. According to Seime (1999), students who do not speak English well in secondary schools would find it difficult to succeed in higher education when the language is used for communication. In addition, problems including varying student engagement levels, the need for increased access to genuine reading resources, and the variety of learner needs make the learning environment more difficult (Bekele, 2024). Furthermore, (Hailemariam, 2011) confirms that Ethiopian students typically have very poor English language proficiency. This is why (Hailom, 1993: 10) argues that teaching English is challenging since the students come from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This calls for the use of highly qualified instructors who can handle delicate classroom situations in a flexible manner and make the right decisions. Therefore, if teachers are motivated by a certain topic, it will rise and the students' performance will improve. Students' motivation and performance have been shown to be strongly correlated (Weiner, 1992; Dumitrescu et al., 2015).

Particularly for college students, writing continues to be a perplexing language skill. When these students first start their studies, they have difficulty picking up new learning

techniques (Al Murshidi, 2014). Lack of prior grammatical knowledge is one of the main obstacles preventing students from performing well in writing. When turning their ideas into written texts, students struggle to create coherent and grammatically sound sentences if they lack a strong basis in grammar. Students from non-English speaking backgrounds who have had little exposure to the language have significant writing issues. In this sense, Manedante (2011), affirms that regardless of how excellent and successful it is, written communication does have certain challenges that require greater attention.

Moreover, students' low vocabulary might make it difficult for them to write well. For students to write well, they must possess a large and classy vocabulary. However, reading actively and being exposed to a variety of literary genres are necessary for the development of a large vocabulary. Some students may not have these opportunities because of their low socioeconomic status and lack of support systems.

In addition, students find it difficult to arrange their thoughts in writing. There are instances when people write without considering the coherence and unity of one sentence and one paragraph after the other. Even while every student has the ability to write, this does not mean that they can write well. It is indicated that writing is just a universal activity, but competence is the ability of a person that has been honed by a great deal of practice or instruction. It also requires a considerably higher degree of brain development in addition to training and practice (Soraya et al., 2020).

Unquestionably, students' writing performance may be hindered by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)- a mental ailment that develops after going through difficult experiences like war, violence, and a stressful environment in general. This is due to the fact that PTSD may negatively impact an individual's ability to operate cognitively and emotionally, especially for military students who are trying to write. Students enrolled at military universities may be sent to combat missions that put them in danger of bodily or mental injury. Their ability to write successfully may be significantly impacted by their dreadful experiences. According to Bisson et al. (2015:1), "whether in the military or as a civilian, at some point during our lives nearly all of us will experience a traumatic event that will challenge our view of the world or ourselves," PTSD may also have an impact on one's understanding. In addition to the traumatizing impacts on the students, teachers' ignorance about the consequences of PTSD might cause military students to question their ability to write confidently and to form unfavorable opinions about the writing process.

As a result, students struggle to rationally and succinctly arrange their ideas in an attempt to write more effectively. When students are unfamiliar with various writing styles, it might be difficult for them to organize their thoughts coherently in paragraph writing. Berne (1988:2) emphasizes the importance of developing coherent writing, saying that "we are able (or hope to be able) to communicate successfully with our reader through the medium of writing by the organization of our sentences into a text, into a coherent whole which is as explicit as possible and complete in itself." Because of this, reading a written text in which the writer jumps about from idea to idea and lacks consistency to link phrases, sentences, and paragraphs is nearly difficult. As a result, students ought to have the freedom to choose writing themes that will help them make an

effect on their writing, gain confidence, come up with ideas, and structure texts logically (Mesfin, 2013).

Numerous studies on the development of writing abilities have been carried out globally at all educational levels. The researcher attempts to offer some of the studies that are linked to this research since it is difficult to present all of the studies that have been completed worldwide. To start, Halefom (2011) examined the impact of peer feedback on composition writing performance in the context of Raya/Mekhoni Preparatory School, one of the locally conducted studies conducted in Ethiopia. His research revealed a substantial relationship between students' writing development and peer feedback. The other is Manendante (2011), who investigated the difficulties that students have when learning to write in a second-year English course. He ultimately came to the conclusion that the issues that the students were facing in the Admas University College sophomore English course were lack of enthusiasm, inadequate background, and collaboration. Both teachers and students have a positive attitude toward teaching and learning writing, but they pay less attention to writing lessons specifically, according to Alamirew's (2005) survey-based study on teachers' and students' perceptions of writing instruction and the writing performances of grade 12 government school students. The students' writing performance suffers as a result.

On the other hand, a lot of study has been done on writing ability all around the world. Schnee (2010), for instance, conducted study to see how training students to modify their tales affected their writing output. The findings showed that teaching students to revise their stories improved their writing correctness, interest, and attitudes. Devi et al. (2017) conducted study on methods for enhancing primary English language learners' writing abilities. They ultimately came to the conclusion that the use of technology, pre-taught terminology, different instructor influences, and the implementation of constructive, diversified learning approaches may all help students write better.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no research has been done on how first-year university students struggle with, and perform in developing their writing abilities, especially in a military university setting. The Ethiopian Defense University /EDU/ is the only university in Ethiopia which admits military students who have unique characteristics that the study specifically focused on. Thus, the main objective of this study was to investigate students' writing challenges and performances at the Ethiopian Defense University /EDU/. The study's specific objectives were: identifying students' main writing challenges, examining students' writing performances, and examining the relationship between students' writing challenges and writing performances.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing allows people to communicate their ideas, emotions, and feelings in written form, which is a fundamental language ability. Different academics have different definitions of writing. For instance, it is described by Zamel (1982: 197) as, "a process of exploring one's thought and learning the act of writing itself what these thoughts are"

Writing, according to Zamel (1983), is a process of realization and meaning-making in which ideas are found, clarified, and reformed. It is not just about graphic display. It also refers to the act of assembling words into phrases, which then become into paragraphs, and people use it to communicate with one other in daily life. Writing in English, which is widely used for comprehending the required information and for global communication, makes it much more important (Sarwat et al., 2021).

In addition, writing is a significant language skill that is essential for academic success, yet many university students find it challenging. Of course, a variety of factors influence students' ability to write effectively, which accounts for this. In terms of how difficult writing is, Meseret (2012) notes that writing is an important yet difficult ability for those learning English as a second language /EFL/. It's a challenging process that requires writers to explore ideas and thoughts and give them a concrete, observable shape. It encourages thinking and learning in order to improve communication and provide ideas for reflection. On the other hand, despite some overlap, Berne, D. (1988) divided the reasons of writing difficulties into three categories: psychological, linguistic, and cognitive issues.

In writing, writers might run into a number of emotional and psychological problems. These psychological roadblocks may have a significant impact on writers' output, originality, and writing process. "Many exams and tests, being graded the way they are, all of these have a negative effect and give the students a great deal of stress," according to Rusinovci (2020:366). An obsessive focus on perfection, a lack of drive, and time constraints can all be signs of psychological issues stemming from insecurity or fear of failing, which can promote avoidance behavior and negative self-talk. It has historically been challenging to understand and characterize human motivation due to its complexity (Anjomshoa and Sadighi, 2015).

According to Berne (1988, p.4), "/writing/ is essentially a solitary activity and the fact that we are required to write on our own, without the possibility of interaction or the benefits of feedback, marks the act of writing difficult", shows how absence of feedback may influence psychologically. Therefore, it's critical to identify and manage these psychological concerns in order to support students in overcoming obstacles, enhancing their writing experience, and maintaining their mental health.

Common language issues that arise when writing might include issues with syntax, vocabulary, grammar, tone, voice, and expressive style. Writing with linguistic issues can be less effective since it is more difficult for readers to understand and appreciate the written word. "English vocabulary and grammar are linguistics aspects which Emirati and Saudi students emphasized as creating difficulties," (Al Murshidi, 2014:93) verifies in his study on Emirati and Saudi students. (Aldabbus & Almansouri, 2022, p.3) citing a different study by Al-Khairy (2013) reiterates, "On several higher education students showed that the main source of difficulties encountered by the students is their inability to choose the appropriate academic words, incorrect punctuation, and linguistic and grammatical errors." Linguistic barriers are the most frequent ones that students encounter when writing, and they can have an impact on the effectiveness, coherence, and clarity of

the message. These linguistic issues can arise throughout several phases of language use, such as word selection, grammatical construction, syntactic structure, and general stylistic elements.

Cognitive issues that might hinder writing include problems of focusing, organizing thoughts, and poor working memory. By addressing cognitive issues, an atmosphere may be created that encourages writers to generate quality work. In this context, Berne, D. (1988) goes on to say that writing, on the other hand, necessitates instruction-based learning. Writers need to learn how to compose the vocabulary and specific grammatical structures that are either seldom or never used in speech in order to communicate successfully in writing. Writers also need to be able to organize their ideas so that even a reader we do not know or who is not present may grasp them. Similarly, (Sweller, 1994) stated that long-term memory retention is undoubtedly a function of learning, but it might not be the sole one. Schema acquisition and automation have an interesting thing in common. The working memory burden is significantly decreased by both. It has been understood that working memory is much less than long-term memory. Only a small number of distinct items may be processed and stored in working memory at once. Reducing or even eliminating this limitation may be a key purpose of schema acquisition and automation.

In producing a piece of writing, there are different views on the stages that writers do write. (Tribble 1996: 39) describes a typical model of four stages: “prewriting; composing/drafting; revising; and editing.” Prewriting: Choosing the writing's topic, audience, goal, and scope is the first step in the planning process. The pre-writing phase, which includes research, brainstorming, and planning, lays the groundwork for the writing process. To create a solid foundation for their writing, writers generate ideas, design their structure, and gather pertinent data. Drafting: During this stage, you will implement a prewriting, jot down your thoughts, and create a draft. In the drafting stage, writers turn their concepts into readable compositions, emphasizing the development of a distinct voice and a clear story.

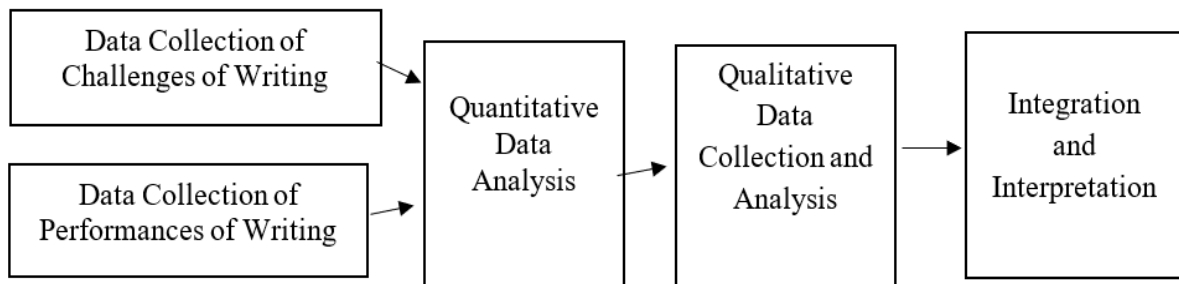
Social cognitive theory, therefore, serves as the study's theoretical cornerstone. According to Bandura (1962), the central assumption of social cognition theory is that social environments serve as the main locations for human learning. People learn new skills, talents, techniques, beliefs, and attitudes by observing others. Therefore, by utilizing conceptual frameworks of explanatory sequential mixed method design, a researcher may effectively integrate several data sources in mixed method research. The strength of mixed-method research is further strengthened in contemporary research methods by making sure that the technique is acceptable and giving validity and reliability (Creswell, W.J & Creswell, J.D, 2018). Stating differently, it is a type of research in which the investigator combines elements of both qualitative and quantitative research designs.

In order to properly handle difficult research questions, mixed-method research's pragmatism theoretical foundations urge the blending of qualitative and quantitative approaches. The students' writing performances and challenges were

employed quantitatively and to support the quantitative findings, additional the interviews were qualitatively examined.

For simpler description, researchers crafted a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework of a study is a network, or "a plane," of connected concepts that provide a full understanding of an event or occurrences. It is a visual model that clearly illustrates the phases of data collecting procedures and integration points in a sequential manner. The above explanatory sequential mixed method design model of Creswell, W.J. & Creswell, J.D., 2018 was somewhat modified by the researcher for this study. The modified version may be seen below.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study



The modified conceptual framework gives a clear focus on identifying the relationships between the variables- students' challenges of writing and students' performances of writing in the process of gathering and analyzing of data. In the first phase, the data obtained from the questionnaire for students' challenges of writing, and for the students' performances of writing were gathered and analyzed quantitatively. In the second phase, the data obtained through the interviews were gathered and analyzed qualitatively, and then the integration and interpretation of findings carried out demonstrating the data analysis process.

RESEARCH METHOD

As it is mentioned earlier, the explanatory sequential mixed method design, which is a two-stage process that collects, examines, and interprets sequentially both quantitative and qualitative data, was used in the study. According to (Creswell, J.W., & Creswell, J.D. 2018), it is crucial that the design creates a link between the quantitative results and the qualitative data results because the primary goal of this design is to use the qualitative data to support and further explain the quantitative results. The main notion is that qualitative data collection and analysis follow directly from quantitative findings. One of the main benefits of the design is the possibility of providing an explanation of the mechanism behind how the variables interact through the qualitative support.

As a result, pragmatism permits a researcher to employ a variety of techniques, perspectives, and presumptions, in addition to various methods for gathering and evaluating data (Creswell, J.W., & Creswell, J.D. 2018). In this study, then, the pragmatic paradigm is upheld as a conceptual strand that permits the researcher to integrate many

approaches into one methodology. The researcher claims that the pragmatic paradigm provides a strong base for resolutely exiting from the false dichotomy of paradigm wars.

Regarding the research participants, the first-year students and English language instructors participated in the study. Students were the main focus of the study since they are the main participants in every teaching and learning environment. Furthermore, it is almost impossible to imagine productive studies without the involvement of instructors as well. As all of the English language instructors had at least 15 years of teaching experience and Masters of Art (MA) degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), the researcher believed that they could provide the necessary information based on their teaching experiences in the military setting.

Then, three research instruments were employed to gather data in order to meet the set study objectives. The instruments included: a questionnaire, a paragraph writing test, and interviews. It was believed that using many instruments would help produce more reliable results than using only one. A questionnaire frequently makes it easier for the researcher to collect enormous amounts of data in a short period of time (Gay et al., 2012). The questionnaire with twenty-six items in Likert-scale was used to address the first specific research question, "Identifying students' main writing challenges." The question items, that the researcher crafted, had three sub sections: linguistic challenges, psychological challenges and cognitive challenges of writing. Five response possibilities on a five-point Likert scale were: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) uncertain, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. Among first-year students, 108 students who were selected in systematic random sampling technique, filled in the questionnaire. The Cronbach's Alph coefficient (0.951) depicted how strong the internal consistency of the question items.

The second instrument was paragraph writing test. The second research objective that the paragraph writing test was used to mainly address was "Examining students' writing performances". The paragraph writing test provided insight into the students' writing performance levels as below average, average and above average. The major focus of the writing exam evaluation was on the students' abilities to arrange their ideas /content/, structure, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. As a result, the students were given an hour to write the paragraph on "The Importance of Learning English Language" using the categories listed above. The topic was specifically chosen so that students would be familiar with it in order to motivate them to put more effort into their writing and successfully communicate their ideas and opinions to the reader (Raimes, 1983). Then, a total of 108 students, who were selected in systematic random sampling technique, took the paragraph writing test. Based on an analytical rubric tool that was taken from (Agan & Deniz, 2019), two raters rated the paragraphs so as to avoid the researcher bias. Finally, the average scores were used to rate the level of the students' writing performance as below average, average and above average.

The third instrument was interview. Eight first-year students and six English language instructors were interviewed. The interviewees were selected purposely. To do this, the researcher employed semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are

commonly referred as "the best of both worlds" as they combine elements of both structured and unstructured interviews, according to George (T. 2023, June 22). Finally, to meet the third specific objective of the study, "Examining the relationship between students' writing challenges and writing performances," the researcher integrated and interpreted the data obtained from the three instruments. The data gathered using different instruments were contrasted and compared. In order to reduce barrier of communication, the interviews were done in the students' native language, Amharic, by their consent. The interview was then transcribed and then translated into English. The language used for the interviews with the English instructors was English. The researcher used NVivo 10 software to categorize the qualitative data and SPSS version 26 software to analyze the quantitative data. All of the participants gave their permission for the interviews to be audio recorded by signing on a consent form which contained a code of conduct between a participant and the researcher.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, to find out students' challenges and performances of writing, and how the two variables are related, the findings and discussion are presented respectively. Writing challenges are particular problems or barriers that students at university encounter while attempting to write well. The main objective of this section is to identify students' main writing challenges. To meet this objective, the questionnaire with three categories: linguistic, psychological and cognitive, was crafted based on the idea of Berne, D. (1988). Then, 108 student participants filled out the questionnaire, and the mean results are summarized in the table below.

Table 1. Mean of Challenges of Writing

Challenges of Writing	N	Mean
Linguistic Challenges	108	3.5556
Psychological Challenges	108	3.4880
Cognitive Challenges	108	3.5127
Average	108	3.5188

The three main writing challenges that students encounter are: linguistic, psychological, and cognitive, according to the study. With a mean score of 3.5556, linguistic problems were the most common ones, indicating problems with content, language structure, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics. The mean score of 3.5127, cognitive problems including keeping thoughts coherent and arranging them were also common and came in second. With a mean of 3.4880, psychological challenges such as insecurity and fear of failing became the least mean of all.

These findings imply that developing writing abilities calls for a diversified strategy. Developing vocabulary and providing targeted grammar training would be necessary to address language difficulties. In the meanwhile, breaking down psychological barriers may need establishing a more encouraging learning atmosphere

where students may freely express their opinions without worrying about criticism. Given these difficulties, instructors may have to concentrate on integrated teaching approaches that develop students' language proficiency and cognitive abilities. Personalized support might be offered through workshops or tutoring programs, and students can overcome psychological challenges by cultivating a positive outlook. Students' general writing skills might be greatly improved by these combined efforts.

The students' writing challenges can be ordered from least severe to most severe, with psychological difficulties being the most serious one, cognitive difficulties coming in second, and linguistic difficulties coming in the third place. A customized strategy is needed to address these issues, one that prioritizes the development of cognitive methods and psychological support above the growth of language abilities. The drive of students to write well is the second point. Most English instructors made the observation that since writing takes a lot of practice and hard work, unmotivated students are not interested in making an attempt or struggling. An English instructor claimed that the students' lack of a solid upbringing prevented them from doing anything. Additionally, students lacked confidence in their writing, which might be a result of a fear of being judged.

According to Bisson et al. (2015), whether serving in the military or not, almost everyone will go through a horrific incident at some time in their lives that will cause them to reevaluate how they see the world or themselves. In this regard, some students revealed in the student interview that their prior difficult experiences can also affect one's understanding. English instructors said nothing about the effects of traumatic disorder that might make military students doubt their capacity for confident writing and feel bad about it, in addition to the distressing effects on the students.

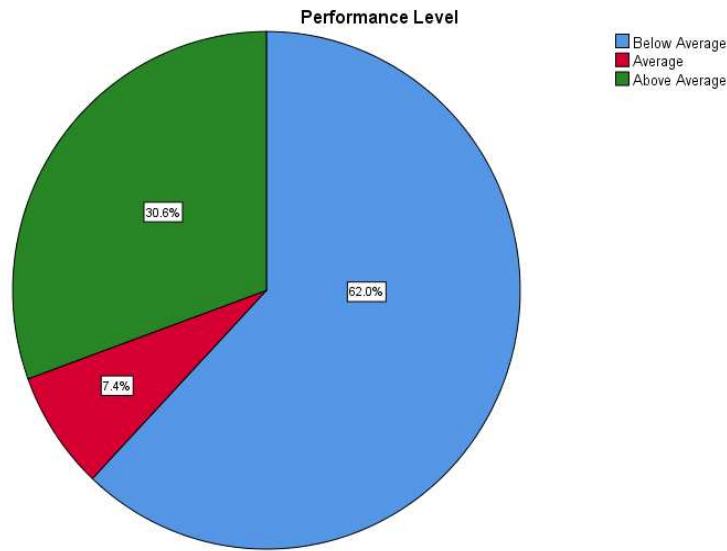
The students' paragraph writing test result is an indication for the magnitude of the problem. Majority of them wrote insufficient paragraphs that all need to be improved. When some students composed paragraphs according to the instructions, but the majority of them created unfinished paragraphs. The outcome demonstrated how serious the issues are. It goes without saying that problems with concentration, mental organization, and working memory are cognitive problems that might make writing difficult. Addressing cognitive difficulties will motivate students to produce good writing.

Students must also be able to arrange their thoughts. Berne, D. (1988) continued in this regard, stating that instruction-based learning is necessary for writing. To effectively communicate in writing, writers must learn how to construct vocabulary and certain grammatical structures that are either never or never used in speech. In order for even an unfamiliar what they are saying, Consequently, the average mean ,3.5188, of students' linguistic, psychological and cognitive challenges indicated that without addressing the writing challenges, it is almost impossible for students to cope-up with studying at university level.

In order to assess the level of students' writing performances, 108 first-year students had taken a paragraph writing test. To categorize the students' writing performances as below average, average, or above average, each paragraph was analyzed. It was believed that the students' writing performances were understood through the usage of the

assessment rubric tool. Of the total 120 first-year students who took the paragraph writing test, 108 students had written the paragraph.

Figure 2. Students' Writing Performances



The above pie-chart showed a noticeable imbalance in the distribution of student writing performance, with a sizable majority (62%) performed below average. Meanwhile, 30.6% of the students scored above average, meaning that certain students were doing really well. This might be due to a combination of personal qualities, efficient teaching methods, or the availability of extra support systems. A smaller proportion of the students (7.4%) at the average level, may indicate that they were struggling to reach the average scores or that they were generally performed in the center of the range. The distribution's result emphasizes the necessity of focused interventions to help students who are performing below average, while simultaneously recognizing and enhancing the writing abilities of those who are performing above average.

The degree of agreement between the two raters' evaluations and the accuracy of the findings were evaluated using Cohen's Kappa coefficient. High agreement between the two raters was demonstrated by the computed Cohen's Kappa result ($k=0.621$), which is in the range of 0.61-0.80. This suggests that despite the subjective nature of the paragraph writing test, there was not much of a score difference between the two raters. Because of the great degree of agreement, the paragraph writing test rating is, therefore, is believed to be more trustworthy.

Table 2. Mean of Students' Paragraph Writing Test Scores per Categories

Level	Students' Writing Performance per Categories					
		Content	Structure	Grammar	Vocabulary	Mechanics
Mean	Rater 1	1.7593	1.5648	1.6759	1.6296	1.4259
	Rater 2	1.6944	1.5370	1.7315	1.6111	1.4537

Grand Mean	1.7269	1.5509	1.7037	1.6204	1.4398

The mean of the students' writing test scores per category, as determined by the two raters, is displayed in the above table. Using the criteria listed in the assessment rubric tool, each category received a score out of four. To determine which writing categories or competencies the students struggled with the most, the grand mean was employed. The students' paragraph writing performance was inadequate in all categories: content, structure, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, and has to be improved, in accordance with the performance level score ranges established by Agan and Deniz (2019). From lower to higher scores, the mechanics (1.4398), structure (1.5509), vocabulary (1.6204), grammar (1.7037), and content (1.7269), grand means came into the insufficient range or below average, that all went into the need to be improved. The total outcome would suggest that, lack of appropriate treatments, students' inability to write is a major challenge to their capacity to learn at the university level.

Table 3. Descriptive Group Statistics of Female and Male Students' Writing Performance

Gender		Level of Writing Performance			Total	With in Performance Level
		Below Average	Average	Above Average		
Female	F	6	1	11	18	
	%	33.33%	5.56%	61.11%	100%	16.67%
Male	F	61	7	22	90	
	%	67.78%	7.78%	24.44%	100%	83.33%
Total	F	67	8	33	108	
	%	62.0%	7.4%	30.6%	100%	100%

Regarding the gender differences in writing, the above Table 03 displays the distribution of writing scores for males and females, as well as the percentages of scores that fall into the below average, average, and above average categories. Of 108 students who took the paragraph writing test, 18 (16.67%) were female and 90 (83.33%) were male. The gender differences in writing performance are made clear by this data, which can also serve as inspiration for instructional initiatives meant to close the gap. The data related to female students was first analyzed, and then the data related to male students was analyzed.

In contrast, male students comprise 24.44% of the "Above Average," 7.78% of the "Average," and 67.78% of the "Below Average" group. This shows disparities between male and female performance levels. The result depicts the fact that males are

more likely than females to perform below average in writing. Male students are far more likely than female students to struggle, with 67.78% of male students falling into the "Below Average" group, compared to 33.33% of female students. This suggests that male students can have higher writing challenges than female students, indicating a need for more resources and support to help them improve their writing abilities.

Both sexes are underrepresented in the "Average" performance category, with female students making up 5.56% and male students 7.78%. The limited proportion of students in this group suggests that most students do not function at an average level in writing, but either excel at it or suffer greatly. This polarization implies that in order to provide individualized training/teaching for both struggling and high-achieving students, educational interventions should concentrate on addressing both ends of the performance range. Additionally, the data indicates that females do better than men in the "Above Average" category, with 61.11% of females and 24.44% of males falling into this category. This evident disparity implies that female students generally perform better in writing than male students. Similarly, (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994) discovered that females had higher levels of self-efficacy for both self-regulation and writing than boys. This has two consequences: although specific interventions are required to help male students who are performing poorly, it is also critical to keep improving the qualities of female students who are performing very well in their writing.

As it is referred earlier, Agan and Deniz (2019) developed the performance level score evaluation criteria, which formed the basis for all assessment categories, including content, structure, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. The majority of the students' writing was clearly below average, according to the results of the paragraph writing test. The overall outcome demonstrated the need for targeted interventions to support students who did below average while also identifying and developing the skills of those who are doing above average. Similar findings were made by Habtamu (2018), who found that most English majors performed badly on essay-writing assessments in various research settings in Ethiopia. Therefore, enhancing learning effectiveness and reaching the best results in higher education requires in-depth understanding of students' expectations toward instructors, other students, and instructional materials as EFL learning components (Jn, 2025).

Students were questioned to find out the reasons for their poor writing performance. Most of them attributed it to their inadequate English language background. This was highly pronounced by English language instructors as well. They stressed that low writing performance was attributed by English teachers to poor writing practices in high schools, students' disinterest in writing, and a lack of integration between grammar and vocabulary instruction. The students' writing results were good indication. The mean of their results fell below average in all categories. To look at their results from lower to higher scores, the mechanics, structure, vocabulary, grammar, and content, grand means came into the insufficient range that all went into the need writing to be improved. However most of the students performed below average, the finding suggests that female students outperform male students in writing in general. This has two implications:

although particular interventions are necessary to support male students who are struggling with their writing, it is also important to continue enhancing the writing skills of female students who are performing very well.

This might mean that in order to assist students develop a better foundation in writing, they need particular support. This support could come in the form of trainings or remedial writing programs that concentrate on fundamental writing techniques. (Rusinovci, 2020), outmoded teaching techniques and approaches, as well as a shortage of qualified English teachers, can also contribute to weak writing performance (Kasumi, 2016; Hasani, 2016).

Regarding the relationships between variables, the correlation between dependent variable- performances of writing and independent variable- challenges of writing, had been made. Correlation refers to the relationship or association between two or more quantitative variables (Gogtay & Thatte, 2017). Correlation analysis is a statistical method for identifying the direction and degree of a relationship between two variables. It aids in determining if two variables have a link and how strong it is. This study uses the correlation analysis to show the connection between students' writing challenges and students' writing performances. The following table shows how the relationship between students' writing challenges and their writing performances relate.

Table 4. The Correlation between Students' Challenges and Performances of Writing

		Challenges of Writing	Performances of Writing
Spearman's rho	Challenges of Writing	Correlation Coefficient	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.111
		N	-
	Performances of Writing	Correlation Coefficient	-
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.253
		N	108

The correlation between the challenges of writing and writing performance among 108 participants is shown in the above table. The two variables have a very weak positive association, as indicated by the Spearman's Rho value of 0.111. This connection is statistically insignificant at the significance level of 0.253, indicating that there is no meaningful association between writing challenges and writing performances. These findings imply that the variables influencing writing performance may be more intricate and may include other cognitive, educational, or motivational components that the difficulties variable is unable to measure. For example, students may be using outside assistance or their own courage to overcome writing difficulties, which improves their

performance. This suggests that treatments may require a more comprehensive emphasis, since educational practices that only aim to decrease perceived writing challenges may not immediately result in better writing outcomes.

The implications for instructors and program designers are substantial because they emphasize the value of a comprehensive strategy for enhancing writing performance. The institution should think about improving motivation, giving focused criticism, or cultivating particular abilities that have a direct influence on writing performance. Without supposing that resolving difficulties alone would increase overall writing performance, this result can guide curriculum creation by integrating a variety of support methods that provide to different learning requirements. These tactics can include improving writing spaces, encouraging better study habits, or offering more individualized feedback as goes as the study researched by (Sardi et al., 2025). Teachers may be better equipped to improve writing results if they start focusing on more extensive support systems. Overall, these results' implications imply that, although writing challenges do exist, they don't seem to have a significant impact on performance in the context of this study, and may trigger further study in the area.

This result suggests that significant changes in writing performance do not appear to be correlated with differences in writing tasks. This low correlation value may indicate that other factors have a greater impact on writing success or that writing problems, as evaluated in this study, do not directly affect performance results. It might include outside variables that were not taken into account in this investigation, such as educational background, resource accessibility, or personal drive. As a result, these data suggest that although writing difficulties could exist, they do not seem to directly and consistently affect performance outcomes.

Whether the elements in the challenges of writing accurately reflect the difficulties students have when completing their writing tasks might be the subject of future study. The findings suggest that in order to fully capture the relationship between challenges and performance of writing, a more in-depth understanding or even different metrics are required however Berne, D. (1988) concluded that students' poor writing skills might be connected to linguistic, psychological, and cognitive issues.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that students' writing skill is below average, with many of them unable to create entire, cohesive paragraphs that are pertinent to the themes they are assigned. These difficulties are caused by a variety of elements, such as cognitive, psychological, and language obstacles. Poor grammar, a small vocabulary, and a lack of knowledge of writing mechanics are the main linguistic challenges. Psychologically, students suffer from a lack of drive, painful writing experiences in the past, and a general disregard for improving their skill. These problems are made worse by a lack of resources and insufficient assistance from current courses: Communicative English Language Skill I and II, which makes it difficult for students to develop strong writing abilities.

The study also emphasizes how writing performance varies by gender. The distribution of results among female students is more diverse, with some performing above average and some below average. Male students' results, on the other hand, are more frequently clustered in the below-average range. This pattern points to possible gender-related implications on students' writing ability and engagement, which may be addressed with treatments that are specifically designed to take these variations into account. These performance differences may be closed by promoting strategies that address each student's unique learning requirements.

Interestingly, the study found a modest negative association rather than a statistically significant association between students' writing challenges and their performance outcomes. Although there is no noticeable effect on total writing skill, this weak correlation implies that as one element rises, the other likely to fall somewhat. As a result, raising students' awareness of writing difficulties might not be enough to improve their writing output. Therefore, in order to be effective, plans would need to focus on a comprehensive approach to skill development and individually address the problems and performance metrics.

In the end, improving students' writing skills necessitates an all-encompassing approach that tackles the recognized linguistic, psychological, and resource-based difficulties. Students may overcome these obstacles with the use of extra resources, such as focused vocabulary and grammatical assistance, as well as by creating a positive and encouraging environment. Furthermore, revising a curriculum or course materials that prioritizes practice and feedback while taking individual variances into account might help students' writing performance over time.

Universities should think about offering bridging English language courses and motivational interventions tailored to first-year students prior to the start of regular sessions in order to address the students' fundamental writing difficulties. Students can acquire the language and writing abilities required to meet university-level standards by completing this preparatory stage. Their competence and confidence may be increased with early instruction, making students feel more prepared to take on academic writing assignments. Students with little experience with writing will especially benefit from such programs, which will lay a solid basis for future academic achievement.

In order to reflect contemporary educational standards and best practices in writing teaching, colleges should also periodically examine and update their course materials and modules. The overall efficacy of writing courses can be increased by updating curriculum to conform to contemporary linguistic and educational contexts. In addition to encouraging organized and clear writing techniques, which are crucial in an academic context, this update would guarantee that the contents stay current. These changes may be guided by frequent input from teachers and students, guaranteeing that the material remains interesting and meets the requirements of the students.

It is crucial for university administrators and English teachers to be aware of the particular constraints that students encounter, especially those who have had difficult academic or military experiences in the past. Understanding the psychological effects of

past events empowers instructors to help students in a positive and compassionate manner. The detrimental consequences of prior trauma can be lessened by creating a polite and understanding environment, which will inspire students to write with greater effort. In military academic contexts, where pressures may differ from those in typical academic settings, this strategy would be quite beneficial.

The students themselves need to understand how important it is to work hard to overcome a range of writing-related challenges, including distractions, time limits, and mental blocks. Over time, a proactive approach to overcoming obstacles can improve their writing skills. By encouraging methods for overcoming these challenges and building students' resilience, the university may support this effort. Knowing that writing ability is a talent that needs effort and dedication rather than being natural helps inspire students to keep getting better, setting the stage for long-term writing success.

Lastly, this research, which primarily focuses on uniformed military students, is the first of its kind to examine first-year students' writing perceptions, difficulties, and performances at Ethiopian Defense University. This study identifies the writing challenges that students perceive to be present in the linguistic, psychological, and cognitive domains. English instructors need to utilize this information to adjust their teaching methods and provide targeted support in order to address these shortcomings. Given the common challenges faced by military students, the university might develop writing programs that are more effective. The findings can also give insights to curriculum designers, English language instructors and EFL researchers about how students in uniform are challenged in writing, and to conduct interventions and further studies in the area.

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