Linguistic, Cognitive, and Environmental Barriers to English Paragraph Writing: A Mixed-Methods Study of Indonesian EFL Students

Nur Syamsiah[1*]
Agus Muhamad Bintang[2]

[1,2] [1]English Education Study Program, Tarbiyah and Teacher Training Faculty of Raden Intan State Islamic University, Lampung

Abstract

Writing English paragraphs remains a significant challenge for many EFL students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung, a public Islamic university characterized by diverse linguistic and academic backgrounds. This study investigated the linguistic, cognitive, and environmental barriers to English paragraph writing through a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected via questionnaires from 60 students, complemented by semi-structured interviews with 10 participants for qualitative insights. Results showed that linguistic difficulties, especially vocabulary limitations (78%) and grammar issues (65%), were the most prevalent obstacles. Cognitive challenges such as idea generation (48%) and paragraph organization (42%) also considerably affected students' writing performance. Additionally, 25% of students identified environmental factors noisy classrooms and limited writing time as disruptive influences. Interview data revealed that vocabulary problems stemmed from minimal English exposure and ineffective learning strategies, while grammar struggles were linked to heavy reliance on L1 translation, influenced by students' religious education. These findings align with Swain's Output Hypothesis, emphasizing the role of active language production in writing development. By addressing gaps in Indonesian EFL research, this study highlights the complex, overlapping barriers faced by students in Islamic university settings and recommends integrated instructional approaches alongside future research on long-term, context-specific interventions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a fundamental skill in English language learning, yet it remains one of the most challenging areas for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at the tertiary level. Among various writing tasks, paragraph writing functions as the essential foundation for developing more advanced academic genres such as essays and reports. As Hyland (2019) emphasizes, the ability to construct coherent and well-structured paragraphs is critical for academic success and professional communication. In Indonesian tertiary settings like UIN Raden Intan Lampung, these challenges are often exacerbated by limited English exposure, curriculum constraints, and varying levels of language proficiency among students.

At UIN Raden Intan Lampung, a public Islamic university, paragraph writing is a core component of the English Education Study Program. However, anecdotal evidence from lecturers and preliminary classroom observations indicates that many students struggle with paragraph development. These struggles manifest in linguistic issues such as limited vocabulary and weak grammar mastery, as well as cognitive difficulties including disorganized ideas, poor planning, and writing anxiety. Richards and Renandya (2002) argue that such writing difficulties stem not only from linguistic limitations but also from cognitive and affective factors that require contextual analysis.

Previous research in the Indonesian EFL context has addressed some of these barriers, yet most studies have been limited to either quantitative analyses of test scores or qualitative reflections on student experiences. For example, Al-Buainain (2009) highlighted coherence issues due to inadequate writing practice, and Bulqiyah et al. (2021) explored the role of L1 interference in shaping paragraph structure. Unlike these studies, this research employs a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) to integrate quantitative trends with qualitative insights, providing a more holistic understanding of the challenge's students face.

In addition to linguistic and cognitive barriers, environmental and institutional factors also shape writing outcomes. Teaching practices that prioritize teacher-centered feedback may limit student autonomy, while peer feedback proven to enhance critical thinking is often underutilized (Guo, H., & Li, D., 2024). Moreover, students frequently lack metacognitive strategies such as planning and revision, which are crucial for improving writing quality. Although digital tools can support vocabulary acquisition and grammar awareness, their implementation in writing instruction remains uneven due to limited digital infrastructure and pedagogical integration.

Building on Nation's (2009) framework of context-sensitive language instruction, this study examines the linguistic, cognitive, and environmental barriers to English paragraph writing experienced by students in the English Education Study Program at UIN Raden Intan Lampung. By combining statistical patterns with in-depth student narratives, the study aims to fill existing gaps in the literature and offer evidence-based recommendations for improving paragraph writing instruction in similar Indonesian EFL settings.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Barriers in EFL Paragraph Writing

Writing is widely recognized as one of the most complex skills in second language acquisition, particularly for learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Paragraph writing, in particular, serves as a foundation for broader academic writing tasks and demands a combination of linguistic knowledge and discourse competence. As Hyland (2019) notes, effective paragraph writing requires coherence, unity, appropriate transitions, and the ability to logically organize ideas skills many learners struggle to master due to limited exposure to authentic texts and constrained classroom practice.

Linguistic challenges such as limited vocabulary, grammatical weaknesses, and problems in organizing ideas are commonly reported by EFL learners in Indonesia (Bulqiyah et al., 2018; Yuliawati, 2021). These issues are often compounded by negative transfer from the first language (L1), especially when students rely heavily on Bahasa Indonesia structures in composing English texts. Richards and Renandya (2002)

emphasize that writing is not merely about expressing ideas but also involves cognitive processes such as problem-solving, planning, and rhetorical decision-making. However, difficulties in paragraph writing are not solely linguistic. Cognitive and metacognitive factors, such as limited idea generation, lack of planning strategies, and ineffective revision habits, play a significant role. Al-Buainain (2009) found that students who fail to plan or revise tend to produce disorganized and underdeveloped paragraphs. These cognitive shortcomings are often intensified by affective barriers like writing anxiety, low confidence, and fear of negative evaluation especially in EFL settings where English is rarely used outside the classroom (Putra & Fatimah, 2020).

At the pedagogical level, instructors' approaches to teaching and feedback are critical. Teacher-centered feedback, which focuses mainly on grammar correction, may limit students' ability to reflect critically and improve content-level issues. In contrast, peer feedback has been shown to encourage student autonomy, foster revision strategies, and improve text coherence (Guo, H., & Li, D, 2024). Despite its benefits, peer feedback remains underutilized in many Indonesian classrooms. Additionally, metacognitive strategies such as goal-setting, drafting, and self-monitoring are rarely emphasized in writing instruction, leaving students with minimal tools for independent improvement.

Environmental factors, including institutional limitations, large class sizes, and time constraints, also affect learners' writing outcomes. Nation (2009) stresses the importance of understanding how such contextual dynamics influence learners' engagement with writing. At institutions like UIN Raden Intan Lampung, curriculum structure, religious discourse patterns, and students' limited digital access all shape the way paragraph writing is taught and learned. While digital tools such as Grammarly or QuillBot offer potential support for vocabulary and grammar learning, their integration into writing pedagogy remains inconsistent due to varied levels of digital literacy and institutional readiness. However, limited research has taken a comprehensive approach to these challenges. Most existing studies address either the linguistic aspects or student perceptions in isolation. A mixed-methods approach, as advocated by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), is especially well-suited to this context because it allows researchers to capture both observable error patterns

and students' lived experiences. In the context of UIN Raden Intan Lampung, where linguistic, cognitive, and environmental factors interact in unique ways, combining quantitative and qualitative methods offers a richer and more contextualized understanding of students' writing difficulties.

2.2. Previous Studies

A number of previous studies have investigated the challenges EFL students face in academic writing, particularly in paragraph development. These studies consistently report recurring issues in grammar, vocabulary, idea organization, and textual coherence. For example, Darus and Subramaniam (2009) examined common writing errors among Malaysian secondary school students and found frequent problems with subject-verb agreement, incorrect article usage, and weak paragraph structure. Their findings reflect similar patterns observed among Indonesian EFL learners, including those at UIN Raden Intan Lampung, where students often struggle with linguistic accuracy and structural cohesion. In the Indonesian higher education context, Bulqiyah et al. (2018) conducted a study at a university in Banda Aceh and found that students encountered difficulties in organizing ideas, applying correct grammar, and maintaining coherence within their paragraphs. The study also emphasized that ineffective feedback practices and the absence of strategic writing instruction exacerbated these issues. This is particularly relevant to the current study, as similar challenges regarding limited individualized feedback and lack of revision strategies have been observed in Lampung classrooms.

In contrast, Alfaki (2015) investigated university-level EFL writing in Sudan and found that students' difficulties stemmed largely from poor writing habits and inadequate instruction in paragraph development. While the findings are broadly similar, Indonesian students often face additional institutional constraints, such as rigid curricular structures, L1 interference from Bahasa Indonesia, and limited exposure to English outside the classroom factors that distinguish their learning environment from that of Sudanese students. Psychological dimensions of writing difficulties have also been addressed in the literature. Guo, H., & Li, D (2024), in her study of Indonesian university students, explored the roles of writing anxiety and self-efficacy. Her findings suggest that affective

factors such as fear of negative evaluation and low confidence significantly impede students' writing performance. These insights are pedagogically important, as they indicate the need for anxiety-reduction strategies an area often overlooked in writing instruction at UIN Raden Intan Lampung, where emotional support and self-regulation techniques remain underemphasized.

Despite the breadth of research in EFL writing, many existing studies have relied on either quantitative methods (e.g., surveys of error frequency) or qualitative approaches (e.g., interviews on learner perceptions). However, few have adopted a mixed-methods design to examine both linguistic and affective barriers simultaneously within the same institutional and cultural setting. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) assert, mixed-methods research offers a more robust and nuanced understanding by integrating numerical trends with participants' lived experiences. Thus, the present study seeks to fill this methodological and contextual gap by applying a mixed-methods approach to investigate English paragraph writing barriers among students in the English Education Study Program at UIN Raden Intan Lampung. By combining quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews, this study not only identifies common writing problems but also explores the underlying cognitive, affective, and environmental factors contributing to them. This comprehensive approach provides deeper insight into the complex realities of EFL writing instruction in Islamic university settings and offers practical implications for improving pedagogical practices.

3. METHODS

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-method design to investigate the linguistic, cognitive, and environmental barriers faced by Indonesian EFL students in writing English paragraphs. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) explain, this design involves the simultaneous collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, which are analyzed separately and then integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. This design was chosen to explore both the frequency of common writing challenges and the underlying student experiences, particularly within the unique socio-educational context of UIN Raden Intan Lampung.

3.1. Participants and Sampling

The participants were undergraduate students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at UIN Raden Intan Lampung. A total of 60 students were selected purposively for the quantitative phase, based on their active enrollment in a writing course during the academic year. This sample size was considered sufficient for identifying general patterns in student-reported writing barriers, consistent with similar small-scale EFL studies, and adequate to detect meaningful trends with basic descriptive statistics. For the qualitative phase, 10 participants were selected purposively from the same pool using maximum variation sampling, ensuring representation across a range of writing proficiencies, academic achievements, and demographic backgrounds. These participants overlapped with the survey respondents, allowing for a richer triangulation of findings. Prior to data collection, all participants were fully informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, and gave their voluntary consent. Ethical considerations, including confidentiality and anonymity, were strictly maintained throughout, particularly in handling the audio-recorded interviews, which were stored securely and transcribed without identifying information.

3.2. Instruments and Data Collection

Two instruments were used: a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, both designed to align with the three central domains of the study: linguistic, cognitive-affective, and environmental barriers.

The questionnaire included both closed- and open-ended items and covered five dimensions:
a. Vocabulary (e.g., "I often struggle to find the right words when writing a paragraph."),
b. Grammar (e.g., "I frequently make errors in sentence structure or verb tense."),
c. Coherence and Organization (e.g., "I can logically connect my ideas in a paragraph."),
d. Affective factors (e.g., "I feel anxious when asked to write in English."),
e. Environmental factors (e.g., "Time limits and noisy classrooms affect my writing concentration.").

The instrument was validated by two language education experts for content relevance and clarity. A pilot test was conducted with five students to ensure item reliability and comprehensibility. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to probe deeper into students' personal experiences with paragraph writing. Sample prompts included:

a. "Can you describe how classroom conditions affect your writing focus?"
b. "What steps do you usually take before and after writing a paragraph?"
c. "How does feedback from your teacher or peers influence your revision process?"

The interviews also explored metacognitive strategies such as planning, drafting, and revising, as well as emotional responses like fear of failure or frustration with grammar. Data were collected over four weeks. The questionnaire was administered online via Google Forms, with one week allotted for responses. Based on the results, 10 students were invited for face-to-face interviews, each lasting approximately 30–45 minutes and conducted with participants' consent.

3.3. Data Analysis and Integration

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics via SPSS to identify the most prevalent barriers reported by students across the five domains. Frequencies and percentages were used to highlight dominant trends. Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, which involved six stages: familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, definition, and reporting. Emerging themes included cognitive overload, fear of making grammatical errors, and the influence of classroom noise or tight deadlines on performance. To integrate the quantitative and qualitative findings, a side-by-side comparison approach was used. For example, statistical trends from the questionnaire (e.g., high frequency of anxiety-related barriers) were triangulated with student narratives expressing fear of being judged or losing confidence. This integration enriched the understanding of how certain barriers manifested both quantitatively (as patterns) and qualitatively (as personal experiences), thus enhancing the study's explanatory depth.

4. RESULTS

This section presents the findings from both the quantitative questionnaire and qualitative interviews, following a convergent mixed-methods structure. The integration of numerical data with personal narratives offers a holistic view of the linguistic, cognitive, and environmental barriers faced by EFL students in paragraph writing.

4.1. Quantitative Findings from the Questionnaire

The questionnaire, administered to 60 students in the English Education Study Program at UIN Raden Intan Lampung, covered five dimensions of writing difficulties: vocabulary, grammar, idea generation, paragraph organization, and environmental factors. Table 1 summarizes the frequencies of student responses.

Table 4.1.
Reported Difficulties in Paragraph Writing

Type of Difficulty	Percentage
Vocabulary limitations	78%
Grammar confusion	65%
Difficulty generating ideas	48%
Paragraph organization issues	42%
Environmental factors (noise, time)	25%

The data revealed that the most frequently cited barriers were vocabulary limitations (78%) and grammar difficulties (65%), indicating strong linguistic challenges. Nearly half of the participants also noted difficulty in generating ideas (48%), a cognitive concern, followed by problems in organizing paragraphs coherently (42%). External factors, such as noisy classrooms and time pressure, were reported by a smaller portion of students (25%), yet remain significant for a quarter of the sample.

Open-ended responses elaborated on these points, with students noting issues such as:

- "I know what I want to say in Indonesian, but I don't know the English words."
- "I often get confused between tenses, and that makes me lose confidence."
- "Sometimes I don't have any ideas, especially when the topic is abstract."

4.2. Qualitative Findings from the Interviews

The follow-up semi-structured interviews with 10 selected students provided deeper insights into the barriers uncovered in the questionnaire. Thematic analysis revealed three overarching themes: linguistic challenges, cognitive-affective difficulties, and environmental constraints.

a. **Linguistic Challenges**: Vocabulary and Grammar

Most students reported struggling to find precise vocabulary to express their thoughts. A participant stated:

"I have the ideas in my head, but it's hard to say them in English because I don't know the right words."

Grammar also emerged as a major concern, particularly verb tenses and article usage. Students expressed anxiety about making grammatical mistakes, which often led them to simplify their ideas or avoid writing altogether.

b. **Cognitive-Affective Barriers**: Idea Generation and Confidence

Students described difficulties in organizing their thoughts, especially when topics were unfamiliar or too broad:

> "If the topic is too general, I don't know where to start. I need more guidance or examples."
>
> Additionally, writing anxiety and fear of negative evaluation were frequently mentioned. One student shared:
>
> "I always feel nervous when the teacher will read my writing. I'm afraid it's full of mistakes."

This emotional burden often affected students' ability to write fluently and confidently.

c. Environmental Factors: Noisy Classrooms and Time Constraints

Several students pointed out distractions in the classroom environment, such as background noise or peer conversations, which made it hard to concentrate. Time pressure during in-class writing tasks was another recurring issue:

> "Sometimes I have good ideas, but I can't finish them because the time is too short, and I panic."

4.3. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The integration of findings shows strong alignment between statistical trends and personal narratives. For example:

a. The high percentage of vocabulary and grammar issues in the survey corresponds with student statements about struggling to translate thoughts and apply grammar rules accurately.

b. The 48% reporting difficulty generating ideas is supported by interview comments on cognitive overload and topic unfamiliarity.

c. Though only 25% of survey participants mentioned environmental issues, the interviews revealed that these factors—while less frequent—have substantial impact on students' focus and performance.

This triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data supports the conclusion that paragraph writing difficulties are multi-dimensional, and influenced not only by students' linguistic competence but also by emotional resilience and learning environment conditions.

4.3. Result from the Semi-Structured Interviews

To enrich and contextualize the quantitative findings, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with eight students from two different writing classes. Six participants (Respondents 1a–1f) came from one class, while two (Respondents 2a and 2b) came from another. This diversity enabled exploration of how students' writing barriers are shaped not only by individual factors but also by their learning environment and academic experiences.

a. Vocabulary

Most participants (e.g., Respondents 1a, 1c, 1d, 1f) reported that limited vocabulary hindered their ability to express ideas clearly and precisely. They often repeated basic words or relied on vague phrasing due to a lack of lexical alternatives.

"Sometimes I just use the same words over and over again because I don't know others," said Respondent 1f.

This issue reflects a lexical resource gap, which is common among EFL learners in contexts where English exposure outside the classroom is limited. Students' dependence on a narrow vocabulary range also aligns with interlanguage theory, in which learners develop a transitional linguistic system constrained by limited input and practice.

b. Grammar

Several students (e.g., Respondents 1a, 1b, 1c, 1f) identified grammar, particularly verb tenses, word order, and sentence structure, as a persistent barrier. This often led to a lack of confidence in writing and a tendency to oversimplify ideas.

> "Even if I have ideas, I'm afraid to write them because I might use the wrong tense," noted Respondent 1b.

Such experiences illustrate the cognitive-affective interplay between linguistic competence and anxiety. Difficulty in grammar use increased students' fear of making mistakes, leading to writing apprehension, which in turn reduced their willingness to take risks or elaborate their points.

c. Idea Generation

Respondent 1e mentioned difficulty generating ideas, especially in response to open-ended prompts. The student admitted relying heavily on existing texts or translating ideas from Indonesian into English.

> "I feel lost without an example. I usually just translate from Indonesian."

This reliance on translation reflects a code-switching strategy (Macaro, 2005) that, while helpful in early stages of writing, may limit creative thinking and fluency. It also reflects sociocultural influences, where students' L1 thinking shapes their L2 production. The struggle to generate original content may also stem from topic unfamiliarity or limited exposure to diverse reading materials.

d. Paragraph Organization

Respondents 2a and 2b highlighted difficulties in structuring paragraphs, including writing clear topic sentences, narrowing ideas, and connecting supporting details logically.

> "I don't know how to connect the sentences. It's hard to make the ideas flow," said Respondent 2b.

These difficulties may reflect a lack of explicit instruction in paragraph development or insufficient practice in cohesion and coherence strategies, both of which are essential in academic writing.

e. Environmental Factors

Although only 25% of students identified environmental barriers in the questionnaire, the interviews helped explain these findings. For instance, Respondent 1b stated:

> "I can't focus when classmates chat. The room is noisy and it's hard to think."

Time constraints also emerged as a significant barrier, especially during in-class writing tasks. These responses underscore how external stressors, such as classroom noise and time pressure, amplify internal anxieties and affect cognitive processing during writing.

    f.   Influence of Contextual and Religious Norms

While not directly stated by participants, observations during interviews suggested that Islamic university norms may indirectly shape students' writing habits. For instance, gender dynamics were visible in group interactions, where female students reported feeling shy or hesitant to share ideas publicly possibly impacting their writing fluency and risk-taking. Additionally, values such as humility and politeness may affect students' confidence in expressing strong opinions, which are often expected in argumentative or expository writing.

4.4. Synthesis of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

The interviews clarify and deepen the findings from the questionnaire, particularly regarding linguistic and environmental barriers. For example, while 25% of students identified external noise in the survey, the interviews reveal how this barrier interacts with emotional stress:

> "I already feel nervous, and when it's noisy, I can't even start writing," said Respondent 1b.

Similarly, grammar-related anxiety, reported by 65% of survey participants, was echoed in students' emotional responses during interviews. The combination of low proficiency, perceived high expectations, and fear of making mistakes resulted in cognitive overload and self-doubt.

These findings demonstrate that writing difficulties among Indonesian EFL students are multi-layered, involving:

    a.   Linguistic issues (limited vocabulary, grammar confusion),

    b.   Cognitive and affective struggles (idea generation, confidence, anxiety),

    c.   Environmental and contextual constraints (noise, time pressure, sociocultural norms).

By integrating statistical trends with student narratives, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the barriers to paragraph

writing in this setting, fulfilling the aim of the convergent mixed-methods design.

5. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to identify the linguistic, cognitive, and environmental barriers faced by EFL students in writing English paragraphs using a convergent mixed-methods approach. By integrating quantitative findings from questionnaires with qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews, the study offers a comprehensive and contextualized account of students' challenges in real classroom settings. Quantitative data revealed that the most commonly reported barriers included vocabulary limitations (78%), grammar confusion (65%), difficulty generating ideas (48%), paragraph organization issues (42%), and environmental constraints such as noise and time pressure (25%). These findings were further validated and expanded through interview data, which illuminated how these issues interconnect and impact students' writing performance on a practical level.

This study fills a notable gap in Indonesian EFL research, particularly in Islamic university contexts, by triangulating lexical, cognitive, and contextual data. Previous studies (e.g., Dhuli, R., Lamo, P., & Larsari, V. N. (2023) have largely relied on either single-skill assessments or broad surveys, often neglecting the nuanced classroom realities students face. In contrast, this study provides context-rich, actionable insights specific to a religiously oriented learning environment (UIN Raden Intan Lampung), where both the language of instruction and cultural context shape learners' cognitive and linguistic strategies. One of the key contributions of this study is its emphasis on the interplay between internal and external barriers. Students who struggled with grammar often also expressed anxiety and reluctance to write freely, suggesting that linguistic competence is closely tied to emotional and motivational factors. Similarly, difficulties with paragraph organization were frequently linked to a lack of exposure to effective writing models and limited feedback, underscoring the need for instructional scaffolding.

Another notable finding is the prevalence of L1 translation habits, particularly among students who preferred composing their drafts in Bahasa Indonesia before translating into English. While this strategy was used to compensate for vocabulary gaps, it often led to disorganized

structures and awkward phrasing. This phenomenon likely reflects L1-dominant thinking patterns shaped by religiously oriented education systems, where Arabic and Bahasa Indonesia are prevalent in academic discourse. From a sociocultural perspective, this suggests that learners' writing development is strongly influenced by their institutional and linguistic environments (Vygotsky, 1978), and that successful L2 writing instruction must acknowledge these contextual realities.

Environmental challenges, though less frequently mentioned in surveys, emerged as significant disruptors during interviews. Noisy classrooms and limited time created additional stress, particularly for students who already experienced anxiety around writing tasks. One participant noted, *"I already feel nervous, and when it's noisy, I can't even start writing."* This supports Nation's (2009) assertion that a calm and supportive environment is critical for successful language production. The mixed-methods design proved instrumental in uncovering these hidden stressors, which may otherwise be underreported in quantitative-only studies.

Then, the study suggests the need for holistic instructional interventions that address linguistic, cognitive, and environmental factors:

a. Vocabulary enrichment through thematic word lists, synonym banks, and usage-based tasks to enhance lexical variety and idea expression.

b. Grammar-focused instruction targeting common errors (e.g., verb tense consistency, sentence structure), combined with confidence-building activities to reduce fear of mistakes.

c. Collaborative writing and peer-review sessions to develop awareness of paragraph structure and coherence, fostering reflective and metacognitive skills.

d. Guided idea-generation activities, including brainstorming scaffolds and structured prompts, to support students in initiating and organizing content.

e. Institutional support, such as classroom noise-reduction policies and time allocations for drafting and revising, to create a more conducive writing environment.

While the study provides meaningful insights, its sample size (60 students from one Islamic university) limits the generalizability of findings. Additionally, while interviews yielded rich data, a broader and

more diverse qualitative sample would offer a deeper understanding of how sociocultural and religious factors influence writing development. Future research could replicate this mixed-methods design across multiple institutions, including both secular and Islamic universities, to explore whether similar patterns emerge. Comparative studies between different regions or educational settings could further illuminate how institutional culture and language policy shape writing practices. Moreover, longitudinal studies may examine the impact of targeted instructional interventions on students' writing progress over time.

In conclusion, this study confirms that barriers to English paragraph writing among Indonesian EFL learners are multidimensional, involving an intricate interaction between linguistic limitations, cognitive strategies, and environmental influences. By shedding light on these dynamics within an Islamic university context, the study offers both theoretical contributions and practical guidance for improving L2 writing instruction in similar educational environments.

6.   CONCLUSSION

This study investigated the primary barriers faced by EFL students in writing English paragraphs at UIN Raden Intan Lampung, an Islamic university context that remains underexplored in current EFL research. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study provided a nuanced understanding of how linguistic, cognitive, and environmental factors intersect to affect student writing performance. Findings revealed that vocabulary limitations were the most frequently reported challenge, experienced by 78% of participants. Grammar difficulties followed closely at 65%, often undermining student confidence and contributing to writing anxiety. Idea generation was also problematic for 48% of students, particularly in response to open-ended prompts lacking adequate scaffolding. Furthermore, 42% reported difficulty in structuring coherent paragraphs, while 25% identified external environmental factor such as noisy classrooms and limited time as obstacles to writing fluency.

This study's mixed-methods design directly addressed a methodological and contextual gap in Indonesian EFL research. While earlier studies largely relied on isolated skill assessments or broad surveys, this research integrated quantitative and qualitative data to uncover how writing challenges are amplified by the sociocultural and institutional context of a religiously oriented university. Specifically, the findings show how L1 translation habits, limited exposure to English

writing models, and contextual stressors create a complex set of barriers that hinder paragraph writing development. To address these issues, the study recommends a comprehensive instructional response, including vocabulary enrichment, targeted grammar instruction, idea generation techniques, and improvements to the physical learning environment. These interventions must be aligned with the linguistic realities and sociocultural backgrounds of learners to be truly effective.

Future research should consider longitudinal studies that evaluate the impact of sustained interventions such as vocabulary scaffolding, peer feedback cycles, or contextualized writing instruction within Islamic EFL settings. Comparative studies across secular and faith-based institutions could also shed light on how institutional environments shape students' writing behavior and learning needs. In sum, this study not only highlights the multifaceted nature of paragraph writing difficulties among Indonesian EFL learners but also underscores the importance of context-sensitive pedagogy and methodologically rich inquiry in advancing writing instruction.

REFERENCES

Al-Buainain, H. (2009). Student writing errors in EFL: A case study. Alexandria Engineering Journal Volume: 19,(Part: 1):311-351. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/310796956_Students_Writing_Errors_in_EFL_A_Case_Study

Alfaki, I. M. (2015). University students' English writing problems: Diagnosis and remedy. International Journal of English Language Teaching Vol.3, No.3, pp.40-52, May 2015. https://surl.lu/ctzcwu

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Dhuli, R., Lamo, P., & Larsari, V. N. (2023). An Analysis of the Significance of Vocabulary in Fostering ESL/EFL Students' Writing Skills: An Empirical Study. *International Journal of Contemporary Studies in Education (IJ-CSE), 2*(1). https://doi.org/10.56855/ijcse.v2i1.252

Darus, S., & Subramaniam, K. (2009). Error Analysis of the Written Essays of Secondary School Students in Malaysia: A Case Study. European

Journal of Social Sciences, 8, 483-495. https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2020.105038

Guo, H., & Li, D. (2024). The Effect of Electronic Portfolio-Based Writing Instruction on the Second Language Writing Performance and Writing Self-Efficacy of EFL Learners: A Mixed Methods Study. *SAGE Open*, *14*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241257697

Hyland, K. (2003). *Second language writing*. Cambridge University Press.

Hyland, K. (2019). *Second language writing* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Bulqiyah, S. Mahbub, M.A. & Nugraheni, D.A. (2021). Investigating writing difficulties in essay writing: Tertiary students' perspectives. English Language Teaching Educational Journal, 4(1), 61-73. http://dx.doi.org/10.12928/eltej.v4i1.2371

Yuliawati, L (2021). The Effects of Vocabulary and Grammar Mastery on Students' Writing Skill. Journal of English Language Learning (JELL), Vol. 5 No 2, 113-118. https://doi.org/10.31949/jell.v5i2.3450

Nation, I. S. P. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL reading and writing*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203891643

Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (Eds.). (2002). *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice*. Cambridge University Press.