Exploring the Relationship between Drafting with Writing Process and Writing Difficulty

Zakiah Mohd Yusoff [1,2*], Siti Aminah Nordin[3], Shakira Azeehan Azli[3], Fatimah Khairiah Abd Hamid[3]

[1]Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), 40450 UiTM Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

[2]Solar Research Institute (SRI), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

[3]Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Johor Branch, Pasir Gudang Campus, 81750 Masai, Johor, Malaysia

[*]Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study explores the motivation factors for learning among undergraduates, focusing specifically on drafting with writing processes and difficulties. Using a purposive sample of 41 engineering students, an online survey comprising 38 items was administered covering demographic profiles, writing difficulties, planning before writing, translating while writing and editing when revising. The demographic analysis reveals a significant gender disparity with males constituting 64% and females 24% of the sample and highlights a predominantly average English proficiency level among participants. The study identifies major writing challenges such as unfamiliarity with different types of writing, goal-setting complexities and insufficient background knowledge, emphasizing the need for targeted educational interventions. Participants exhibit diverse drafting, planning and revising behaviours including structured drafting strategies, varied planning methods and focused revising practices. These findings suggest that tailored instructional approaches and support mechanisms are essential to enhance writing proficiency and confidence among engineering students. Future research should investigate longitudinal writing development, the impact of technological tools and the role of peer feedback and cultural factors in writing to further improve educational practices and student outcomes.

Keywords: Drafting techniques, writing difficulty, quantitative survey, academic writing, drafting strategies

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

Writing is a fundamental skill essential for academic success and professional competence. The process of writing involves several stages, including prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing (Cardenas-Hagan Ed, 2020; Petray et al., 2021). Drafting plays a crucial role in shaping the final written product. According to recent research, drafting is the stage where writers translate their ideas into written form often resulting in a preliminary version of the text that undergoes subsequent revisions (Ashrafiany et al., 2020; Cardenas-Hagan Ed, 2020; Petray et al., 2021; Suprapto et al., 2022). This iterative process allows writers to refine their thoughts, improve clarity and enhance the overall quality of their work. The relationship between drafting and writing difficulty is a significant area of study especially in understanding how different drafting techniques can either facilitate or hinder the writing process (Lababa et al., 2023; Melon-Galvez, 2016). Recent studies suggest that systematic drafting can alleviate writing difficulties by providing a structured approach to organizing thoughts and developing arguments (Melon-Galvez, 2016). Conversely, a lack of structured drafting can lead to increased

writing anxiety and difficulty, impacting the writer's ability to produce coherent and effective text (Ashrafiany et al., 2020; Lababa et al., 2023).

Writing proficiency is crucial for Malaysia's aspirations to be a knowledge-based economy. The Twelfth Malaysia Plan (2021-2025) highlights the need for a highly skilled workforce capable of producing well-crafted written documents to drive innovation and economic growth (Economic Planning Unit, 2020). Employers in Malaysia increasingly seek employees with strong writing skills for effective communication, documentation and reporting. Consequently, understanding the relationship between drafting and writing difficulty is essential for developing effective educational interventions that enhance writing proficiency. Studies have shown that Malaysian students often struggle with writing due to a lack of exposure to comprehensive drafting practices, many students find drafting challenging because they have not been taught systematic approaches to planning and organizing their writing. This gap in instruction contributes to writing difficulties and affects their overall academic performance.

Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from educators, policymakers, and researchers to integrate robust drafting practices into the curriculum. By fostering a deeper understanding of how drafting impacts writing difficulty, educational stakeholders can design targeted interventions that support students in developing strong writing skills (Bora, 2023).

Statement of Problem

The relationship between drafting and writing difficulty has been extensively studied particularly in understanding how different drafting techniques influence the writing process (Silcha et al., 2016). Current research highlights the benefits of systematic drafting in reducing writing difficulties and enhancing overall writing quality. An existing study found that structured drafting practices significantly improve the clarity and coherence of written texts and emphasized the role of iterative drafting in alleviating writing anxiety and fostering better writing outcomes (Bora, 2023; Padilla et al., 2009). These studies underline the importance of drafting as a critical component of the writing process, suggesting that effective drafting can lead to more proficient and confident writers (Chien & Khan, 2023).

Despite these insights, the application of these findings within the Malaysian educational context remains limited. Many Malaysian students struggle with writing due to a lack of exposure to effective drafting strategies. These studies suggest that insufficient instruction in systematic drafting practices contributes to writing difficulties and hinders students' ability to produce high-quality written work. Employers in Malaysia seek employees with strong writing skills, highlighting the need for improved writing instruction in the education system to meet professional demands.

The current body of research reveals a significant gap in understanding how drafting practices specifically impact writing difficulty among Malaysian students. While global studies provide valuable insights into the benefits of structured drafting, there is a lack of localized research that considers the unique educational, cultural and linguistic factors influencing Malaysian students (Abrar et al., 2023). This gap highlights the need for targeted studies that examine the specific drafting techniques that are most effective for Malaysian students, the role of educators in facilitating effective drafting practices within the Malaysian curriculum and the impact of drafting practices on reducing writing anxiety and improving writing outcomes among Malaysian students. Addressing these areas will provide a clearer understanding of how drafting practices can be optimized to support Malaysian students in overcoming writing difficulties and achieving higher levels of writing proficiency (Sundari & Febriyanti, 2022).

Objective Of The Study And Research Questions

This study is done to explore the perception of learners on their perception of writing difficulties and writing process. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions.

- How do learners perceive writing difficulties?

- How do learners perceive drafting in their writing?
- How do learners perceive planning in their writing?
- How do learners perceive editing in their writing?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing Difficulties

Writing difficulties are a common challenge faced by individuals across various educational levels and professions. These difficulties can manifest in multiple ways including issues with generating ideas, organizing thoughts, maintaining coherence and adhering to proper grammar and syntax. Understanding the root causes and implications of writing difficulties is essential for developing effective strategies to mitigate them. Writing is a complex cognitive task that requires the integration of multiple processes including planning, translating thoughts into text and revising (McCutchen et al., 2009). Cognitive overload can occur when writers are unable to manage these processes simultaneously leading to difficulties in producing coherent and cohesive texts (Graham et al., 2015). Additionally, linguistic factors such as limited vocabulary and poor understanding of grammar can further exacerbate writing difficulties (Graham et al., 2007).

Motivation plays a crucial role in the writing process. Low motivation and negative attitudes toward writing can lead to procrastination and writer's block (Anita & Kardena, 2021; Cahyono & Rahayu, 2020; Wright et al., 2020). Self-efficacy or the belief in one's ability to succeed in writing tasks is also a significant factor; individuals with low self-efficacy are more likely to experience writing anxiety and avoid writing tasks (Bruning et al., 2013). The quality of writing instruction can significantly impact students' writing abilities. Effective writing instruction includes explicit teaching of writing strategies, providing opportunities for practice and giving constructive feedback (Graham et al., 2007). In contrast, inadequate instruction can leave students ill-prepared to tackle complex writing tasks, resulting in persistent writing difficulties.

Various interventions have been proposed to address writing difficulties. These include teaching self-regulation strategies using technology to support writing and implementing collaborative writing activities (Graham et al., 2017). Research indicates that targeted interventions can significantly improve writing performance and reduce writing-related stress (Lane et al., 2008).

Writing Process

The writing process is a multifaceted and recursive activity involving several stages, each critical for producing coherent and effective written texts. Recent studies highlight the dynamic and iterative nature of writing, emphasizing the importance of various stages including planning, drafting, revising and editing (Graham, 2018). Planning the initial stage where writers generate ideas, organize thoughts and outline their content is crucial for structuring writing and ensuring coherence. Explicit instruction in planning strategies has been shown to significantly improve the quality of students' writing (Campbell & Filimon, 2018) and tools like graphic organizers and pre-writing discussions help writers develop a clear roadmap for their tasks. The drafting stage involves translating planned ideas into written text focusing on content generation rather than perfection. Encouraging students to write multiple drafts enhances the quality of their final texts by allowing deeper exploration of ideas and necessary adjustments (Graham, 2018).

Revising and editing are critical stages where writers refine their drafts for clarity, coherence, quality and correct surface-level errors such as grammar, spelling and punctuation. Peer review and self-assessment during revision can provide new perspectives and lead to more substantial improvements (Cho & MacArthur, 2010). Targeted instruction in editing skills and the use of digital tools for grammar and spell-checking can significantly reduce errors (Graham, 2018). The final stage, publishing involves sharing completed work with an audience which can motivate writers by providing a sense of accomplishment (Saulsburry et al., 2015). Recent research underscores the importance of integrating these stages seamlessly with instruction focusing on helping students move fluidly

between planning, drafting, revising and editing to develop a holistic understanding of the writing process and enhance their overall writing proficiency (Graham, 2018).

Past Studies on Writing Difficulties

Recent studies have explored various dimensions of writing difficulties, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of these challenges. One significant area of research has focused on the cognitive processes involved in writing. For example, (Graham et al., 2015) conducted a comprehensive review of writing interventions and found that difficulties often stem from challenges in planning, text generation and revision. These cognitive processes require significant mental resources and when students struggle with any one of these components, their overall writing performance can be severely impacted. Additionally, the role of self-regulation in writing demonstrating that students who lack self-regulatory skills often face greater difficulties in organizing their thoughts and managing their writing tasks efficiently.

Motivational and emotional factors have also been identified as critical contributors to writing difficulties. Previous study has explored how writing self-efficacy influences students' writing performance and found that students with low self-efficacy are more prone to experience writing anxiety which can hinder their ability to write effectively (Bruning et al., 2013).

Study on the impact of writing attitudes have been done and found that negative attitudes towards writing are linked to increased writing difficulties. They argued that fostering positive writing experiences and providing supportive feedback can help mitigate these challenges. Furthermore, digital literacy and the use of technology in writing instruction have been areas of growing interest. According to a study by (Bora, 2023), integrating digital tools in writing instruction can help students overcome certain difficulties by providing interactive and engaging platforms for writing practice.

Past Studies on Writing Process

Recent studies have provided significant insights into the writing process emphasizing its complex and iterative nature. Research by (Graham et al., 2017) highlights the importance of explicit instruction in writing strategies showing that teaching students specific techniques for planning, drafting and revising can lead to substantial improvements in writing quality. Their meta-analysis of writing interventions demonstrated that strategy-focused instruction helps students develop a more structured approach to writing, thereby enhancing their overall writing performance. Result reveal that emphasized the role of self-regulation in writing, noting that students who are taught to set goals, monitor their progress and adjust their strategies accordingly tend to exhibit better writing outcomes.

Another critical area of research has focused on the integration of digital tools in the writing process. Survey have shown that using technology to support writing can facilitate various stages of the writing process from planning to revision (Zhao, 2023; Zhao et al., 2024). They found that digital tools such as graphic organizers and collaborative writing platforms can help students organize their thoughts more effectively and provide immediate feedback thus enhancing their writing skills (Hynninen, 2018; Li et al., 2020). Additionally, research by (Aghaie & Zhang, 2012) explored the impact of peer collaboration on the writing process. Their findings indicate that peer feedback and collaborative writing activities can significantly improve students' writing abilities by fostering a more interactive and engaging learning environment.

Conceptual Framework

Academic writing is considered as an active process that writers go through. This is because the writer goes through process involving thinking to write. According to Rahmat (2020), critical thinking and writing process are related. Writers gained problem solving skills as they write. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. Flower and Hayes (1981) states that the writing process is a thinking process and the process involves planning (task-interpretation, goal-setting), drafting and editing. This study uses the basic cognitive writing framework by Flower and Hayes (1981) to merge with the items by Pedric & Czalr (2003).

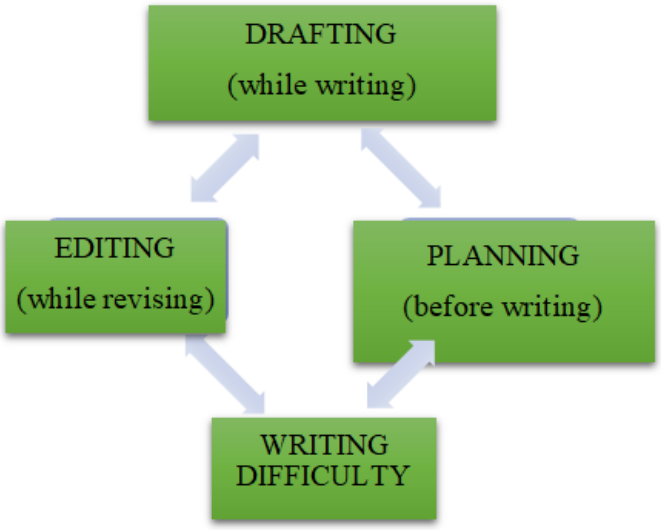

Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the study

Relationship between Drafting with Writing Process and Writing Difficulty

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study is done to explore motivation factors for learning among undergraduates. A purposive sample of 41 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Flower and Hayes (1981) and Pedric & Czalr (2003) to reveal the variables in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECTION	COGNITIVE PROCESS MODEL Flower and Hayes (1981)	WRITING STAGE (Pedric & Czalr, 2003)	NO OF ITEMS
A	Demographic Profile		4
B	Writing Difficulty		6
C	Planning	Before writing	10
D	Translating	While writing	8
E	Editing	When revising	10
Total			**38**

The survey consists of five sections, each designed to gather specific types of information from the participants. Section A contains four items that collect basic demographic information. These data points help contextualize the responses and allow for demographic analysis of motivation factors. Section B includes six items that assess the participants' perceived difficulties in writing, aiming to identify the specific challenges that undergraduates face when engaging in academic writing. Section C comprises ten items focused on the planning stage of writing, investigating how participants prepare for writing tasks, including brainstorming, outlining and organizing their thoughts before beginning to write. Section D examines the actual writing process with eight items that delve into how students translate their ideas. Finally, Section E contains ten items addressing the revision and editing stage, looking at how participants review and refine their written work, focusing on error correction, clarity and overall improvement of the text. Data were collected through an online survey platform to ensure ease of access and convenience for the participants.

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Table 2: Reliability of Instrument

Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
0.840	38

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .840, thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument chosen/used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

FINDINGS

Findings for Demographic Profile

Table 3: Percentage for Gender

1	Male	64%
2	Female	24%

The gender distribution of the study's participants reveals a significant disparity between male and female respondents. As indicated in Table 3, males constitute 64% of the sample, while females represent 24%. This notable difference in gender representation could have implications for the study's outcomes and interpretations.

Table 4: Percentage for Course

1	Science	0%
2	Engineering	100%

The study's participants are exclusively from engineering programs as shown in Table 4, providing a focused and in-depth understanding of motivation factors within this specific field. This homogeneous sample allows for detailed insights into the unique trends and challenges faced by engineering students potentially leading to targeted strategies and interventions to enhance their learning experiences.

Table 5: Percentage for English Proficiency

1	Weak	5%
2	Average	83%
3	Good	12%

The English proficiency distribution among the participants as shown in Table 5 indicates that the majority, 83% rate their proficiency as average. A smaller segment, 12% consider their proficiency to be good, while 5% rate themselves as weak. This distribution suggests that most participants have a functional command of English, which is crucial for understanding and engaging with academic content. The presence of students with good proficiency highlights a subset with potentially stronger language skills which could positively impact their academic performance.

Table 6: Percentage for SPM

1	A-B	61%
2	C-D	39%
3	E-F	0%

Table 6 tabulated the distribution of SPM results among participants shows that 61% achieved grades A to B, while 39% attained grades C to D. Notably, no participants received grades E to F. This distribution suggests a predominantly high level of academic achievement among the sample with a majority securing relatively strong SPM results. Such results indicate a baseline of academic proficiency that may influence their motivation and approach to learning at the undergraduate level.

Findings for Writing Difficulties

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do learners perceive writing difficulties? Table 7 presents the mean scores for various aspects of writing difficulty based on participant responses. Across the surveyed aspects, participants generally perceive several common challenges. Notably, they find writing difficult due to unfamiliarity with different types of writing (mean = 2.9) and the complexity of setting goals for essay writing (mean = 2.9). Additionally, unclear teacher instructions (mean = 2.4) and explanations (mean = 2.4) contribute significantly to perceived writing difficulties. Participants also struggle due to insufficient background knowledge (mean = 2.8) and the challenge of organizing content within individual paragraphs (mean = 2.7). These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of writing difficulties perceived by learners highlighting specific areas where educational interventions and support mechanisms could enhance writing proficiency and confidence among undergraduates.

Table 7: Mean for WRITING DIFFICULTY

	Mean
Rhetorical situation WDQ1I find writing difficult because I am not familiar with different types of writing.	2.9
Goal setting WDQ2 I find writing difficult because the goal for the essay writing is sometimes hard to achieve.	2.9
Teaching instruction WDQ3 The teacher's instruction on what to do is sometimes not clear and that makes the essay writing difficult.	2.4
Teacher explanation WDQ4 Sometimes the teacher's explanation makes me feel that writing is difficult.	2.4
Long term memory WDQ5 Writing essays is difficult because I do not have background knowledge of the topic given	2.8
Individual paragraph WDQ6 Writing essays is difficult because I have to know what to write in each paragraph.	2.7

Findings for Drafting/When Writing

This section addresses research question 2: How do learners perceive drafting in their writing? Table 8 presents the mean scores for various aspects of drafting and writing processes based on participant responses. Participants generally exhibit structured drafting behaviours, such as consistently starting with the introduction (mean = 4.3) and stopping after a few sentences or a paragraph to cover one idea (mean = 3.9). They also frequently engage in rereading their own writing to generate ideas for continuation (mean = 3.5) and occasionally make changes to their outline during the drafting process (mean = 3.0). Interestingly, participants occasionally write in their native language and translate it into English (mean = 3.0), reflecting a strategy to overcome language barriers. Confidence in grammar and vocabulary (mean = 3.6) and strategies like simplifying thoughts when unsure of English expressions (mean = 3.2) are also evident. These findings highlight diverse drafting strategies used by learners, emphasizing the importance of understanding individual approaches to optimize writing support and educational interventions.

Table 8: Mean for -WHEN WRITING (WW)

	Mean
WWQ1 I start with the introduction.	4.3
WWQ 2 I stop after each sentence to read it again.	3.6
WWQ 3 I stop after a few sentences or a whole paragraph, covering one idea.	3.9
WWQ 4 I reread what I have written to get ideas to continue.	3.5
WWQ 5 I go back to my outline and make changes in it.	3
WWQ 6 I write bits of the text in my native language and then translate them in English.	3
WWQ 7 I am very confident with my grammar and vocabulary.	3.6
WWQ 8 I simply what I want to write if I don't know how to express my thoughts in English.	3.2
WWQ 9 If I don't know a word in English, I write it in my native language and later try to find an appropriate English word.	3.8
WWQ 10 If I don't' know a word in English, I find similar English word that I know.	3.3

Findings for Planning (Before Writing)

This section addresses research question 3: How do learners perceive planning in their writing? Table 9 presents the mean scores for various aspects of planning before writing based on participant responses. Participants exhibit a range of planning behaviours with a moderate tendency to revise assignment requirements before starting (mean = 3.2) and to look at models written by proficient writers (mean = 3.6). Many participants also think about what they want to write and form a mental plan (mean = 3.4) while some make notes and short lists related to the topic (mean = 3.5). Writing an outline of the paper is also common (mean = 3.3) though the use of written schedules or timetables for the writing process is less frequent (mean = 2.7). Some participants start writing without a written or mental plan (mean = 2.7) or use their native language for initial notes and outlines (mean = 3.0). These findings suggest that while many learners engage in some form of planning, the extent and methods vary highlighting the need for targeted instruction on effective planning strategies to enhance writing outcomes.

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Table 9: Mean for -BEFORE WRITING (BW)

	Mean
BWQ 1 I make a timetable/schedule for the writing process.	2.7
BWQ 2 Before I start writing, I revise the requirements of the assignment.	3.2
BWQ 3 I look at a model written by a proficient writer.	3.6
BWQ 4 I start writing without a written or mental plan.	2.7
BWQ 5 I think about what I want to write and have a plan in my mind but not on paper.	3.4
BWQ 6 I note I down words and short notes related to the topic.	3.5
BWQ 7 I write an outline of my paper.	3.3
BWQ 8 I write notes or an outline in my native language.	3

Findings for Editing/When Revising

This section addresses research question 3: How do learners perceive editing in their writing? Table 10 presents the mean scores for various aspects of the revising process based on participant responses. Participants demonstrate diverse revising behaviours with a notable tendency to focus on specific elements one at a time (mean = 3.7) and make content or idea changes (mean = 3.4). Some prefer to read what they have written only after completing the whole paper (mean = 3.3) and a fair number of use dictionaries (mean = 3.1) and make vocabulary changes (mean = 3.1) during revision. Structural changes to sentences and essays are also made (mean = 3.0 for essay structure) and a subset of participants may even start afresh with a new draft (mean = 3.0). However, reading essays aloud (mean = 2.5) and handing in papers without rereading (mean = 2.7) are fewer common practices.

Table 10: Mean for-WHEN REVISING (WR)

	Mean
WRQ1 I read my essay aloud.	2.5
WRQ 2 I only read what I have written when I have finished the whole paper.	3.3
WRQ 3 When I have written my paper, I hand it in without reading it.	2.7
WRQ 4 I use a dictionary when revising.	3.1
WRQ 5 I make changes in vocabulary.	3.1
WRQ 6 I make changes in sentence structure.	3
WRQ7 I make changes in the structure of the essay.	3
WRQ 8 I make changes in the content or ideas.	3.4
WRQ 9 I focus on one thing at a time when revising (eg. content, structure).	3.7
WRQ10 I drop my first draft and start writing again.	3

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings and Discussions

This study sheds light on the writing processes and difficulties of engineering students highlighting key areas for targeted educational interventions. The gender with 64% males and 24% females could influence the outcomes, as might the predominantly average English proficiency and high academic achievement of the participants. Key writing difficulties include unfamiliarity with various writing types, goal-setting challenges, unclear instructions and insufficient background knowledge. These issues suggest a need for focused support to enhance writing proficiency and confidence. In terms of drafting, students demonstrate structured behaviours like starting with the introduction and rereading their work with some using their native language to draft. Planning practices vary with many revising requirements and looking at models but fewer using written schedules. Effective planning instruction could improve writing outcomes. Editing practices show a focus on specific elements and content changes though reading essays aloud and final reviews are less common. Enhancing these editing strategies could further support student writing.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study highlight several pedagogical implications for enhancing the writing proficiency of engineering students. Educators should design targeted writing support programs focusing on unfamiliar writing styles and effective goal-setting techniques to address the significant writing difficulties identified. Clear communication and comprehensive instructional materials are essential to mitigate issues arising from unclear teacher instructions and insufficient background knowledge. Integrating language support into the curriculum through language enhancement courses, writing centres and peer tutoring can help students with weaker English proficiency. Additionally, teaching effective drafting and planning strategies including creating detailed outlines and systematic approaches to writing along with encouraging reflective practices such as reading work aloud and thorough revisions can improve the quality of student writing.

Future research should build on these findings to further explore and address the writing challenges faced by engineering students. Longitudinal studies tracking writing development over time can provide insights into the long-term effectiveness of various pedagogical interventions. Comparative studies across different disciplines can reveal unique writing challenges and strengths helping design discipline-specific support programs. Investigating the impact of technological tools on writing processes and outcomes could guide the integration of effective technological aids into instruction. Researching the role of peer feedback and collaborative writing activities can offer practical strategies for educators while examining cultural and linguistic factors can lead to more inclusive and effective writing support. Furthermore, future research should consider the psychological aspects of writing such as anxiety and motivation to develop interventions that address these factors. Understanding how to alleviate writing anxiety and enhance motivation can significantly improve students' writing experiences and outcomes.

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