



## DEVELOPING CREATIVE WRITING SKILLS AT TERTIARY LEVEL: AN ANALYSIS OF ISSUES FACED BY ESL STUDENTS AND REMEDIES

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### **Abstract**

*This study explores the multifaceted challenges faced by tertiary-level ESL students in developing creative writing skills, with a particular focus on learners enrolled in three universities in Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan: KFUEIT, IUB-RYK, and AIOU-RYK. Through a quantitative methodology, data were collected via a structured questionnaire from 60 students across departments of English, Education, and Business. The primary aim was to investigate core writing obstacles and assess the role of technology-based tools in addressing these gaps. Findings revealed that students struggle significantly with grammatical accuracy, sentence structuring, and logical idea organisation. Emotional barriers such as writing anxiety, lack of motivation, and limited confidence were also prevalent, particularly when engaging in long-form assignments. These struggles frequently led to reduced academic performance and a diminished sense of achievement. Notably, many students reported receiving insufficient feedback on their work, highlighting a disconnect between learner needs and instructional practices. Despite these challenges, students expressed strong intrinsic motivation to improve their writing abilities. Tools like grammar checkers and digital writing aids were widely used and perceived as helpful. However, more advanced tools such as citation software and structured writing templates were underutilised due to lack of awareness or training. This points to a clear gap in digital literacy, not willingness. The study recommends a multipronged intervention approach: embedding technology use into curricula, offering department-specific writing modules, facilitating scaffolded writing tasks with timely feedback, and reducing affective stress through peer support and flexible assessment strategies. Furthermore, extracurricular activities such as writing clubs and student publications can enhance writing culture beyond coursework.*

### **1 Introduction**

Most post-secondary education systems rely on the that ability to write creatively and academically, but many students cannot reach the proficiency level. These problems are caused by the lack of previous experience in academic writing, inability to meet the genre conventions, and insufficient skills at critical thinking (Hyland, 2013). There are other challenges to language proficiency and lack of understanding of the norms of academics, as determined by linguistic and cultural difference (Leki, 2007). Consequently, learners fail to join institutions of higher learning with appropriate skills in structured academic writing, and this has an adverse impact on the performance of students in various fields (Gonye, Mareva, and Dudu, 2012)Institutions can be



very important in combating such obstacles with specific support systems that include writing workshops, personalized feedback, academic literacy training, and gradual assignments (Bailey, 2011). However, the absence of effective institutional support systems, including specialist writing centres, further complicates skill development (Murray & Moore, 2006). ESL learners particularly benefit from targeted language support such as online resources, writing hubs, and speech laboratories (Coffin et al., 2003). Essay writing remains a central academic task requiring critical thinking, organisation, and mastery of academic language, areas where students frequently struggle (Karim et al., 2017; Uddin, 2014). Therefore, this study aims to explore the challenges faced by post-secondary students in essay writing from a student-centred perspective.

### **1.2 Problem Statement**

Many ESL students find it difficult to develop efficient academic writing abilities at the tertiary level due to a few interrelated problems, such as poor pre-tertiary preparation, language obstacles, and a lack of knowledge with academic conventions. A lot of university-bound students struggle to write coherently, critically analyse, and follow the conventions of higher education writing. These challenges are more intense for non-native English speakers, who may have trouble getting linguistic and cultural difference in scholarly discourse. Additionally, institutional factors make it difficult for students for developmental feedback, practice opportunities and accessing structured writing support. To capture these problems multimodal strategies which include advance techniques of instructions, institutional techniques on vast scale is needed to enhance student's capacity for academic writing.

### **1.3 Need and Significance of the Research**

Students benefit from structured support in essay composition, idea development, and academic language through academic writing courses and workshops. Skilled writers can present ideas more clearly, participate confidently in class, and communicate complex arguments effectively. Writing skills enhance critical and strategic thinking, increase interest in course material and encourage coherent and structured expression. The more students become confident about writing, the more confident they are in their ability to express opinions and communicate meaning with the help of text, which is a fundamental component of academic study where through written assignments, they are assessed. Digital writing is also fundamental in the modern higher education. Academic blogs, online journals, discussion forums, collaborative documents, and e-portfolios should be fluent to the students. Effective writing skills will help learners gain access to the digital academic environment, engage in meaningful conversations, and develop intellectual contacts. Another aspect of writing, as a means of self-expression, is a sense of community because it allows students to find like-minded individuals with similar interests and goals, which contributes to academic confidence and personal development and involvement in general.

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

1. To explore how technology-based tools (e.g., grammar checkers, citation software) can be used to enhance the writing skills of students.
2. To determine the impact of certain challenges on the overall performance of the students and their confidence.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

1. How can technology tools be helpful for students to fix common writing problems?



2. How do these challenges affect students' academic performance and their confidence in completing and writing tasks?

### **1.6 Expected Outcomes**

The anticipated results of survey-based study on Developing Creative Writing Skills at Tertiary Level: An Analysis of Issues Faced by ESL Students and Remedies include a thorough comprehension of the main difficulties students have when writing for academic purposes, the identification of relevant variables, and an assessment of the available resources for guidance. Important concerns such problems with academic vocabulary, structural coherence, and grammatical accuracy, as well as psychological barriers like poor self-confidence and writing anxiety, should be outlined in the study. It would also define how these challenges are exacerbated through lack of proper education at pre-tertiary level and unawareness of academic ethics. It is not surprising that the study would propose some potential solutions, which could include a more targeted writing workshop, better organization of the peer tutoring process, and the use of such technologies as the plagiarism checker and the grammar helper.

### **2 Literature Review**

The literature of creative writing in English as a Second Language (ESL) has experienced a considerable change in the past few decades as an emphasis on teaching elementary grammar way has changed to a more interactive, meaning-making interaction. Creative writing is no longer regarded only as an artistic activity in the modern pedagogy; however, it is also the effective instrument of linguistic competence, critical thinking, and the confidence of learners in tertiary ESL settings (Hyland, 2013). Consequently, creative writing has become relevant to ESL research because of its cognitive and emotive basis of language learning. Traditionally, academic writing relied on classical rhetoric, but there was the emergence modern writing pedagogy of 1960s and 1970s with the formation of process-oriented and student-oriented writing methods. Emig (1971), Britton (1975) and Flower and Hayes (1981) among other scholars revised the concept of writing to emphasise it as a recursive mental process which entails planning, drafting, and revision. These views had a great impact on ESL teaching because they placed a writing as a process through which fluency and academic literacy were achieved as opposed to a product. Traditionally writing in language acquisition was considered secondary to speaking and listening in language acquisition. This has changed, with studies having realised writing as a place of identity and socio-cultural interaction (Matsuda, 2001; Canagarajah, 2004). Creative writing enables ESL learners to play with words, share their life experiences, and think about rhetorical consciousness, which agrees with the constructivist principles of learning. The recent texts believe that creative writing should be incorporated into tertiary ESL programs in order to facilitate academic socialisation, vocabulary building, rhetorical mastery, and the perpetuation of discourse (Manchin, 2011; Hammond and Derewianka, 2014). Nevertheless, the form of ESL teaching is still exam-based and grammar-based in South Asian countries like Pakistan, where creativity and critical thinking are frequently ignored (Fareed et al., 2016; Rahman, 2010). This has created machine competent but not communicatively endowed writers. Although there might be certain issues with assessment, the empirical research reveals creative writing to increase lexical richness, syntax, and writing quality (Ivanic, 2004; Spiro, 2014). Also, online storytelling tools and blogs enable creative expression, and it can also be facilitated by the digital platforms which are particularly useful in resource-limited settings (Warschauer, 2010). Altogether, the literature is very favorable to



creative writing as an essential part of ESL education on the tertiary level. Nevertheless, the empirical studies are still inadequate in the least researched areas like Rahim Yar Khan. This paper aims at filling this gap and analyzing obstacles to and opportunities of training creative writing skills in ESL learners in this situation.

## **2.2 Creative Writing and ESL Proficiency**

Creative writing has developed to be an expressive exercise into an effective pedagogical practice of developing language skills in English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, especially at the tertiary level. In addition to the aesthetic aspect, creative writing is also known to benefit the vocabulary development, control over grammar, coherence, fluency, and confidence in learners (Hanauer, 2010; Spiro, 2014). It puts meaning above strict accuracy, thus enabling learners to practice language in imaginative situations, which minimizes anxiety and teaches them to take risks (Hanauer, 2012; Liao and Roy, 2017). The freedom helps to build confidence, which has a positive effect on the interest of students towards academic writing tasks. There is empirical evidence in favor of the linguistic advantages of creative writing. Research indicates that vocabulary range, syntactic variation, tense consistency, and subject-verb agreement are improved with the help of narrative and poetic writing tasks (Khatib and Rezaei, 2013; Ostrowska, 2018; Li and Li, 2015). Higher-order thinking of inference, synthesis, and evaluation, which strengthen academic literacy and critical thinking, is also encouraged through creative writing (Griffith, 2010; Hammond and Derewianka, 2014). Moreover, creative writing facilitates emotional involvement and personality development as well as metacognitive awareness so that learners can perceive English as a personal and significant resource as opposed to an imposed barrier (Hanauer, 2010; Hacker et al., 2009). Since creative writing has its advantages, it is not used to its full potential in examination-based ESL. The inclusion of creative writing in ESL curriculum, then, can provide a more holistic, humanistic, and effective approach to developing the language.

## **2.3 Challenges in Teaching Creative Writing to ESL Students at the Tertiary Level**

There are both pedagogical and institutional issues which are associated with teaching creative writing to ESL students in higher education. Although creative writing is a good tool to develop the language, it is not given much attention because of the belief that creativity does not align with academic rigour especially in exam-oriented and non-Western settings (Hyland, 2013; Fareed et al., 2016). Most teachers are not professionally trained and are not sure of teaching creative genres because the normal training of ESL focus on grammatical correctness and not narrative skills and subjective evaluation (Richards and Schmidt, 2010; Hanauer, 2012). Implementation is also complicated by assessment practices as creative writing is not easy to be assessed and measured (Spiro, 2014).

There are also obstacles related to students, such as anxiety, fear of making a mistake, and the lack of cultural acquaintance with the conventions in dominant narratives that may stop taking risks and expressing oneself (Cheng, 2004; Leki, 2007). Adoption is further constrained by time pressure, scarce resources and institutional perspectives on creativity as having no impact on employability. To deal with these challenges, teacher training, flexible assessment and institutional support must be used to incorporate creative writing in ESL programs in a meaningful way.

## **2.4 Role of Feedback and Peer Review in ESL Creative Writing Development**

Feedback is one of the major aspects of teaching ESL students creative writing in second language (L2) writing. In addition to correction of error, good feedback is formative which assists learners



to construct voice, expression, and audience awareness. When integrated together with peer review, the feedback makes the classroom a communal learning environment in which students get to learn through mutual experiences (Hyland and Hyland, 2006).

Feedback provided by the instructors helps in developing ideas, enriching vocabulary, accuracy of grammar and clarity of choice (Ferris, 2003). In creative writing, however, feedback has to be as technical as it should be supportive of originality. Too much emphasis on mistakes may kill creativity whereas educative feedback emphasizing meaning, the story, and the emotional richness leads to confidence and experimentation (Lee, 2009). Dialogic feedback models that encourage reflection and revision go a step further to increase learner autonomy and engagement (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Peer review is considered to have a complementary role in decentralisation of authority and enhancement of audience awareness. By comparing the drafts of their peers, ESL students absorb writing standards and support their learning (Rollinson, 2005; Min, 2006). However, peer review must be given a great deal of scaffolding because the students are not always confident or tend to focus too much on the superficial mistakes (Berg, 1999). Disciplined rules and enabling classroom climate are thus mandatory (Topping, 2000). All in all, well-considered feedback and peer review practices facilitate linguistic correctness, creativity, and confidence and cannot be done without in tertiary level ESL creative writing teaching.

### **2.5 The Impact of Digital Tools on Creative Writing Instruction for ESL Learners**

Digital tools have had a tremendous impact on teaching creative writing in ESL classrooms, especially on a tertiary or higher level. No longer do teachers depend on conventional and paper-based exercises but on various digital platforms encouraging innovativeness, teamwork, and language acquisition. The applications like Google Docs and one note help in process-based writing by enabling easier drafting and revision, which eliminates anxiety and more experimentation among the learners with ESL background (Zamel, 1982). Digital storytelling tools also contribute to motivation as they pull together the text and graphic and multimedia, enabling students to pay attention to meaning and narrative sensemaking instead of accuracy (Robin, 2008; Yang, 2012).

Peer interaction and genuine audiences are also supported on online platforms which support the concept of writing as a social process and enhance the engagement of the learner (Hyland, 2016; Campbell, 2003). It is also possible to use automated feedback tools to offer prompt linguistic support, which will promote learner autonomy when they are deployed in tandem with instructional teacher support (Bitchener and Ferris, 2012).

### **2.6 Cultural and Identity Perspectives in ESL Creative Writing**

Creative writing is a very personal affair to the ESL learners, as it provides them with space of exploring who they are, their culture and expressing themselves using a second language. Tertiary level inhibitions Restrictive academic writing practices tend to restrict this potential whereas creative genres assist in the linguistic and emotional development. The cultural background is not only a determinant of what the students write but also how they write since it determines the narrative structure, rhetorical style, and meaning making (Kaplan, 1966). In creative writing, ESL learners can find themselves negotiating between first and second-language identities, new selves in English, which is referred to as reauthoring the self (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000). Literature demonstrates that the practices enable learners to feel empowered and also help build confidence and they also develop a sense of ownership to English (Hanauer, 2012; Norton, 2000). Validating



the multilingual expression and cultural diversity, creative writing fosters inclusivity, intercultural sensitivity, and significant learning of language in the ESL classrooms.

### **2.7 Cognitive and Affective Benefits of Creative Writing for ESL Students**

Creative writing is not simply a language activity of ESL students in the tertiary level; it can be a step between the language acquisition and the cognitive-emotional development. When expressing imagination, students explore experience, categorize their ideas and think at a higher level. Creative writing is a choice making in structure, vocabulary and point of view which entails the utilization of basic in planning, self-monitoring, and revision involved in the process of effective writing (Flower and Hayes, 1981). It also enables long term language memory through deep semantic processing since learners associate new language to emotion and personal meaning (Craik and Tulving, 1975). Emotional gains also matter creative writing will assist to reduce the anxiety, improve self-confidence and provide positive emotional discharge in a non-stressful environment (Cheng, 2002; Pennebaker, 1997). The academic resiliency and purposeful interest in the second-language learning process is facilitated by creative writing by fostering reflection, empathy, and intrinsic motivation.

### **2.8 Best Practices and Pedagogical Strategies for Teaching Creative Writing to ESL Students**

Creative writing instruction with ESL learners at high level needs to be flexible, inclusive, research-based and pedagogical strategies. ESL students present diverse cultural backgrounds and creative possibilities, but they are usually challenged by language barriers, insufficient knowledge of genres, and confidence issues. Best teaching should therefore be a consideration of cognition, emotional and linguistic needs of the learners at the same time. The most prominent best practice is the process-oriented approach to writing, where the focus is on prewriting, drafting, revising, and reflection, as opposed to one final product. The studies indicate that process writing helps to lower anxiety, build fluency and enhance coherence among ESL students (Tribble, 1996; Ferris and Hedgcock, 2014). Genre-based teaching also contributes to the development of creativity as it helps to clear up structural and rhetorical demands, allowing students to play around with meaningfulness within familiar structures (Hyland, 2003).

The concept of scaffolding and differentiated instruction is important in the context of multilingual classes where learners at different levels of competency are encouraged to be involved in the learning process with the help of prompts, vocabulary support and grouping activities (Gibbons, 2002). Formative feedback and peer collaboration contributes to interaction, awareness of the audience as well as confidence especially when feedback target both content and voice in conjunction with accuracy (Ferris, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978).

### **2.9 The Role of Reading in Enhancing ESL Creative Writing**

Creative writing is a tertiary level instruction that needs the flexible, inclusive, and research-based instructional approach to teach. ESL learners are not only rich cultural views and imaginations, but also have language constraints, lack of genre familiarity, and confidence issues. Effective teaching should hence be able to meet the cognitive, emotional, and linguistic needs of the learners at the same time.

One best practice is a process-oriented approach to writing, focusing on prewriting, drafting, revising, and reflection and dispensing with a final product. It has been found out that process writing lowers anxiety levels, enhances fluency, and makes ESL learners more coherent (Tribble,



1996; Ferris and Hedgcock, 2014). Genre based instruction also contributes to creativity since structure and rhetorical requirements are clarified; learners can explore meaningfully within familiar forms (Hyland, 2003). Multilingual classes require scaffolding and differentiated instruction where learners with different levels of proficiency can be involved using guided instruction in the form of prompts, vocabulary support and group work (Gibbons, 2002). Collaboration with peers and formative feedback promote interaction, audience sensitivity and confidence especially where feedback is evaluative in terms of content and voice as well as correctness (Ferris, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). Also, culturally responsive pedagogy and multimodal composition provide greater motivation and inclusivity by legitimizing identities and communicative resources of learners (Gay, 2010). On the whole, by combining these practices, it is possible to establish a powerful setting, in which ESL students can acquire linguistic competence, creativity confidence, and meaningful academic activity.

### **2.10 Motivation and Identity Formation through Creative Writing**

The two concepts of motivation and identity go hand in hand and are a critical point of central focus in how ESL students approach creative writing in the tertiary level. Creative writing is both an academic and personal and outpouring activity which allows learners to discover themselves, their place, and their perception of the world. Creative writing, unlike the traditional writing of the academic writing, which limits the expression of feelings, memories of the culture, and imagination, gives students an ability to unite all these elements, making the process of language learning more robust. Motivation has been widely known as one of the determinants of successful acquisition of second language. Creative writing boosts intrinsic motivation through relevant, autonomy, and agency whereby learners choose subjects, make characters and share their own experiences (Ryan and Deci, 2000). This ownership makes one stronger and more daring to take linguistic risks. The identity building is also very important, since the ESL learners usually feel sidelined in schools. Leveraging personal narratives and creative storytelling, students are re-empowered to speak again and start to perceive themselves as full-fledged participants of academic discourse (Norton, 2013).

Narrative writing especially contributes to identity building as it enables the learner to redefine previous experiences and develop a different identity (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). This process is further reinforced by social interaction in the sense that the sharing of creative work with other members of the community and teachers offers validation and a feeling of belonging to a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Positive teacher feedback, inclusive teaching and less restrictive assessment practices are good ways of enhancing self-efficacy and minimizing anxiety and thus, learners are able to build positive learner identities as writers (Bandura, 1997).

All in all, creative writing is an effective tool in instilling motivation and identity, and reducing ESL students to engaged, confident and invested language users.

### **2.11 Creative Writing and Critical Thinking in ESL Contexts**

Creative writing is not only a linguistic exercise among ESL learners in the tertiary level, but it is also a cognitive process that develops critical, interpretive and flexible thinking. Creative writing is the process through which students can analyse experiences, build meaning and make conscious decisions concerning the structure of the narrative, the use of language and thematic coherence, which are all evidence of higher-order thinking skills. The creative writing work (storytelling, poetry, and character development) incorporates critical thinking, which is the capacity to be able



to reason, assess evidence, and provide informed conclusions (Ennis, 2011). These are activities that involve learners reflecting upon cause-effect relationships, perspective and logical consistency (Paul and Elder, 2014). Revision also enhances metacognitive awareness that motivates students to think on clear, coherent and effective (Flavell, 1979). Combining imagination and analysis, creative writing helps ESL students to venture out of reproduction to inquiry, judgment, and intentional communication, making them critical thinkers in addition to effective language users.

### **2.12 Challenges in Assessment of ESL Creative Writing**

Creative writing evaluation in ESL tertiary is unique because of subjectivity of creativity, linguistic diversity, and cultural diversity. Creative texts, unlike academic or technical writing, are not amenable to standardisation and it is hard to tell when a linguistic error is caused or whether it is a deliberate style choice (Huot, 2002). The ESL learners can intentionally test syntax or voice, but this innovation is usually punished when the grammatical point is evaluated, rather than the meaning and expression (Ivanic, 2004). Cultural discrimination also makes the task of evaluation challenging because narrative forms and rhetorical traditions differ from culture to culture and could be misunderstood by evaluators who have been socialized in Western conventions (Spack, 1997).

Genre awareness is also an influencer of fairness in assessment, as ESL students do not have to be familiar with genres conventions (Tardy, 2009). Moreover, creative writing is usually associated with personal identity and emotional attachment, and the assessors must be responsive and ethical (Norton, 2013). In order to overcome these issues, researchers are suggesting the introduction of transparency criteria, formative feedback, portfolio assessment, and culturally responsive pedagogy (Hamp-Lyons and Candon, 2000; Leki, 2006). Finally, ESL writers should be facilitated by ethical, inclusive assessment practices to achieve creativity, confidence, and growth.

## **3 Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Overview**

Research methodology can be described as the structured strategy of planning, conducting and analysing a study. It assists in ensuring the research is reliable, valid, and appropriate in providing response to the set-out research questions. This chapter describes in detail the entire process that was undertaken to conduct the current study. This paper is going to discuss the problems that ESL students encounter while achieving creative writing and question how technology-aided products (e.g. grammar checkers or citation programs) can help them. To fulfil this, such a quantitative research method is adopted wherein, the structured questionnaire is employed as the primary tool of extracting responses of university students in Rahim Yar Khan.

The chapter includes the following key sections:

- Research design
- Population and sample
- Sampling technique
- Instrument used for data collection
- Procedure of data collection
- Data analysis method
- Ethical considerations

Each section is designed to ensure clarity, transparency, and relevance to the study's objectives.



### 3.2 Research Design

Research design provides a structured framework that guides data collection, measurement, and analysis, ensuring that a research problem is addressed systematically and credibly. In order to arrive at reliable and valid results especially in academic research, it is important to select an appropriate design to use. The research design adopted in this study is the quantitative research design that is concerned with the gathering of numerical data, which can be statistically analysed to determine patterns, trends, and relationships. Attitudes, abilities and perceptions of variables are particularly the best variables to use quantitative methods in educational research.

The research is conducted on the creative writing issues of ESL students and the impact of writing tools based on technology on these problems. The structured questionnaire is designed to gather the data on a five-point Likert scale to provide homogenous and easily measurable responses. The sample of participants consists of ESL pupils, who represent various departments of universities in Rahim Yar Khan, which makes it possible to generalise and objectively analyse the study.

### 3.3 Population of the Study

Population in research will be the whole type of things which have the same characteristics with research. The sample population of the research is the ESL students in the upper stages of education in three well-established universities in Rahim Yar Khan. The reason behind the choice of these institutions was due to the academic variety and the vast use of English in all aspects. The following universities are these:

- Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering and Information Technology (KFUEIT)
- Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB), Campus, Rahim Yar Khan.
- Rahim Yar Khan Regional Centre, Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU).

They are universities that introduce full-time and a distance learning environment. This diversity makes the perspective on the issues and the experience of the students bigger especially when it comes to the acquisition of academic and creative writing skills in English language.

In these universities, the departments were classified as the following based on the application of writing practices in the course's activities of the universities.:

- Department of English Language and Literature
- Department of Education
- Department of Business Administration

The students of the chosen departments are used to doing academic, creative, and reflective writing, so they will be appropriate respondents in this research. One hundred and twenty students were contacted and sixty of them were filling the structured questionnaire. There was a balance in the distribution of the respondents who were divided into three universities and departments. The participants were tertiary level ESL students, and hence, the findings will be like the objectives of the study.

### 3.4 Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample is a smaller group of people who are chosen in a large population to make the data collection manageable and meaningful. In this study, a purposive sampling technique was employed where 120 ESL students were chosen in three universities in Rahim Yar Khan and out of them, 60 students were included in the survey. All participants were recruited in the English, Education, and Business departments, which was relevant, balanced, and provided enough data to conduct small-scale quantitative MPhil research.



### **3.5 Research Instrument**

The tool that is used to gather data is called the research instrument. The research used a structured questionnaire to obtain credible and measurable data on the problematic writing issues and use of technology-based tools by ESL students to respond in a consistent fashion and subject to a statistical analysis.

The questionnaire to be used in this study consisted of two major parts, which were directly related to the research objectives and questions:

A was the section that contained the assertions in regards to the usage of technological resource tools like grammar-checking tools, citing software, and writing programs. This was a section that examined the usage of these tools by students, the frequency and the usefulness of the tools in enhancing their writing abilities.

Part B was dedicated to academic and creative writing difficulties of ESL students. It contained questions related to vocabulary, sentence, ideas, writing confidence and anxiety. It also examined the impact of these difficulties in their general performance in school.

All the statements in both sections were aimed to be rated on five-point Likert scale. Likert scale is a rating tool that is usually used in educational research to enable participants to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree to a certain statement. The followings were the scale used in this questionnaire:

- 1 – Strongly Disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – Neutral
- 4 – Agree
- 5 – Strongly Agree

The rating scale was selected to record personal opinions and to compare the strengths of response. The questionnaire contained 17 statements that are closed ended and in two parts; this allowed the use of SPSS in conducting the statistical analysis. The clarity was provided by clear wording, and the pilot testing ensured the accessibility by ESL. This instrument was efficient and standardised the data collection of writing problems and technology use.

### **3.6 Data Collection Procedure**

The study was based on a closed-ended, structured questionnaire that was sent by electronic means to ESL students at KFUEIT, IUB (RYK Campus), and AIOU (RYK). The online approach provided accessibility, informed consent, confidentiality, high participation by the departments, and convenient storage of data to be subjected to statistical analysis.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

Data analysis entails coding and interpretation of information collected to determine patterns that would relate to the research intents. In this quantitative research, the data was collected using a five-point Likert scale using a structured questionnaire whose responses were coded on a numerical basis (1-5). The SPSS was used to analyse the data, which is one of the most popular statistical software in the field of educational research. To summarise trends and variability of response, descriptive statistics were used, frequencies, mean scores, medians and standard deviations were used to summarise statistics. The analysis of each questionnaire section was done individually to answer the research questions. Since the research was exploratory, there were no



inferential tests; descriptive analysis gave informative results concerning the writing problems and the application of technology-based tools by ESL students.

### 3.7: Demographic Profile of Respondents

**Table 3.7.1: Gender of Respondents**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	34	56.67%
Female	26	43.33%
Total	60	100%

**Table 3.7.2: University of Respondents**

University	Frequency	Percentage
KFUEIT	20	33.33%
IUB-RYK	20	33.33%
AIOU-RYK	20	33.33%
Total	60	100%

**Table 3.7.3: Department of Respondents**

Department	Frequency	Percentage
Education	25	41.67%
Business Administration	19	31.67%
English	16	26.67%
Total	60	100%

### 3.8 Ethical Considerations

This study was carried out in a highly ethical manner that considered human participants. Interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis, and the informed consent was well-informed, and the possibility of withdrawal was ensured. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed since no personal data were used. Only academic purposes were applied in the responses, which were kept safely and the research was conducted in accordance with the university ethical standards and supervisory authorisation.

## 4 Results and Analysis

### 4.1 Overview

The chapter provides the results of a structured questionnaire conducted on 60 ESL students in three universities in Rahim Yar Khan. It is an analysis of demographic information, writing technology tool usage, and writing difficulties using SPSS descriptive statistics. The findings are provided in tables, and on this basis, the discussion and conclusions are made.

### 4.2 Analysis

#### Section A

#### 4.2.1 Use of Grammar Checkers (Q1)

"I use grammar checkers (e.g., Grammarly) regularly while writing assignments."

**Table 1**

Response (Likert Scale)	Frequency
1 = Strongly Disagree	18



<b>2 = Disagree</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3 = Neutral</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4 = Agree</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>5 = Strongly Agree</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.57</b>
<b>Median</b>	<b>2.00</b>
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>1.33</b>

### Interpretation of Q1: Use of Grammar Checkers

Q1 data reveals the level of dependence of ESL students at the tertiary level with grammar checking software such as Grammarly when they engage in academic writing. Out of 60 respondents, the greatest number (18 students) strongly disagreed with the statement, indicating a huge percentage of students do not use grammar checkers on a regular basis. In the meantime, 10 students were opposed to it, and 10 were neutral which means that they are uncertain or least used. There was a relatively higher number of 15 students that agreed and used such tools moderately. Frequent users were only 7 students who strongly agreed to that. In general, most of them do not use (or use infrequently) grammar checkers. This can be an indication of either ignorance, unavailability or education in how to effectively incorporate such tools in their writing endeavours.

### 4.2.2 I use citation tools (e.g., Zotero, Mendeley) to manage references (Q2)

Table 2

<b>Response Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>1 = Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2 = Disagree</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>3 = Neutral</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4 = Agree</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>5 = Strongly Agree</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.05</b>
<b>Median</b>	<b>3.00</b>
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>1.37</b>

### Interpretation of Q2: Use of Citation Tools

The answers to Q2 demonstrate the interaction of ESL students with the digital citation tools (Zotero or Mendeley). Among 60 respondents, 12 students were strongly against and 13 were against the use of citation tools and it means that there is a large share of students who do not implement the use of citation tools in their references management. One student held a neutral position (10 individuals), which may have been due to poor knowledge or confusion of these tools. Conversely, 17 students said yes, and 8 said strongly yes indicating that there are a good number of students currently doing so with such software. This result implies a bifurcated trend as other



students enjoy citation tools when writing their academic papers, but others might not have the exposure, training, or confidence to utilize the tools.

#### 4.2.3 I face difficulty in organising ideas while writing (Q3)

Table 3

Response Category	Frequency
1 = Strongly Disagree	7
2 = Disagree	11
3 = Neutral	8
4 = Agree	18
5 = Strongly Agree	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.48</b>
<b>Median</b>	<b>4.00</b>
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>1.29</b>

#### Interpretation of Q3: Difficulty in Organising Ideas

The details provided in Q3 indicate that ESL students have difficulties in organizing their thoughts when they write. One out of 60 respondents noted that the struggle to find ideas was the reason why they said that 18 students agreed and 16 strongly agreed. This indicates that over a half of the sample struggle to express themselves well and rationally through their writing. The number of students that strongly disagree was only 7 and those that disagree was 11 which means that not as many of them experience this problem. Eight students are neutral which can be considered as inconsistent experiences. The results indicate that there is a general mental barrier in the writing process of ESL learners. Such challenges may be related to a small range of vocabulary, the inability to plan or academic writing rules, which emphasizes the necessity of the guided support and strategy-oriented training.

#### 4.2.4 I struggle with sentence structure and grammar while writing (Q4)

Table 4

Response Category	Frequency
1 = Strongly Disagree	11
2 = Disagree	13
3 = Neutral	6
4 = Agree	16
5 = Strongly Agree	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.32</b>
<b>Median</b>	<b>4.00</b>
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>1.41</b>



### Interpretation of Q4: Struggles with Sentence Structure and Grammar

The answers to Q4 indicate that a significant proportion of ESL students have problems with sentence structure and grammatical correctness in academic texts. Among the higher scores, this issue was the most supported with 16 and 14 people agreeing and strongly agreeing that they have a problem with it. Conversely 11 strongly disagreed and 13 disagreed indicating that approximately 40 percent of the students are not perturbed by grammar as a significant problem. There are six students who picked neutral, which could suggest the uncertainty or inconsistency of their experiences. These results warrant affirmation that grammatical correctness is still a major issue to many ESL learners. This problem probably influences the clarity and consistency, which indicates the necessity of language instructions, grammar training and constant feedback in the process of writing.

### Section B

#### 4.2.8 I get confused while citing sources or avoiding plagiarism (Q8)

Table 8

Response Category	Frequency
1 = Strongly Disagree	8
2 = Disagree	14
3 = Neutral	10
4 = Agree	15
5 = Strongly Agree	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.25</b>
<b>Median</b>	<b>3.50</b>
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>1.38</b>

### Interpretation of Q8: Confusion in Citing Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism

Based on the results of Q8, it is possible to consider that the proper citation and plagiarism avoidance are widely confused issues among ESL students. Right out of 60 interviewed students 15 agreed and 13 strongly agreed that they are having problems in this sphere which means that about half of the students have the problem with comprehension of the academic integrity requirements. This may be so because they are not conversant with such referencing formats as APA or MLA, have received no training or because they fear spontaneous plagiarism. Conversely, 8 students strongly disagreed and 14 disagreed thus showing that approximately 37 percent are sure that they will be able to perform citation. Ten students chose neutral and this was probably a result of mixed experiences or experience in using academic writing. The discovery thus indicates that there is a need to inquire regularly on the guidelines of referencing styles and the policy against plagiarism by developing the academic writing of ESL students.



#### 4.2.9 I revise and edit my work before submitting it (Q9)

Table 9

Response Category	Frequency
1 = Strongly Disagree	5
2 = Disagree	11
3 = Neutral	11
4 = Agree	17
5 = Strongly Agree	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.52</b>
<b>Median</b>	<b>4.00</b>
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>1.28</b>

#### Interpretation of Q9: Revising and Editing Before Submission

Responses to Q9 suggest that a strong majority of ESL students recognise the importance of revising and editing their work. Out of 60 participants, 17 agreed and 16 strongly agreed that they review their writing before submission. This positive trend indicates that many students are aware of the value of self-editing to improve clarity, grammar, and structure. However, 5 students strongly disagreed and 11 disagreed, showing that some learners still do not practice revision regularly. Additionally, 11 students remained neutral, which may suggest inconsistency in their revision habits. Overall, the data highlights a relatively good level of self-monitoring among students but also points to a need for more training on effective editing strategies, possibly through workshops or peer-review sessions.

#### 4.2.10 I use grammar or spelling checkers while writing (Q10)

Table 10

Response Category	Frequency
1 = Strongly Disagree	9
2 = Disagree	11
3 = Neutral	10
4 = Agree	13
5 = Strongly Agree	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.43</b>
<b>Median</b>	<b>4.00</b>
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>1.40</b>

#### Interpretation of Q10: Use of Grammar or Spelling Checkers

The Q10 data shows grammar and spelling checker are widely used utilities by ESL students. The respondents to the question about the regular usage of these tools during the writing process strongly agreed (17) and agreed (13). It implies that half of the students are actively using digital



assistance such as Grammarly, Microsoft Word suggestions or browser-based applications to recognize and correct their language mistakes. Such dependence demonstrates an increased interest in the technologies that are available and can help in language acquisition and writing effectiveness. Conversely, 9 students were very unenthusiastic and 11 disagreed, possibly because they had no access, awareness, and confidence in the effectiveness of using such tools. There were ten neutral participants who might have either had a low frequency of usage or contextual usage. The general tendency advocates the incorporation of the writing support opportunities based on the use of technology in the academic environment to enable ESL students to advance in self-editing and lessen the errors in the language.

## **5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion**

### **5.1 Summary of Key Findings**

This paper was set out to investigate writing-related issues experienced by ESL writers in the tertiary level and how digital tools help in finding solutions to these problems. The participants were sampled (n=60) of ESL learners attending three government universities in Rahim Yar Khan: KFUEIT, IUB-RYK and AIOU-RYK. The results analysis was founded on 17 questionnaire statements in line with two key research objectives.

The key findings are summarised below, grouped according to the research objectives:

#### **1. Use of Technology-Based Tools in Enhancing Writing Skills**

Results indicate that grammar and spelling checkers are regularly used, citation tools and online templates are frequently used, and the digital writing tools are believed to be effective. In general, students are aware of their usefulness, but the use in practice is not even among the various types of tools.

#### **2. Writing Challenges and Their Impact on Confidence and Performance**

The second category of statements measured typical writing problems and their emotional and academic consequences:

- A significant number of the respondents had problems with sentence structure and grammar (Q4), with 30 people affirming and strongly affirming. This implies that this is a fundamental technical flaw in ESL writing.
- Many (34 students) also stated that they were unable to form logic in ideas (Q3 and Q15) which demonstrated a lack of academic coherence training.
- English writing (Q6) creative writing was cited as difficult by 27 students. On the same note, the references and the prevention of plagiarism (Q8) were the topics that confused many people and thus required a clear definition.
- Interestingly, motivation (Q16) was placed high with 42 out of 60 students agree or strongly agreeing that they wanted to improve their writing skills.
- Confidence levels varied. Whereas 32 students claimed that they felt confident when writing academic papers (Q11), some claimed that they felt anxiety and nervousness, particularly when it involved a long assignment (Q14).

#### **General Trends**

The most apparent trend among the responses is that students are enthusiastic and open to the idea of improvement yet have to deal with an ongoing technical and structural barrier. Most of them already use the simplest of tools, like grammar checkers, yet fewer use more sophisticated



assistance, like citation software. The results indicate a discrepancy in the skills as well as writing support systems.

## 5.2 Discussion of Results

This section explains the key findings of the research in accordance with the two research objectives. It appraises the way the data given by ESL students in three universities in Rahim Yar Khan indicates wider educational realities and also relates those results to the existing literature and practical consequences.

### 5.2.1 Discussion on the Role of Technology-Based Tools in Enhancing ESL Writing Skills

The results indicate that grammar and spelling checkers are most used by ESL students, indicating that they do depend on the technology to be more superficial. There was no uniformity in the use of citation tools and writing templates, which revealed a lack of knowledge or training. Most students thought that digital tools would enable them to be much better writers despite the uneven usage.

### 5.2.2 Discussion on Writing Challenges Faced by ESL Students and Their Impact

The second research question was the investigation of the writing issues of ESL students and how they affect their confidence and performance. About half of the participants reported major problems in grammar, sentence structure, and organisation of ideas, which were also reported by Fareed et al. (2016). Another problem faced by students was creativity and use of sources. Most of them were still motivated to improve, regardless of their anxiety and very little feedback, thus the necessity of supportive instructions and positive feedback (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

### 5.2.3 Linking Findings with the Research Questions

Two research questions were involved in the study:

How might technology tools be useful to solve the common writing problems among students?

The outcomes indicated that rudimentary tools are usually utilized, particularly grammar checkers. Nevertheless, more sophisticated tools such as citation software are not much used, again, primarily, it is not because there is no interest, but because they are not trained to use it. Students are quite confident in the opportunities of digital tools, which means that there is a necessity to incorporate them into classroom activities.

What are the impacts of these challenges on the academic outcome and confidence of the students in completing and writing assignments?

Academic writing poses technical, structural and emotional challenges to most students. They also suffer lack of confidence, particularly when they are under pressure. These people want additional support, templates, and elucidation to become better. However, they still are very motivated, and this creates an opportunity of a positive intervention.

### 5.2.4 Implications for Teaching Practice

The findings of this study carry several practical implications for ESL teaching at the tertiary level:

- **Integration of Writing Tools:** Teachers should include training sessions on citation tools and writing platforms to bridge the usage gap.
- **Focused Feedback:** More students need timely and constructive feedback that addresses individual challenges in grammar, organisation, and style.
- **Scaffolded Writing Assignments:** Providing samples, templates, and guided rubrics can help students approach tasks with clarity.



- **Emotional Support:** Creating a low-stress writing environment, especially around long assignments, can reduce anxiety and improve performance.
- **Recognition of Effort:** Acknowledging students' motivation to improve is essential. Their willingness is present what's missing is structured support.

### 5.3 Recommendations

On the findings, the research proposes to incorporate the use of technology training in the writing courses, to fortify the writing curricula with process-based writing assignments, and to provide constructive feedback in writing on a timely manner. It is important to manage the affective barriers using supportive teaching and review by peers. Discipline-based writing support ought to be provided by departments whereas the culture of writing must be encouraged in the university by use of workshops, writing clubs and publication options to boost the confidence and performance of ESL students.

### 5.4 Conclusion

This research paper has analyzed the problem of creative writing as encountered by ESL learners in Rahim Yar Khan and the use of technology-based tools. The results showed significant constant linguistic and affective challenges and high motivation of students and positive attitude to digital tools. The findings demonstrate a necessity of holistic, technology-intensive, and situational writing lessons at the tertiary level.

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