

## **An Analysis of Factors Influencing EFL Learners' Writing Skills**

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### **Abstract**

Writing skill is a special attitude that writers can set their opinions into words with it. By means of writing skills, learners mentally interact with words and messages. Writing is an integral fragment of language practice. Using a set of symbols also represents the language in a textual medium. However, writing is a challenging ability. It is difficult to write coherently. It needs the abilities of combining words and sentences. This paper aims to explore the factors that affect the EFL learners' writing skills both in negative and positive ways. This review paper marks out the body of research regarding the term of writing skill, the problems of writing, and factors influencing writing. Based on the literature review, the learners' priority is developing writing skills, and they require more attention. This study helps the language instructors to find out learners' needs in English language teaching. It also helps the learners to investigate the factors that expand their writing skills. Furthermore, this study provides the factors that need to be focused on by the learners to make writing skills properly.

Keywords: Writing Skill, EFL Learners, Effective Factors, Coherence, Cohesion

### **Introduction**

The English language has four macro skills which are either receptive or productive. Reading and listening belong to receptive skills. By reading or listening, language learners receive ideas, thoughts and opinions. On the other side, writing and speaking are productive skills. It means that through writing and speaking the learners produce ideas, concepts and meaning from context. Writing which is one of these productive skills needs to be focused on education. However, it is not easy to write for most learners. The language learners need to focus on some elements during writing such as: using punctuation accordingly, using vocabulary appropriately, sentence structures and the organization of a paragraph. Connecting ideas to the main idea is another phenomenon of a good paragraph, and that process is called coherence in writing. In brief, if these tools have been applied during writing, meaningful paragraphs can be conducted (Faradhibah, 2017).

Coherence in writing is an essential skill to write smoothly and clearly. A paragraph with coherence makes the connection between the supportive details that support the main idea. Writers can write coherently when they use time order to present the ideas according to their importance order. They use transitional words or phrases to connect the ideas and sentences for writing coherently. "Transitional words" (alternatively "signal words") leads the reader through the sentence. They also use references of pronouns for ensuring coherence and avoid repetition. Reference of pronouns means replacing nouns that were mentioned before with a pronoun. The writers need to use pronouns properly without confusing the readers. In short, to write there should be a logical order. Using logical order, each idea needs to be linked to both the previous and the following one in a paragraph. Coherence in writing means to write by connecting the sentences clearly and reasonably. With coherence in writing the sentences are connected logically. When the sentences are attached then the readers understand the concepts easily without any ambiguity. It is very vital to be coherent in writing to avoid confusion and misunderstanding. Some factors affect EFL learners to be more coherent in writing. On the other side, some reasons avoid the EFL learner from being coherent in writing. For that reason, this literature review explores these effective factors.

The significance of this study is to reach the results of the previous studies that were conducted to find out the reasons for being and not being coherent in academic writing. Arguably, these reasons should not be neglected in the education system. For better education and productive classrooms, the language instructors need to analyze and take these factors into the consideration. The factors like using lexical chains, substitutions, ellipses, and adding conjunctions into the sentences all allow the learners to be coherent in writing. Hence, the instructors need to convince the learners to use these elements. This can happen if the instructor let the learners write as much as they can because when the students practice enough, they see their lack and weakness, and that needs motivation, courage and low anxiety. The teacher can lower their student's writing anxiety by providing literary genres (Abdalrahman, 2021). Literature can improve learners' cognitive skills by showing them samples of logical actions. Furthermore, the learners can be motivated to write with the help literature because literature means the use of expressions.

This research paper aims to explore the factors that affect EFL learners' writing skills. Thus, this research paper had been conducted to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are the factors that make the EFL learners write coherently?
2. What are the reasons that make the EFL learners struggle in writing?

### **Methodology**

A descriptive qualitative research design is used to analyze the literature on the

analysis of the factors that affect EFL learners' writing skills to find out what are the reasons that make the EFL learners write or not write coherently. For that, the samples were chosen purposefully. The data had been collected from secondary sources. Research articles that were written from 2016 until 2021 were used in gathering data. To demonstrate how the previous researchers and scholars analyze the effective factors on writing skills, thematic analysis is used for interpreting the collected data.

### **Coherence and Cohesion in Writing**

Writing skill is the ability to express opinion, and the writer delivers messages and opinions through it. For that reason, learners need to pay attention to linking and connecting ideas to write clearly. Coherence and cohesion are important factors that help the students to write properly. If a student writes with cohesion and coherence, he can easily deliver his messages and express himself. Cohesion bounds similar ideas, and it separates texts from non-texts. With cohesion, the reader can easily understand the relationship between what was written, what is being written and what will be written by appropriate cohesive devices. Additionally, cohesion is defined as the "foundation upon which the edifice of coherence is built" and also it is known as "an essential feature of a text if it is judged to be coherent" (Aminovna, 2022). It means that cohesion creates coherence, and coherence provides semantical unity among sentences and paragraphs in a text. The relationship between cohesion and coherence is that they are vital components in building a thorough text. When a teacher asks the students to conduct a piece of cohesive and coherent writing, they usually face problems like: they want to write in an organized way and arrange their opinions and thought in words, phrases and clauses, but they finish their writing in a long statement (Latifah & Triyono 2020). The cohesion and coherence devices can be used for collecting related words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs.

### **Factors for Being Coherent**

According to the previous studies regarding being coherent in writing, the factors of being coherent were discussed by scholars. These factors have been discussed in detail in the following subsections.

### **Analyzing Literary Contexts**

Analyzing literary context is one of the factors that allows a learner to develop his/her writing skills. Abdalrahman (2021) stated that coherent passages can be conducted when the teacher integrates writing class with literature. For him, the literary text is a must for a learner to read in order to acquire unity, construction, grammatical structures and coherence automatically because students occasionally will imitate the style and format of

an author as a model of their writings. It means that the structure of a text can be seen as a model of writing. This statement is also found from the results of another researcher; Şen Bartan (2017). He conducted an empirical study, and in the post-test, he found that the learners had improved, the content, communication level and organization. Thus, the results of his study approved the idea of the relationship between the two skills of reading and writing. Hussein, Meena and Ali (2021) found that literary genres need to be used as teaching tools in the classrooms. By these literary texts, the learners will see the vital components of the expression, and cohesion. They stated that language learners can write in a coherent way by analyzing literary contexts. Literature means expression. Thus, if a teacher asks a student to write about a specific topic he/she needs to provide literary context to let the learners see how the messages and concepts had been delivered by another author.

### Using Lexical Chain

Using lexical chains has been regarded as one of the factors which provide coherence in writing. Mukherjee, Leroy and Kauchak (2018) interpreted lexical chains as a chain of semantically relative ideas, and that chain does not depend on grammar structure in a text. The chain capture lexical cohesion highlighting repeated relative ideas in a text. There are more different ways of categorizing semantically related lexical items. This study focuses on three of them which are exact, synonyms and lexical chains. The below text snippets demonstrate the example of each one of them.

“Aarskog-Scott syndrome is a rare disease inherited as autosomal dominant or x-linked and characterized by short stature, facial abnormalities, skeletal and genital anomalies. The Aarskog-Scott syndrome is also known as the Aarskog syndrome and faciogenital dysplasia. Aarskog-Scott syndrome is due to mutation in the *fgd1* gene. *Fgd1* encodes a guanine nucleotide exchange factor (gef) that specifically activates *cdc42*, a member of rho (rashomology) family of p21 gtpases.”

<sup>1</sup> Exact:	{	• "syndrome, syndrome, syndrome, syndrome"
<sup>2</sup> Synonymous:	{	• "abnormalities, anomalies"
<sup>3</sup> Semantic:	{	• "gene, nucleotide"

Figure 1: The lexical chain

1. exact lexical chain means repeating the nouns as it is demonstrated in Figure 1. The writers repeat the nouns exactly. A lexical chain needs to have at least two existences of a noun, i.e., a single existence of a word does not consider a lexical chain.
2. synonymous

Aminovna (2022) stated that Synonymous Lexical Chain means using nouns with their synonyms (see Fig. 1). Nouns have synonymous when they are not lexically the same. Additionally, nouns are synonymous if they have the exact “Concept Unique Identifier”. Example:

Synonymous chain: disease → disorders

“In addition to the ultrasound or AFP scanning, it is also necessary for children with this disease to be checked for other birth defects because genetic disorders are usually associated with some of the abdominal wall defects.”

3. Semantic

Semantic means using the nouns which belong to the same semantic tree and are related to each other.

Example:

“Cancer is a group of diseases involving abnormal cell growth with the potential to invade or spread to other parts of the body.”

Synonymous chain: “cancer” → “disorders”

### **Factors of Being Cohesion**

Previously the researchers had conducted research projects regarding a cohesive text, and it was found that there are factors that make the learners write a cohesive text. These factors have been discussed in the following subsections.

### **Reference**

Reference means referring to an element that cannot be interpreted if you do not refer to it with another word semantically. In a text, there are referring devices such as comparatives, demonstratives, articles and pronouns. The writers use these items to refer to words in the text. There are two types of references: one of them is exophoric and the second one is endophoric (Bahaziq, 2016).

The first type makes the reader look beyond the text to infer the interpreted referent. For example:

“That is a wonderful idea!”

To interpret the meaning of that, the reader needs to look and think outside the situation. On the other side, the second type allows the reader to interpret the meaning within the text rather than outside the text or situation, and there are two classes of endophorics: anaphoric and cataphoric. Paltridge (2012), defined anaphoric as “Anaphoric reference is where a word or phrase refers back to another word or phrase used earlier in the text” (p. 115). For instance:

“Ali went to the cinema. He sat with Ahmad”.

He refers back to Ali; that is why he is an anaphoric reference. However, the second class which is Cataphoric reference expect another word or phrase which is going to be mentioned later in the text. For example:

“As soon as he arrived, Mike visited his parents”.

He is a cataphoric reference that refers to Mike.

### **Substitution**

Substitution means replacing a word with another word in a text, and substitution in a text provides grammatical cohesion. The writers use substitutions to avoid repetition. Substitution is different from the reference. Substitution means the connection between words, but reference connect the meanings not words. Substitutions have three types: clausal, verbal, and nominal (Daud, Daud, & Kassim, 2016).

Clausal Substitution means replacing clauses with “so” or “not”. This is shown in the following dialogues:

A: “Do you think the teacher is going to be absent tomorrow?”

B: “No. I don’t think so”.

In this dialogue, so substitutes the clause of “going to be absent”.

The second type is Verbal substitution, and Verbal substitution means replacing a verb or a verbal group with another verb. For example:

“I challenge you to win the game before I do!”

“Do” is used for substituting the verb of winning the game.

In this sentence, do is the verbal substitution.

The third type is Nominal substitution. Nominal substitution is the replacement of a noun or a nominal group with another noun. There are some elements for this type: one, ones, and same. For example,

“This car is old. I will buy a new one.”

“One” is the nominal substitution for the noun of “car”.

### **Ellipsis**

Ellipses mean to leave out words that are not necessary to be mentioned in the text again. Ellipses avoid the writers repeating the words that are written earlier in the text. By

omitting these words, the sentences will be more concise. Ellipsis are compared with substitutions because ellipsis substitutes by zero (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Scholars have been considered as anaphoric substitutions because the omitted words are within the text. Ellipses do not damage the passage because the deleted word from the text can still deliver the meaning. Like substitution, the ellipsis has three types, and they are verbal, clausal and nominal Mukherjee Leroy & Kauchak (2018).

Verbal ellipsis means leaving out the verb in a sentence. For example:

A: "Have you been studying?"

B: "Yes, I have [0]. [0: been studying]"

The verb of "been studying" has been omitted.

Clausal ellipsis will exist when the writer omits a clause. For instance:

A: "Who is writing on the board?"

B: "Alice is [0]. [0: writing on the board]"

The omitted clause is: "writing on the board"

Nominal ellipsis involves omitting a noun. For example:

"My brothers like sports. In fact, both [0] love football." [0: My brothers]

"My brothers" in the second sentence is the removed noun.

### **Conjunction**

Conjunction words are connective words that usually connect sentences or clauses in a text. That is why they are different from other grammatical devices because they logically connect sentences or clauses rather than structures or words. Furthermore, they link sentences in a logical order, and that helps the reader to understand the text easily. Conjunctions have four types which are: temporal, adversative, causal and additive. Temporal conjunctions provide the time order of actions and events in a text or a paragraph, for example, first, second, finally, at the same time, etc. the second one, Adversative conjunctions in a text are contrasting results or opinions, and this type of conjunction is occurred by words for example, "but, in contrast, whereas", etc. Causal conjunctions are used to illustrate results, reasons, or purposes. They usually use the words; as, so, thus, therefore, because, etc. Finally additive conjunctions link units or statements that share similarities (Kusumawardani, 2018). For instance: are, and, likewise, furthermore, in addition, etc.

### **Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)**

The term foreign language anxiety (FLA) is "the feeling of tension and apprehension associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Chastain 1975 and Scovel 1978 had discovered it.

They claimed that FLA is an effective factor that delays learning a foreign language. Currently, this factor attracts the practitioner's and educator's attention because it creates barriers in the process of learning a foreign language. FLA frequently occurs in the learning environment. The learners suffer from negative feelings such as fear, stress, low - confidence during learning a foreign language (Horwitz, 2001). Then they are driven to show poor performance in the process of learning. With foreign language anxiety, barriers appear, and those barriers negatively have impacts on the language learner's achievement and proficiency (Dordinejad & Ahmadabad, 2014; Rudiyanto, 2017). Thus, it prevents the learners and the instructors from accomplishing their goals. Poor writing with no unity and cohesion occurs because of FLA. It needs a lot of effort and practice to master writing and write with cohesion and coherence. For that reason, the development of writing skills leads the learners to have writing anxiety.

### **Writing Anxiety**

Aloairdhi (2019) stated that writing anxiety (WA) is originated from FLA. The fear of making mistakes increase their anxiety level. Blasco (2016) claimed that there is a strong relation between WA and metacognitive skills and writing anxiety; thus, for a productive writing assignment the learners need to cope with this anxiety. Barzani & Meena (2022) suggest the usage of authentic materials in the classroom and Meena (2020) recommends cooperative learning to overcome these anxieties.

### **Abuses of Transition Words**

Siddiqui (2020) in his study found that the Abuses of transition words is one of factors that negatively affect the clarity and the organization of a paragraph. He claimed that if learners do not have a clear opening, they are not able to provide clear supportive details. They do not establish the mentioned idea instead they write more and more in the paragraphs. This can be approved by the over usage of "and," "also," "so," and "then", and long sentences. Moreover, lack of transition or using a few transition words in a paragraph replicate the lack of the students' ability regarding construction and writing a well unified and organized paragraph. The below paragraph is a sample of the abuses of transitions in a paragraph.

"I meet with a girl she's name is sana and sana is also my roommate and she is also in the class... Then we go to visit seniors and then we got to cafeteria and drinks juice and then we go to hostel".



### Future Research

Analyzing factors that have an impact on learners' writing skills is a sufficient view in education that is why more research and study is needed to establish solutions for better writing. According to the results of this research, the researcher recommends the following topics as future research:

- Integrating writing class with literature class
- Using hands-on activities to cope with foreign language anxiety
- Teacher's perception towards writing anxiety
- Using lexical chain in writing class
- A better learning environment for teaching writing skills
- Proofreading and writing skills
- Using authentic material during writing class
- Learner's points of view regarding writing anxiety
- Motivating students for cohesion and coherence
- Directing learners for extensive reading

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Because of the significance of learning a foreign language, the student's writing skills need reinforcement with a practice. While the students practice the writing skills, there are possibilities of having problems and obstacles like anxiety, not being able to connect the ideas, sentences, and words. For that, the effective factors need to be taken into account. Then the teachers and the learner can take advantages from these factors. In this way the language instructors can help the students that struggle with writing.

The researcher highly recommends to conduct more researches to promote writing performance.

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