

Assessing English writing of South Indian native Tamil students: The mediocre level requires strategic implications

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Abstract

The study assesses the English writing level of South Indian native Tamil language post-graduate students. The paper highlights the impact of native language sources in English writing and discusses the strategic implications. The study framed an English writing test instrument applying Bloom's Taxonomy to assess the level of writing. Quantitatively, 300 randomly sampled written transcriptions were taken for analysis. Qualitatively, a structured one-to-one interview was conducted among 27 language instructors, and 127 transcripts were observed to highlight the usage of native language sources, which resulted in poor writing. It assessed the students' level in L2 writing as mediocre, which was explained by 74% of the sampled responses. It found that the interference of native language in English writing made students make more mistakes in the order of words, subject-verb agreement, usage of tenses, and application of grammar rules. Further, it discussed the strategic implications for improvement as - a) repetitive incremental practice – teaching structures, tenses, and grammar rules of native and target language, b) conversational instruction – sharing differences in native and target languages, sharing of mistakes and errors, and c) timely feedback – a part of follow up mechanism for assessment.

Key words: English writing level, Tamil language, native language interference, Tamilnadu, ESL

Introduction

Writing is a cognitive process that requires consistent efforts to excel in all other language skills, such as listening, speaking, and reading. Practising listening and speaking skills with special importance will likely result in excellent written outputs. Writing is comprehensive, expressive, and communicative. It requires continuous conscious effort, a vigorous framework, and regular practice (Nawal, 2018). Writing skills require using language appropriately and strategically, including showing a certain degree of structural accuracy and communicative potential. The learning process of higher education should motivate students to excel in their specialities with creativity focusing on the research essence. The learning process includes sharing knowledge and information, acquiring skills, and developing students comprehensively to become specialists in their subjects. Arkhangelskyi (1980) believed that improving students' language knowledge and skills is an educational activity and professional enrichment. Korzh (2017) stated that students gain information and become aware of their self-improvement when they practice English language skills.

Literature review

Writing is the finest language-learned outcome behaviour of any language-learning process. This requires the cognitive ability to be skilled in Listening, Speaking, and Reading (LSR). Becoming proficient in writing expresses and reveals to the learners how they learned, acquired, and familiarized with that language. It requires more cognitive effort with continuous, complete deliberation. Dixon and Nessel (1983) highlighted in their study that becoming proficient in writing is more complex than LSR. The learners face many challenges in becoming proficient in writing, for example, learning vocabulary, meaning words, sentence formation, using phrases with explicit expressions, applying grammar rules, and responding to situations. Many factors influence the learners, such as using native language sources, assessments and follow-up methods, regular practice of skills, instructional techniques, classroom and family environment, and socio-cultural environment. Among all the factors, the learners face the challenge of using native language sources in English writing. This is due to a lack of practice, proper assessment, and motivational support.

Native language sources in English writing become a burden

English language learners are exposed to English as a second language. He practices the second language as what and how he learned his native language. The learner applies the first language pattern, grammar, syntactical

structure, words, spellings, sounds, and letters. It would automatically and cognitively enhance ESL learning. In their experiments, Ghenghesh et al. (2011) found that the facilitating role of native language encourages ESL learners. They discussed the importance of the native language as an intermediate process to know how the concepts and ideas are expressed in English, motivating the learners to think in English. At the same time, this state of learning practice can occur for a certain amount of time until becoming proficient in all areas of LSRW skills is cognitively intense. Then, it has to be avoided. They suggest avoiding native language references in L2 thinking (Nawal, 2018, pp.389-392). ESL learners face the challenge of the influence of L1 skills. For instance, in the Arabic medium learner context, the variations of the native language and English in semantic syntactical structures impede the learners' progress in writing skills (Derakhshan & Karimi, 2015, p. 2114). Sasaki and Hirose (1996) discussed the clumsiness and errors that occur due to the interference of native language sources in the unnecessary translation process. The existing earlier studies of Beare (2000) and Beare and Bourdages (2007) generate strategies of L1 and L2, confirming the translation complexities and cognitive load, while L2 writing impedes the writing process, thus resulting in clumsiness in the written output (c.f. Schoonen et al., 2003).

Cognitive inability to access L2 sources

In ESL writing, applying Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) reasonably explains the load burden in whole writing development. Due to the translation process in L2 writing, the learners cannot access the resources in working memory. They cannot process the words, spellings, meanings, grammar, and sentence format information. This cognitive failure occurs when accessing L1 resources and translating them to L2. The human memory model of Atkinson and Shiffrin states that the learners' working memory receives their sensory inputs (Young et al., 2014). It organizes what it accepts as structure and format information. Then, that becomes inputs to infinite long-term memory. Miller (1956, pp. 85-87) identified that the working memory can hold 7+/- 2 items for only 30 seconds at any time. Over time, the organized specific schemas with repeated experiences become more complex. Then, there is a retrieval process that happens to get back the language structure. This process becomes a bottleneck for learning.

Need for change in instructional methods

The rationale of the cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988, pp. 269-271) is that the instruction designs impose cognitive load on learners' limited working memory and that the cognitive load, in turn, influences learning outcomes (Genc and Gulozer, 2013). Fraser et al. (2015) and Twigg et al. (2020) suggested the methods to reduce cognitive burden as a) explaining complex concepts through simple ones for instance explaining tenses and grammar rules, b) showing the components of a task instead of showing the whole for instance teaching the essay writing through comprehensive paragraph writings, c) gradually building up the learning environment – by using real-time situations and examples, d) expecting multiple answers for specific tasks – assignment writing practice using different topics, e) demonstrating the task performance – how to frame sentences and how to write comprehensive essays and letters, f) keeping keen attention on the practice of structures – showing and focusing the various differences of native and target languages, g) adopting visual and auditory modes – for explaining spellings and pronunciation, h) providing tasks that show theme variation – assignments, project reports preparation, i) adopting continuous task performance to use a variety of skills, and equipping them for self-explanation – role plays and drama acting.

English language learning of native Tamil students

They study English as a subject, not as a language. They study in regional language schools lacking English language development facilities, efficient curricula, proper instructional designs, and evaluation mechanisms (Prashana & Pramela, 2021). They are taught English using the bilingual and grammar-translation method, where most of the time in learning the translations occurs. This kind of teaching and learning practice continues till university education. Even at the college and university level, the students do not become proficient in L2 skills, notably speaking and writing. They become incompetent in terms of fluency. From school education to college education, English skills are taught from an examination-oriented point of view, focusing on remembering and understanding levels, not focusing on higher levels like creating and evaluating. Rural and semi-urban environments are not conducive to effective L2 learning and practice (Geetha, 2017). The inability to speak and write in English is increasingly found among students living in rural and semi-urban areas. They are not encouraged, and then they leave L2 language practice. This is continuously happening in the workplace as well. This approach to L2 learning affects learners' academic and career prospects (Maniam, 2010). The students naturally learn L1. But they unnaturally learn English. They learn only through classroom teaching. The combination of vocabulary, orthography, complex spelling systems, pronunciation rules, and studying the origin of English words hardly challenges them to become proficient in L2.

Thus, the present study highlights ESL writing learning using native language sources that affect L2 writing proficiency. The study plans to assess the level of English writing using evidence from native Tamil language students

learning ESL. Tamil is one of the Indian regional classical languages spoken worldwide by around 100 million people. Tamil language students have realized the importance of English as the yardstick for global employability. They study English from their school education to their university education. They have learned that they cannot survive in any field of work or profession without English language skills. But they find it difficult to get proficient in English. They are challenged with limited vocabulary, complexities in grammar, syntactical structure, insufficient exposure to the efficient use of English, and a lack of native English speakers' exposure (Geetha, 2017).

Objectives

1. Assessing English writing of South Indian Tamil language post-graduate students by using an English writing test instrument applying Bloom's Taxonomy
2. Bringing out the supportive strategic implications for improving the English writing level

Hypotheses

H1: English writing of Tamil students stands at different levels, such as high, medium, and low.

H2: Native Tamil language sources in English writing were observed in test performance.

H3: A significant difference was identified among the students in English writing across taxonomy levels.

Methodology

The study used 300 sample responses from native Tamil language post-graduate students learning English as a second language. They were pursuing post-graduate courses at a renowned university in the south part of Tamilnadu state, India. They were selected after completing English language course training in the post-graduation first semester period. To assess the English writing of the respondents, the rest of the instrument question paper was framed using Bloom's taxonomy.

Assessment procedure

For the quantitative assessment, test performance scores were calculated for 100 marks, and the levels were fixed as high, medium, and low using test mean scores. For qualitative assessment, spelling, vocabulary usage, sentence format, tenses, the format of letters, essay titles, paragraphs in essays, and expression of words were observed and evaluated.

Data collection

a) Test performance of 300 sample responses out of 418 responses (72% response rate) was used for quantitative assessment. The remaining 28% of responses were omitted due to incomplete responses. The framed test question paper was distributed through language instructors who conducted the test in their respective departments and collected back the responses from them. 1 hour and 30 minutes were allotted for writing the test.

b) 27 university-level language teacher experts were interviewed one-on-one for qualitative assessment. During an interview, the ESL measures spelling, usage of words, sentence structure, grammar rules, descriptive writing ability, usage of real-time examples, usage of phrases, and narrating ability were placed before them. The repetitively used measures were considered for qualitative assessment and test instrument setting. The expert informants suggested the Taxonomy cognitive levels for setting test instruments. They validated it as well. Accordingly, spelling, word usage, and sentence pattern were grouped into remembering, understanding, and application Taxonomy levels and grammar rules, sentence format, descriptive writing ability, usage of real-time examples, following essay and letter formats were grouped into analyzing, evaluating, and creating Taxonomy levels. Further, the randomly selected 127 responses (written transcripts) out of 300 were qualitatively observed and assessed using content analysis.

Test instrument

English writing test instrument was framed to test whether the learners can remember spellings and words, whether they understand the meaning of words, whether they are applying words in different sentences in different situations, whether they are analyzing the meanings of the words with spellings in different situations, whether they are evaluating to write different types of essays descriptive on given topics in different situations, and whether they are creating formal and informal letters on a given topic of different situations. The instrument comprised the Items/questions 1 to 16 was framed using closed-ended objective questions, i.e. finding out the missing letters of the given words, finding out the meaning of words, matching the words with meanings, writing sentences using given words, and matching words with given sentences and 17 to 20 questions were framed using open-ended descriptive questions, i.e. essay writing and letter writing. Twenty marks are allotted for each remembering, understanding, analyzing, and applying level (1-16 questions), and 10 are allotted for each evaluating and creating level (17 – 20 questions).

Reliability & Validity statistics – Internal consistency reliability co-efficient value ($\alpha = 0.917$) of the English writing testing instrument (20 items including Taxonomy levels Remembering four items, understanding – 4 items,

Applying – 4 items, Analyzing – 4 items, Evaluating – 2 items, and Creating – 2 items) ($M=60.48$, $SD=210.866$, $V=14.521$) show high internal reliability with coefficient alphas above 0.80.

Table 1. Reliability & validity of taxonomy levels of English writing

Taxonomy levels of English writing	M	SD	Alpha (α)	REM	UND	APP	ANA	EVA	CRE
Remembering (REM)	4.14	.514	.883	1					
Understanding (UND)	3.47	.822	.858	.207***	1				
Application (APP)	2.64	1.19	.828	.475***	.673***	1			
Analyzing (ANA)	2.70	.985	.834	.284***	.629***	.744***	1		
Evaluating (EVA)	2.14	1.013	.823	.425***	.477***	.668***	.645***	1	
Creating (CRE)	2.19	1.043	.850	.403***	.368***	.497***	.529***	.829***	1

Note:***sig. $p < .001$

Average variance extract ($AVE=0.639$) and composite reliability ($CR=0.912$) of the factor English writing ($M=17.29$, $SD=19.827$, $V=4.453$, $\alpha=.870$), and KMO measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity value = 0.779, $\chi^2=1086.006$, $Df=15$, $p\text{-value} < .05$ confirmed the validity of the factor English writing. The correlation coefficient value of taxonomy levels also confirmed the validity. It evidenced the consistent positive relationship of taxonomy levels of learning writing with medium to high co-efficient values ranging from 0.207 to 0.829. It proved the interdependent relationship between the levels.

Demographic frequency - 238 (79.3%) respondents are 20 yrs of age, 41 (14%) respondents are 21 yrs of age and 21 (7%) respondents are 22 yrs of age. The respondents are an average of 20.28 years of age whose writing performance was assessed with different levels of marks scored in the English writing assessment test. One hundred sixty-nine respondents are male, and 131 respondents are female. The number of respondents from rural, semi-urban, and urban areas is equal (100 respondents). The respondents living in a native Tamil language (L1) speaking family environment are 243 (81%), mostly from rural and semi-urban areas, and the respondents living in English (L2) language-speaking family environment are 57(19%), mostly from urban areas.

Results & discussion

The study aimed to assess the English writing levels of South Indian native Tamil students. It quantitatively assessed the levels using test mean scores and mean differences fixed them as high, medium, and low. It also qualitatively assessed the levels by observing the native language sources in test performance. It discussed the results below.

Test score frequency for the levels assessed

One hundred thirty-eight students (46%) had a low level of 22 – 60 scores ($M= 47.72$), then the rest of 84 students (28%) had a medium level of 61-71 scores ($M= 64.40$), and 78 students (26%) had high-level of 72- 92 scores ($M=78.85$) ($N=300$). The rural and semi-urban students (222 students, 74%) struggled to get high-level scores in all the taxonomy levels.

H1: English writing of Tamil students stands at different levels as high, medium, and low

Table I shows the test score frequency of rural, semi-urban, and urban Tamil students distributed across Taxonomy components at different levels. This proved the hypothesis that the English writing level of Tamil students stands at various levels: high, medium and low. The extensive distribution of test score frequency fell in medium and low levels across the components, evidenced by the inability of rural and semi-urban students in easy level of complex components of taxonomy, i.e. they are unable to remember the letters and sounds of words, lack of understanding the meaning of words, and unable to apply the words in sentences.

Table 2: Level of English writing of Tamil students

Taxonomy levels	Rural (N=100)		Semi-Urban N=100)		Urban (N=100)	
	Frequency	Levels	Frequency	Levels	Frequency	Levels
Remembering	52	Low	34	Medium	48	High
Understanding	42	Low	50	Medium	56	High
Applying	50	Low	39	Medium	45	High
Analyzing	68	Low	34	Medium	37	High
Evaluating	65	Low	42	Medium	56	High
Creating	70	Low	47	Medium	63	High
Levels of scores	Low (22-60 Scores) $M=47.72$		Medium (61-71 Scores) $M=64.40$		High (72-92 Scores) $M=78.85$	

H2: Native Tamil language sources in English writing were observed in test performance

Using native language sources in English writing was observed when the test written transcriptions were scrutinized. The identified mistakes and their frequency exhibited in Table II show almost (79%) of 100 out of 127 written transcriptions were full of mistakes and errors. This proved the hypothesis that Tamil students frequently use L1 sources and their pattern in English writing. This confirmed that the students faced the challenge of translating L1 sources into L2 writing and struggled to transfer the structure, pattern, and grammar rules of both languages, and they got perplexed. Undoubtedly, this results in a load in memory and leads to poor writing outcomes. Further, the native language style of narration and native language way of responding to situations, improper usage of phrases, inappropriate usage of the salutation 'respected sir' instead of 'sir', confusion in using complimentary words 'Yours faithfully' and 'Yours sincerely' in letter writing were observed. This emphasizes the need for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to practice directly using L2 sources in writing.

Table 3: Frequency of Identified mistakes in written transcriptions

Identified mistakes	Rural (N=47)		Semi-urban (N=40)		Urban (N=40)		Total (N=127)	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
Word order (syntax)	36	76.5	34	85	25	62.5	95	74.8
Subject-verb agreement	40	85.1	31	77.5	19	47.5	90	71
Tenses	38	80.8	35	87.5	27	67.5	100	78.7
Pronoun usage	34	72.3	34	85	26	65	94	74
Salutation in letter writing	30	63.8	32	80	19	47.5	81	63.7

F - Frequency, P - Percentage

H3: Significant difference among the students in English writing across taxonomy levels was identified

A statistically significant difference between student groups was observed in English writing levels across all taxonomy components. The rural and semi-urban students were identified as low performers. MANOVA statistics evidenced the difference explained by eta squared values with a large effect size (23%) of the locality. The significant difference in manageable difficulty levels of taxonomy components like remembering and understanding levels was explained by the small effect size of locality (4%-7%). It also exhibited a significant difference in high levels of difficulty of taxonomy components like applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating, which was explained by the large effect size of locality (10% to 52%).

Table 4. Difference in locality groups across taxonomy levels

Competence Levels	Rural		Semi-Urban		Urban		Df	F	η_p^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Remembering	3.94	.618	4.21	.396	4.28	.445	2,297	12.580***	.070
Understanding	3.25	.893	3.49	.749	3.67	.770	2,297	6.681***	.043
Application	2.06	1.364	2.83	.962	3.04	.980	2,297	21.398***	.126
Analyzing	2.27	1.038	2.82	.885	3.02	.877	2,297	16.918***	.102
Evaluation	1.27	.833	2.46	.749	2.70	.819	2,297	90.651***	.379
Creating	1.14	.891	2.59	.580	2.83	.679	2,297	158.036***	.516

Note: ***sig. $p < .001$

Overall, MANOVA statistics evidenced the significant difference in L2 writing with a large effect size explained by locality (23%) - Rural ($M=2.55$, $SD=.667$), Semi-Urban ($M=3.17$, $SD=.600$) and Urban ($M=3.35$, $SD=.652$), $F(2, 297) = 43.781$, $p\text{-value} < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .228$. Post hoc analysis Tukey HSD test statistics showed the rural students significantly differed from the other two groups across all the Taxonomy levels. Further, the identified difference showed the direct relationship of locality with the L2 writing competence of learners.

First, discussing the study results, the assessed mediocre English writing level proved that native Tamil students actively learn and practice English writing. The study assumed a higher level of English writing but evidenced the mediocre level explained by 74% of sampled responses. This mediocre level may result from difficulties in writing, such as the recollection of words, understanding meanings of words, application of words in sentences, etc., as well as complexities and confusion in applying grammar rules, structure, pattern, etc. This difficulty and confusion are happening in the transfer process in writing. The transfer process using L1 sources in L2 writing may be called L1 interference (Hanafi, 2014). Of course, it may support L2 writing. However, learning and relearning did not occur during transfer as learning occurred in L1 (Cummins, 1984). Numerous authors (Prashana & Pramila, 2021; Maniam, 2010; Maniam & Kesavan, 2016; Kumar et al., 2014; Geetha, 2017) found the usage of native Tamil language sources

in English writing, resulting poor writing outcomes. They discussed using L1 sources during the transfer process in L2 writing. They argued that the transfer process is quite often happening and supports students. This may be an unintentional practice. Further, their study evidenced the differences between L1 and L2 in structure, pattern, grammar rules, and tenses, which makes students more complicated and confused. Their study discussed that both languages differ in their word order, verb agreement with the subject, tenses, and pronoun usage. Tamil has an 'Object Subject Verb' pattern. English has a 'Subject Verb Object' pattern. Tamil uses three tenses: present, past, and future, whereas English uses twelve tenses and pronoun forms. They learn the surface structural components of L2 and practice them. Then, they encounter complexities in applying L2 structural components and poorly selected structures that significantly affect the textual content (Fareed et al., 2016).

Secondly, the assessed level of writing across taxonomy components shows that students are well-versed in learning and practising the easy level of difficulty. Still, they are lagging in a high difficulty level in areas like analyzing, evaluating, and creating. This state across taxonomy levels may result from insufficient involvement in writing practice, adequate instructions and feedback focusing on writing skill improvement, lack of proper assessments, lack of facilities and sources apart from the classroom, exam-oriented approach for L2 learning, giving much more importance for teaching subjects.

Thirdly, the identified significant differences in the assessed English writing level across taxonomy levels show that urban students get more opportunities for second language exposure than rural and semi-urban students. They study in well-established schools and colleges, which tend to create a conducive second language learning environment in classrooms and encourage the learning environment in the family as well. However, rural and semi-urban students study in regional schools and colleges, which do not have resources for creating a learning environment. They do not use the sources for second language acquisition if they have the sources.

Thus, the study results detailed the assessed level of English writing of Tamil students and the reasons for the mediocre level across taxonomy levels. It highlighted the usage of native language sources in English writing, showed the differences in levels among students, and detailed the reasons. Further, it emphasizes the need for strategic implications for writing improvement in the following section.

Implications

The study empirically evidenced the English writing proficiency level of native Tamil post-graduate students. Well, performance in taxonomy levels of remembering and understanding was observed, and poor performance in the other levels of analyzing, applying, evaluating, and creating was observed. This observation shows the students face notable challenges like the collection of words, understanding the meaning of words, usage of phrases, sentence structure forming, and complexities in grammar. In general, while we think of L2 writing learning and teaching, age, locality, and family environment may be the key factors that require attitudinal motivation and application-oriented regular practice. Further, the study emphasizes instructional support and, at the same time, stresses the individual involvement of students in learning language skills.

Strategic implications for writing improvement

Special attention to writing improvement of rural and semi-urban students - scheduling ESL learning with stipulated time intervals for regular practice, agenda for practising both receptive and productive skills, providing exposure to native English speakers or well-trained English speakers, and encouraging them to give equal importance to learning language skills and learning of subjects.

Interactional and feedback mechanism with the pragmatic approach – sharing of mistakes and errors during the transfer of native Tamil language pattern to the English language, discussing the differences in native and target languages that may enhance internal second language thinking capacity improvement and selective attention practice (Moss & Ross-Feldman, 2003).

Incremental step-by-step practice for rural and semi-urban students – This may help the students to absorb the materials better. Practising fewer points at once supports the learners, for example, practising a grammar rule with many examples, practising descriptive writing, and demonstrating how to write assignments and articles (Nadri et al., 2019).

Emphasizing the need for repetitive practice - the mediocre English writing proficiency of Tamil students emphasizes the need for repetitive practice in areas like structure, pattern (syntax) of sentences, verb agreements with subjects, usage of pronouns, tenses, and formats of essays and letters. Repeated practice over time for each taxonomy's difficult levels enables the learners to retain what they learned. De Keyser (2007) and Hagen (2020) suggested repeated practice and methods like role-playing, games, stories, personalized practice, and fun fluency techniques. Hinkel (2015) suggested spaced repetition techniques at specific intervals for teaching and learning participles and their forms, tenses, gerunds, vocabulary learning, prepositions, and grammar structures.

Expectations of course curriculum giving importance to - the essential aspects of writing (spellings, phrases, vocabulary, structure, pattern, tenses) and the pedagogical practices may give (Nalliveetil & Mahasneh, 2017) more attention to improving the levels of creative and evaluative skills rather than focusing on just remembering and understanding levels.

Understanding the need for cognitive ability, burden, and failure in learning L2 skills – Instructors may frame their instructions to break the explanations into more manageable chunks that may support reducing the burden in the transfer of L1 to L2 (Hagen, 2020). Cognitive load instructional theory (Sweller, 1988) recommends a design for education programs for English writing teaching (Twigg et al., 2020). It suggests strategies to manage cognitive failure that are a) Planning lessons according to the existing knowledge and skill of learners, using worked examples to teach content, b) Eliminating inessential information (Swell et al., 2019), presenting essential information together and simplifying complex information by presenting orally or visually, and c) Encouraging students to visualize concepts and procedures they have learned (CESE, 2019).

Individual involvement and self-assessment in L2 learning - Learning is all about individual orientation, individual ability, inner process, and motivation. Notably, language skill learning is individual-centric. The study findings emphasize the importance of self-learning & motivation and self-assessment. For self-learning ESL writing, there are studies suggesting methods/ implications, like the practice of writing notes and short sentences, using known words and known vocabularies, following simple grammar rules, and the practice of describing something. In assessing language skills, apart from instructors and teachers, students themselves, their peers, friends, and subject matter experts (Lockwood, 2015).

Finally, in ESL classrooms of Tamil post-graduate university students, L2 writing learning should foster regular practice for accessing L2 sources by creating situations for students to think in L2. Proper evaluation methods and interactive feedback mechanisms concerning learners' English language improvement will significantly enhance the high writing outcomes, not just for examination.

Conclusion

The assessed mediocre English writing of native Tamil post-graduate students indicates the need for more attention to practising all the taxonomy levels of writing. The only choice of classroom ESL learning requires improvement in instructional designs and practices. The observed spelling mistakes, improper usage of sentence structure, tenses usage, confusion in grammar rules, and native language pattern in essay and letter writing evidenced the native language sources usage in English writing. This emphasized the need for instructional support to practice the direct use of English language sources rather than native ones. Besides, while considering the English writing level of rural and semi-urban students, the study emphasizes following a bottom-up approach to teaching and learning English writing for excellent written outcomes. For example, spelling of words, the contextual fit of words, paragraph writing, title framing, ending part of essays, letter format, and style expression. In addition, the study found that rural and semi-urban students lag in English writing compared to urban students. They want a conducive learning environment with family support for attitudinal motivation and instructional support as instructional designs for regular practice, assessment, and feedback.

Declaration of conflict of interest

I/we, the authors, declare no potential conflicts of interest concerning this article's research, authorship, and/or publication.

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