

PAKISTANI UNDERGRADUATE ESL LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THEIR DIFFICULTIES IN ESL WRITING

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Abstract

Errorless writing has been a phenomenon in the ESL context because writing is a difficult and challengeable task, especially for Pakistani ESL learners. They face such difficulties in writings due to a lack of knowledge, and skills. These difficulties and challenges are influenced due to certain reasons such as lack of prior knowledge, concertation, insufficient skills, untrained teachers, poor strategies of teaching, inappropriate methodologies, and lack of practice in this regard. This study attempts to investigate the perceptions of Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners regarding the difficulties they face in ESL writing. Using a survey questionnaire, the data for this study was collected from 279 Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners from two public and two private sector universities in Pakistan using the convenience sampling technique. The results revealed that the Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners faced several difficulties in ESL writing including lack of appropriate vocabulary, making meaningful sentences, finding the exact expressions, correct usage of active/passive voice and conditional sentences, and coherence and cohesion. The findings have important implications for ESL teachers, trainers and material developers.

Keywords. ESL writing, challenging, perceptions, undergraduate, difficulties, implications and techniques.

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INTRODUCTION

The English language is taught in Pakistan as a subject however when it comes to the academic context, it becomes very painful for ESL learners especially the writing part (Nunan, 1999). Students always have problems in acquiring the four skills mainly listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among them writing skill becomes a phenomenon for ESL learners because they do not give proper attention to it right from the beginning and when they reach to university level, they face the same issues (Alroaia, 2020; Aghagolzadeh, 2015; Davari, 2018; Fareed & Bilal, 2016).

The English language is widely used around the globe. According to Crystal (2003) the term Lingua Franca means a way of communication while having the medium of English among different speakers and having different languages. Huge usage of the English language has been observed among the non-natives as compared to the natives of the English around the globe. In most cases, the language has been defined as the language of contact between those whose mother tongue is different on both sides.

For both the speakers, the language is a foreign language & a second language of communication. That means that on the international level the language unites two cross-cultured speakers on the same page (Firth, 1996). English is a lingua franca and also called the World Englishes because of its usage widely around the globe. Although there are many languages but yet due to certain factors the language has taken the place (Crystal 2003; Gnutzmann 1999). The language has been divided into three circles respectively. The first is the Inner circle, the second is the Outer circle and the third one is the Expanding Circle (Kachru, 1992).

English is used for international communication on the mass level among those who are from different backgrounds therefore, based on Kachru's model the language has been divided into three circles. Though the language is used as the bridge between diverse communities internationally. Thus, the term lingua franca is preferred and also called English as an international language. English is being practiced excessively among the non-native speakers as compared to the natives (Jankins, 2000).

The English language is the medium of instruction and one of the most influential languages in most parts of the world. In English mainly the skills a person learns are listening, speaking, reading, and writing respectively. According to Inyega (2007) among the mentioned four skills, the writing skill is considered to be the most difficult and avoidable part as far as adopting the language (English) is concerned because most of the time the students do not focus on writing that much like the other three skills. To take the case in the Pakistani context, the Pakistani ESL learners face a lot of problems, especially in writing skills. To acquire a second language (English)

uplifts the lifestyle of people in the society and that is true because we know that English plays a vital role in our society especially in career development (Cook, 2001).

The English language is used in Pakistan in different contexts. Almost all the institutions give value to the English language and claim that whosoever understands and acquires the language has a bright future and that is obvious because this is the dilemma of our society that if someone knows English only as a language people praise and if a person cannot perform well in the language, people do not prefer them even if he/she is a degree holder.

In this regard the future of the English language is bright but there are certain issues about the proper learning of English in Pakistan especially about the writing skill for ESL learners. To acquire and master any language, we need to know the fundamentals of that language very well. As discussed above that all four parts are important, we need to focus equally all but among them writing part is crucial because it requires full attention otherwise the learners will face the music if not acquired adequately (Miller, 2007).

There is a very diverse system in Pakistan, although English enjoys a bright future here however everyone does not have such an environment to acquire the language adequately. There are certain reasons we need to understand. The system of Pakistani educational institutions is not equal and there is a majority of ESL learners who face difficulties even when they reach the advanced level (Elkhath, 1983). Writing becomes a crucial part for them and they commit very minor mistakes in this regard because writing is a productive skill, therefore needs immense attention (Hughes, 1996).

Those students who are coming from any elite schooling system & standard schools have fewer issues as compared to those who are passing out from the middle and lower standard schooling system (Rahman, 2005). That is the reason when they reach a higher level yet they confront the issues because writing is a very complex part and the learners require to be very active physically as well as cognitively (Mercer, 2004). Further, writing is also a difficult part for all the learners but especially for Pakistani ESL learners because of their cultural and lingual differences. As for the Western and Eastern are concerned, they are different in many aspects in acquiring the language and that is the reason they are far better in this regard (Wen, 2006).

According to Wahid (2020) the common issues of ESL learners in Pakistan are grammatical errors such as sentence structure, appropriate vocabulary, word order, punctuations, and spelling. Moreover, another important issue is that when they tend to write in English first they think in their L1 (Urdu) then translate into English and after this start writing. Therefore, most of the time they do blunders while

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translating the sentences from their mother tongue to English, that is why it becomes very vague for them and even impossible to make such an acceptable piece of writing because every language has its own rules and regulations one cannot translate verbatim into another language (Devias, 2003).

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Writing is considered to be one of the most important skills among the four skills. The four skills are the major focus as for as the teaching & learning of ESL is concerned (Harmer, 2007). It is observed that comparatively the writing part carries weight and since it is a productive skill, therefore, requires great attention to be given when it comes to obtaining it. Thus, writing if is being taught not merely as a product but rather is more about a process. It is an exploration of what we already know and feel about the language we know (Murray, 1972).

According to Byrne (1988) it is not simply to jot down some words, sentences, or merging the sentences to a sort of text but rather is a complex skill that requires high attention to be given. It includes various components, such as grammar, text, syntax & sentence structure, vocabulary, word order, coherence & cohesion, and clarity of the sense and meaning.

Writing skill has a magnificent role in an ESL setting, it expresses different schools of thought, literature, philosophy, and pearls of wisdom in this regard. When a language is learned especially English language, students realize the significance of the writing skills but at the same time, they also feel the traumatic situation because clarity in meaning, grammar, word order, and sentence coherence & cohesion is not easy therefore it has to be given the attention so that the readers can get the message what the writer wants to convey (Hogue, 1991).

There are various aspects of writing skills that have to be understood to produce good writing skills because writing is a problem-solving activity, where a writer approaches the task of writing as a problem and takes intellectual means to solve it. It is very significant for a writer to be very explicit because it is the writing which decides the level & standard of a writer. Therefore, the intellectual level of a writer can be assessed from his/her written work (Hyland, 2015).

The major four skills of the English language are very important in terms of mastering the language therefore, a learner needs to give full attention to the language (Miller, 2007). The major four skills of English are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The two skills (speaking and writing) are mainly called productive skills in which the learners need to be very active while learning particularly these both skills. As the skill of writing is produced in comparison to other skills; listening, speaking, and reading although reading is also productive but not that much difficult as the writing skill is (Rummel, 2005; Mubagna, 2010).

There are many issues that the L2 students face particularly about writing skills (Khan, 2015). In this regards Wahid (2020) points out that there could be many reasons for such hurdles that the L2 students confront, such as cultural & ethnic differences which are one of the major issues because the context in education varies from country to country and region to region that is the topmost problem that the students face while learning the language especially the writing skill.

Facing issues in writing skills can also be due to social reasons. In this regard, the attitude of the L2 learners plays a vital role because if their behavior is not positive there will be no interest and ultimately their motivation level will be down (Kellogg, 2001). A positive attitude towards learning about the targeted language (English) is very productive and can be useful (Studley, 2002).

This is the way to be proficient in the targeted language because if the students have the social and parental support and socially they are persuaded, they can achieve the goal and can be succeeded in learning the targeted language even at the initial level they can face difficulties but once they are motivated they can easily overcome and can be competitive in this regard (Myles, 2012).

Derakhshan (2020) investigated the most common issues and errors about writing skills in the EFL context. The study was conducted to know the perceptions of the EFL Iranian students about these issues and obstacles in writing. The author collected the data from 120 students of EFL from the Golestan University of Iran. In the procedure for the collection of the data, the researchers used a valid and reliable instrument (questionnaire). The researchers also took the semi-structured interview (N=24) of students in the university.

The researchers concluded that the participants admitted that to teach the language especially the punctuations and grammar they need to be taught in the context and there is a dire need for the four skills to be integrated simultaneously because to teach the language effectively and productively we need to focus on the four skills at the same time. Further, they stressed that EFL teachers should focus on using punctuation when it comes to writing skills.

They agreed that the students can learn the vocab and spelling more appropriately if the teachers use a proper strategy like memorization they can use mnemonics, etc. Those who participated as the interviewees expressed their views that if we write in any other language especially if we learn English as a foreign language it becomes a very challengeable task for us because we need to focus on certain things related to grammar; such as sentence order, structure, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuations, etc. For the EFL students, these are the most challenging things in the writing part.

Finally, the researchers concluded while presenting their findings that the students' perceptions are vivid and indicated that the teachers who teach the English

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language should be very focused on the spelling, the punctuations, and the order of the sentences and should make the students understand adequately about the context. They also suggested some useful tools, for the teachers to teach effectively.

Beiki (2020) explored that the writing task is challengeable especially for EFL students in Iran. The author conducted a study about cooperative learning that how the students can learn while having a group and cooperate. The study was conducted to know the perceptions of Iranian EFL teachers about instructional practices and cooperative learning. In the study, 30 teachers of the English language participated as the participants from Islamic Azad University in Tehran. The authors used a mixed-method while using a stratified random sampling technique. The main objectives of the study were to know the perceptions of Iranian EFL Teachers about cooperative learning and instruction practices.

While using the triangulation method, they used the required techniques to collect the data appropriately. For the collection of the data the instrument they used was a reliable questionnaire to know the perceptions of the teachers. Thirty teachers were selected while using the semi-structured interview techniques to get the data, especially about the writing skills. Primarily the authors collected the data through observation of the class and taking the semi-structured interviews.

The researchers concluded that the teachers who were the participants of the study urged that in the writing class there should be a cooperative practice environment so that the students can learn effectively and overcome their flows in the writing skills. After doing the study successfully the researchers argued that the teachers can teach the writing skill very effectively in the classroom. The authors also suggested that the study can be done in similar contexts in the future as well. Due to limited resources and restrictions, the study was done in a particular area only.

Rahimi (2019) explored the gap between research, practice, and theory in the correctness of the feedback. To talk about the problem the author aimed to fill up the gap while comparing the impact of comprehensive vs. focused and also the revision to improve the writing skills of ESL students in the light of quality and accuracy. This was done to focus on the grammar errors; the syntax, the structures, words, and sentences, etc. The author obtained the data from 78 ESL students of twelve standards whose mother tongue was French. Both the gender; 50 females and 28 males participated while having the age 22 on average who were admitted to a university in Canada.

The students were divided into the groups of comprehensive vs. focused groups to check the differences. These four groups were treated differently; primarily 2 groups got comprehensive written corrective feedback, and the second two got focused corrective feedback. Among them, both taking one from each were assigned to revise

the task of writing while the remaining were not required to do so. While doing this the author used certain tests to check the differences. This comparison was based on taking a writing course for the seven essays they wrote in 15 weeks.

The author concluded that the focused groups showed high performances as compared to the groups of comprehensive students to reduce the errors made in the essays. The author stated that there was no major difference found after using the one-way ANOVA test. However, the outcomes vividly declared that the group of focused students improved a lot the quality of writing. The study aimed to check whether the changes bring improvement and clarity in the writing skills and also the study's objective was to know that how written corrective feedback for comprehensive group and focused group is useful especially for the ESL students in terms of accuracy and quality of writing skill and how they can reduce these errors.

The researcher stated that the current study covered only a particular area due to certain limitations and restrictions. The other researchers can explore the topic further in the future.

Al-Khasawneh (2013) studied the common issues and weaknesses of ESL learners about writing at the University of Taibah Saudi Arabia. The researchers collected the data from male students of 10 pre-year of the university. The procedure for this study was qualitative while having taken semi-structured interviews. The main purpose of the study was to identify the reasons behind the writing skills of the students in the university. After conducting the study the researchers found that there are some key factors behind these common errors and weaknesses like the less usage of the grammar properly, understanding and knowledge about the grammar, personal interest, and background of the students about the education, etc.

There are many other factors discovered by the researchers while discussing issues of the language. Some of the ESL learners revealed that it depends on the background of the students they belong to. They also admitted that the students who come from diverse communities and backgrounds have issues especially those students whose schooling was not done in the particular language and did not have a similar background of the language (English) therefore they are facing such problems, especially in writing skills even at the advanced level.

The researchers hoped that if the teachers implement what the researchers have found and recommended in their study will help the students a lot. The researchers believe that the study is helpful if implemented not only in a particular region but around the globe. Finally, the researchers recommended the study for other researchers to expand in the future.

Zhou (2009) studied that what adult ESL learners think of improving vocabulary and grammar in their writing especially for academic purposes in the Pre-University Canadian program (EAP). The total participants of the study were 15 ESL

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students. Primarily there were forty-five students in the first year of the study but in the second phase of the study, only fifteen students participated. The researcher used the technique of taking semi-structured interviews and stimulated recall interviews.

The study revealed the ESL learners' improvement especially regarding grammar and vocabulary in their writing skills. The participants in the study expressed that they were motivated in learning the language skills especially the grammar and vocabulary about the writing but they have also stated that there is a need for the appropriate resources and knowledge to improve the skill. Some other ESL learners had impractical expectations about their competency in learning the language.

The main objective of the researcher was to identify what aspects of vocabulary and grammar the group of adult ESL learners wanted to improve their writing. The author concluded that the ESL students who took part in the study realized certain issues and mistakes about the writing skills and the most noted points include; the verbs, sentence structure, word order, parts of speech, vocabulary, and spelling, etc.

The study strongly suggested to the mediators and the course providers to help the students in these domains; the first thing that the teachers ought to do is to let the students know about the differences between achievable and unachievable goals. The second important thing is to point out the route cases of learning obstacles and hurdles about the grammar and the third is to select the contexts which are as per the standard in terms of learning the language academically. The researcher suggested to other researchers to expand the study in the future because the study was conducted on a very small scale due to certain reasons and limitations.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To analyze and investigate the perceptions of Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners regarding their difficulties in ESL writing.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the perceptions of Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners about their difficulties in ESL writing?

METHODOLOGY

THE RESEARCH STUDY

The major purpose of our research was to investigate the perceptions of Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners regarding the difficulties in writing. The researcher was interested to find out the key factors behind these difficulties the students face even at the advanced level and hoped to provide the solutions to these confronted issues the students face especially in writing tasks so that they can produce a good piece of writing if asked to perform the task.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a strategy, plan, and structure of inquiry and investigation regarding the research questions or problem, or phenomenon (topic). Here, planning means the complete procedure from collection of the data till the results. In the research program, researchers investigate the complete information properly. In other words, research design describes the complete strategy about the phenomenon (topic) where they integrate various components and aspects chronologically and coherently to make sure that the study will be addressed in a well-mannered way. It includes measurement, selection of relevant variables, choosing targeted populations, selection of samples, collection of data, testing, describing data, analyzing the data, and systematically presenting the results and outcomes (Kerlinger, 1986).

In the current study, the researcher has used a quantitative method. It is important to know why this method was used in the current study. For that reason, we need to understand the nature of this (quantitative) method first. The quantitative method was adopted around 1250 A.D and it was aimed to investigate the data quantitatively. It involves a statistical or numerical approach to the research design. It is considered to be specific in its experimentation and surveying which develops the theories that already exist. The method has got the dominant role in the western culture thus, it was aimed to create knowledge and meaning (Ormrod, 2001). According to Creswell (2003) the quantitative method is destined to maintain the presumption of empiricist criteria. Further quantitative method is used to create and uncover the meaning objectively in the collected data.

In different ways, a quantitative type of study can be conducted as it includes, correlational method, descriptive method, developmental design, survey research, and observational method. These methods of research can also be used in various degrees with causal-comparative and experimental research (Apuke, 2017).

In the current research, the researcher used the quantitative approach to collect the data because the data for this study suited this method therefore the method was taken into consideration. In the process of gathering the data, it is important to analyze the data appropriately and adequately while using the statistical software and numerical data to get the results, therefore the quantitative method is one of the best options for the researchers to use in their researches. If the researchers want to analyze the data properly and systematically in terms of numerical form, they need to use the quantitative approach however it depends upon the nature of the study & the research (Creswell, 2014).

In this research, the researcher collected the data from 279 participants through a questionnaire survey (Wahid, 2020), and the data were analyzed statistically via SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software while

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applying the descriptive statistics analysis to extract the results of the study.

PAPULATION & SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

PAPULATION

In this study, the targeted populations were the students selected from BS English Major of first, second, and third semester respectively. We aimed to collect the data from 4 different (two public and two private) universities in Karachi. There was a total number of participants N=279 who took part in the study. Among them from the public sector universities 32.5% (90) participants were from public sector university 1 and 31.5% (88) participants were from public sector university 2. On the other hand, from the private sector universities, 18.3% (51) participants were from private sector university 1 and 17.9% (50) participants were from private university 2. This indicates that the data were collected from different sectors of the universities in Karachi which allows us to present the accurate results of the study.

SAMPLE

The resulting sample included 279 BS English major students from both genders (145 males 52% and 134 females 48%) respectively which were very close in terms of participation. The male participants were more than the female having a slight difference of 4% only.

The age of the participants who took part in the research was according to the graph below. There were 65.6% of participants whose age was between 15-20 which is considered to be a large number of the respondents of the study. Similarly, 32.2% were those, whose age was between 21-25 and a very small percentage of 2.2% of those whose age was between 26-30. This indicates that the participants having different ages took the part in the study to share their opinions and ideas which allows us to get diverse information about the difficulties they face at the university level.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

To collect the data about the perceptions of Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners regarding the difficulties in writing, and instrument (questionnaire) was adopted from (Wahid, 2020) to get the responses from the participants regarding these difficulties in writing. This questionnaire comprised three parts. The first two parts of the questionnaire surveyed the respondents' demographic and academic information including the consent form while the third part was designed where twenty-four items were included. These twenty-four items were related to the difficulties the learners face in their writing such as first language interference, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, word order, sentence structure, coherence & cohesion, punctuation, capitalization, and rhetorical problems. The reliability of the questionnaire was $\alpha=.929$ which is considered to be excellent as per the parameters of the reliability scale. The instrument was also validated by the five field experts. This Likert skill ranges from "1" strongly disagree to "5" strongly agree.

The soft copy of the questionnaire was sent to the students via email and other available ways (WhatsApp) to get the data accurately. The participants were offered to take part in the study voluntarily. The participants were provided the relevant items (questions) in the questionnaire and there were no difficulties for them at all. This survey took ten to fifteen minutes only to complete and the participants were ensured regarding their confidentiality in terms of providing their personal information for the research.

DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

The data was collected and analyzed while using the quantitative method. The data collected through questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively means the descriptive statistics analysis was applied while using the software SPSS version 25 to extract the details such as the mean value, standard deviation, and showing the groups regarding the questionnaire items in order investigate the perceptions of the Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners regarding the difficulties in writing.

DATA ANALYSIS

FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question was set to know the perceptions of Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners regarding the difficulties they face in writing. The data were elicited from the survey administered to 279 participants who took part in the study. The data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics through SPSS Version 25.

In order to understand the authenticity and reliability of the data, we need to know whether the data is reliable. Reliability analysis allows us to know the items that compose the scales and the property of measurement scales. Reliability provides information about the relationship between individual items and the scale. The questionnaire that is being used must be reliable which can give effective information and can be used in other studies in the future as well. The value of Cronbach's Alpha which is accepted or we can carry the research with that should be 0.6-0.7 minimum and 0.8 or greater is considered as an excellent level of reliability. In our case the reliability statistics using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used with the help of Cronbach's Alpha detected from the items $N=24$ which is 0.929. This means the information is credible because a value higher than 50% is sufficient therefore, in our study the value is 90% plus which is excellent. See the following table of Reliability Statistics.

The outcomes of the descriptive statistics were extracted through SPSS based on the information which was gathered while using the questionnaire. It includes the mean value and standard deviation which is related to the respondents' answers to all the 24 items (questions) from the questionnaire. This indicates that the data were checked and analyzed accordingly to produce accurate results. There were 24 items included in the questionnaire which were answered by the respondents based on the

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five Likert Scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The participants responded as per their understanding. Table 4.2 reports the mean and standard deviation of the items of the questionnaire investigating the difficulties faced by Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners in the ESL writing.

The biggest difficulty faced by the students is related to the lack of vocabulary as shown by the mean value of 3.62. The second difficulty is related to usage of synonyms where the mean value of this difficulty is 3.50 faced by the students. The third difficulty faced by the students is related to the usage appropriate words in the sentences which has the mean value 3.27. The fourth difficulty is related to translation which is also another big problem for the students. The mean value of this difficulty as reported is 3.25.

The fifth difficulty is related to finding the exact English expressions which has the mean value 3.18. The sixth difficulty faced by the students is regarding the grammatical mistakes which has the mean value 3.16. The seventh difficulty is related to writing style which has the mean value 3.8. The eighth one is regarding the correct usage of active/passive voice which has the mean value 3.1 frequently faced by the students in the writing. The ninth difficulty as reported is about the spelling faced by the students which has the mean value 3.00.

These were some the major frequently faced difficulties faced by the ESL learners which have the mean value greater than 3.0. Similarly, there are other difficulties as well which have the mean value lessor than 3.0 such as regarding the usage of conditional sentences, the mean value for this as reported is 2.96. The next difficulty is regarding the appropriate usage of the tenses which has the mean value 2.94. The next difficulty is related to the correct usage of punctuation in a sentence and the mean value for this as reported is 2.91. The next difficulty the students faced is about the connectivity of ideas in the writing which has reported the mean value 2.84.

Next difficulty is about the coherence in the writing and the mean value for this is 2.82. The next difficulty the students encountered is the sentence structure which has the mean value 2.81. The next is the cohesion of the events in the writing which has the mean value 2.80. The next difficulty is about recalling the exact spelling of the words and the mean value for this as shown is 2.77. The next hurdle is about arrangement of the sentences which has the mean value 2.76. Another difficulty is about the making the sense of the sentences which has the mean value 2.63.

The next hurdle is about the explanation of the past events which has the mean value 2.58. The second last difficulty faced by the students is connectivity between the paragraphs which has the mean value 2.56 and the last difficulty faced by the ESL students is achieving poor grads due to spellings.

Table

Analysis of the Perceptions of Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners about the Common Errors in Writing.

<i>.No</i>	<i>Statements</i>		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std Dev</i>
	<i>I use some simple words to replace the difficult ones.</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>3.62</i>	<i>1.205</i>
	<i>I use different words to express the similar meanings.</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>3.50</i>	<i>1.178</i>
	<i>I usually lengthen the sentences as I can't find the exact words.</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>3.27</i>	<i>1.248</i>
	<i>I think of a sentence in Urdu first and then translate it into English.</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>3.25</i>	<i>1.379</i>
	<i>I sometimes use Romanized Urdu e.g. (mubarak ho) when I can't find the exact English expression.</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>3.18</i>	<i>1.348</i>
	<i>Grammatical mistakes affect my expression in writing.</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>3.16</i>	<i>1.287</i>
	<i>I write English essays in the way I do in Urdu.</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>3.08</i>	<i>1.278</i>
	<i>4. I face difficulty while using passive voice in my writing.</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>3.01</i>	<i>1.281</i>
	<i>I face problem to write spellings of the word that is new to me.</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>3.00</i>	<i>1.285</i>
	<i>I feel problems in the use of conditional sentences.</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>2.96</i>	<i>1.209</i>
	<i>The frequent problem which I face while writing is the correct usage of tenses.</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>2.94</i>	<i>1.288</i>
	<i>I am often confused in the use of punctuation marks.</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>2.91</i>	<i>1.275</i>
	<i>The reason of poor performance in writing is the incorrect use of punctuation marks.</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>2.84</i>	<i>1.276</i>
	<i>While writing I often face the problems of connecting ideas.</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>2.84</i>	<i>1.261</i>

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<i>I feel confused while referring to the things which I have already mentioned in my writing.</i>	79	2.82	1.218
<i>I usually find difficulties to understand sentence structure in English.</i>	79	2.81	1.291
<i>My written expression is not good in describing the sequence of events.</i>	79	2.80	1.225
<i>I take time to recall what exact spelling is.</i>	79	2.77	1.299
<i>My sentences are not well organized that's why I can't communicate well.</i>	79	2.76	1.271
<i>Writing is difficult for me because I have lack of vocabulary.</i>	79	2.74	1.344
<i>My sentences don't convey complete sense as I am not good at making commas in sentences.</i>	79	2.63	1.260
<i>My written expression is not good in describing the past events</i>	79	2.58	1.184
<i>I face problems in connecting one paragraph with the other.</i>	79	2.56	1.230
<i>I get poor grades because of poor spellings.</i>	79	2.01	1.117

(Strongly agree=5, Agree=4, Undecided=3, Disagree=2, Strongly disagree=1)

DISCUSSION

The English language is taught in Pakistan as a subject but when it comes to the academic context, it becomes very painful for ESL learners especially the writing part. Students always have problems in acquiring the four skills mainly listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among them writing skill becomes a phenomenon for ESL learners because they do not give proper attention to it right from the beginning and when they reach to university level, they face the same issues. The ESL learners commit very common errors in writing such problems as, spelling, grammar, punctuations, syntax, sentence construction, organization, joining ideas, choice of words, tenses, collocations, and idiomatic expressions which create difficulties for the ESL learners to perform well.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the perceptions of the Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners about their difficulties and the most common errors in

their ESL writing. The question "perceptions of Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners regarding their difficulties in ESL writing" has been addressed here. To answer the main question of the study, an instrument (questionnaire) was administered to 279 participants in order to know their perceptions regarding the difficulties they face in writing. These participants were randomly selected from four universities in Pakistan who were studying in BS English department.

The methodology for the research was a quantitative method where for the questionnaire the statistical analysis was done using SPSS. And for the essays analysis, error analysis techniques were used to evaluate the data systematically. The targeted population for the study was the students from the BS English department who took part in the study voluntarily. The researcher hopes that this study will be very lucrative not only for Pakistani ESL learners but also for all ESL learners. Further, the study will pave the way for ESL teachers to focus on these difficulties while teaching writing skills to them in the ESL context.

The Perceptions of Pakistani Undergraduate ESL Learners about the Difficulties They Face in Writing.

The findings of the question is related to the perceptions of Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners regarding the difficulties they faced in the ESL writing.

Our findings have some similarities with the study of Derakhshan (2020) who investigated the most common issues and errors about writing skills in the EFL context. The study was conducted to know the perceptions of the EFL Iranian students about these issues and obstacles in writing. The researchers argued about the participants who admitted that to teach the language especially the punctuations and grammar they need to be taught in the context and there is a dire need for the four skills to be integrated simultaneously because to teach the language effectively and productively. Our findings have got the same results that the ESL teachers should focus on the components of the language when they teach in the classroom because they students can be corrected if these difficulties are being explained to them.

Al-Khasawneh (2013) studied the common issues and weaknesses of ESL learners about writing at the University of Taibah Saudi Arabia. The researchers found that there are some key factors behind these common errors and weaknesses like the less usage of the proper grammar, understanding, knowledge about the grammar, personal interest, and background of the students about the education, etc. Our findings have the striking resemblance with this study because the ESL students have very little knowledge about the proper usage of the grammar, their understanding level is not that much high therefore, it is a barrier in their way to perform well. Our findings are constant with the statement that if they give proper attention to the language and improve their basic grammar so the chances will be high to perform well in writing.

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Similarly, Albalawi (2015) investigated the perceptions of the most common writing problems among the students of translation major sophomore and English language at KSA/Tabuk University. Our findings have got the same results that if these highlighted issues are explained in the classroom to the ESL learners, they will be in the position to work in the right direction. Our findings are also consistent with the findings of Zeng (2019) as the study found that the students face hurdle and difficulties in their writing mainly lay in grammar, vocabulary, and writing resources. However, our findings contradict those of Lee and Tajino's (2008) where they found that the actual difficulty for the students is facing language related components of writing which they believe that this is more difficult than the structure/ content related components. On the other hand, we found structure/content components more difficult than the language related components.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has the following implications for the key stakeholders:

The ESL teachers at the university level need to be aware of the difficulties students face in learning ESL writing skills and plan their lesson in order to overcome these problems. They can provide the support to the students' problems in developing their ESL writing skills.

Parents also need to be aware of the difficulties and common errors in their children's ESL writing skills. They can provide support through self-study books, etc.

The curriculum and material developers also need to include materials in the curriculum and text books that can help students overcome the difficulties and common errors identified in the current study.

Students also need to be encouraged to identify their own difficulties and problems in ESL writing and do self- study in and outside the classroom to overcome these problems.

ESL teachers can utilize error analysis to identify the common errors in their own students' ESL writing in order to adopt a more precise teaching approach to help students overcome their common errors.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The current study has the following limitations:

The first limitation was the time and limited resources because the allotted time was not enough to conduct the research and this study was conducted without any external aid.

The research was conducted in the selected area (writing) only where the most common errors and difficulties the learners faced were investigated.

Only four universities were selected for the collection of the data because the researcher was unable to approach other universities due to the time restrictions and

the facilities. The researcher collected the data from two public sector and two private universities only.

The study was also limited to the participants who were studying in the English department at the university level and the students from BS first, second and third semesters were aimed to be part of the study only.

The participants of the study were the students only thus, the researcher decided to collect the data from the students only. The research was also limited to the department (English) and were supposed to collect the data from the students who were the part of English department not from any other discipline.

The research was limited to Pakistani ESL learners only because of the very small means it was difficult to collect the data from other countries and regions. Therefore, the researcher decided to involve the ESL learners in the study from Pakistan only.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The following recommendations are made for further research:

The study was conducted to explore the writing skills difficulties only. This can be expanded to other skills of the English language as well in the future research.

The study was limited to only four universities. Therefore, future researchers can conduct the study while collecting the data from other universities as well.

The sample size was not that much big as there were 279 participants only who took part in the study. The sample size can be broadened by the other researchers in the future in order to collect more data for the research.

This research was limited to only to students of only one discipline (English), so future research can explore the difficulties faced by students of other disciplines too.

The populations of the current study were the university students only. Future researchers can collect data from school and college students in future research.

CONCLUSION

In nutshell, the main purpose of the study was to investigate the perceptions of the Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners regarding the difficulties they face in ESL writing. The question was analyzed using the descriptive statistics to talk about the difficulties the students face in ESL writing where the mean value and standard deviation of the students' responses were analyzed accordingly. It was found that the students do face such difficulties especially in writing because they are unaware of these difficulties. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the teachers to teach the language properly because the teachers should be well-trained so that they can teach the skills adequately. These difficulties can be confronted if the teachers are well-trained and the students are taught accordingly. The researcher does not acclaim that this was the end to the identification of the major factors behind the difficulties the learners faced (face) but it is hoped that the study will be very lucrative and will offer

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some practical solutions about the writing skills not only for the ESL learners but also for the teachers and other stakeholders, especially in the ESL context.



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