

## A Study of English Writing Problems of Students at Aung Nan Taw Buddhism Academy in Yangon of Myanmar

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### Abstract

The objectives of this research were 1) to study the English writing problems of students at Aung Nan Taw Buddhism Academy in Yangon of Myanmar. 2) to find out the solutions of English writing problems of students at Aung Nan Taw Buddhism Academy in Yangon of Myanmar. The number of respondents consisted of 50 students. The instrument used in this research is both qualitative and quantitative method. The tools used for collecting data were questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and participant observation with students and then the information was analyzed by using frequency and percentage.

This study explores the writing confidence and challenges faced by English language learners at a religious and secular learning institution. Demographic data revealed that most participants were male (88.0%) and aged 20–25, with a mix of laypeople (52.0%), monks (40.0%), and novices (8.0%). The findings indicate varied levels of writing confidence, with only 20.0% strongly confident in their writing skills and 48.0% engaging in writing outside the classroom. Students faced difficulties in grammar (40.0%), vocabulary (30.0%), sentence structure (40.0%), and spelling (52.0%). Organizational skills such as idea development, paragraph structure, and the use of linking words also posted significant challenges.

Furthermore, understanding writing types and formats, and using appropriate formal or informal language, revealed mixed responses. Only 46.0% received useful feedback regularly. Interviews with teachers highlighted core issues such as grammar weaknesses, limited vocabulary, and low confidence. Teachers addressed these through integrated instruction, peer collaboration, and formative assessments. The study underscores the need for comprehensive support to enhance students' writing abilities through a balanced approach to language instruction and feedback.

**Keywords:** English, Writing Problems, Challenges, Aung Nan Taw Buddhism Academy in Yangon of Myanmar.



## Introduction

Writing is a fundamental language skill essential for academic achievement, professional growth, and personal expression. Among the four core language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—writing is often seen as the most complex, requiring not only mechanical accuracy (grammar, spelling, punctuation) but also cognitive abilities like organizing ideas and adapting language for different purposes. (Grabe, W., 1996) For English language learners, especially in non-English-speaking countries like Myanmar, mastering writing presents significant challenges due to limited practice opportunities and traditional teaching approaches.

At Aung Nan Taw Buddhism Academy in Yangon, students strive to improve their English writing skills within a unique educational setting that blends language learning with Buddhist studies. Despite institutional support, many students struggle with fluency, accuracy, and confidence in writing. These difficulties arise from factors such as lack of exposure to English, minimal writing resources, reliance on rote memorization, and emotional barriers like fear of making mistakes.

Writing is often misunderstood as a mechanical task rather than a creative and cognitive activity. This perception can limit student motivation and engagement. Learning to write, however, is similar to learning a new game—it requires understanding rules, developing strategies, and consistent practice with adequate support. (Hyland, K., 2003) Furthermore, writing enhances critical thinking, reflection, and deeper learning, making it a powerful tool for both academic and personal development.

Despite its importance, writing remains underemphasized in many English as a Foreign Language (EFL). (Raimes, A., 1983) This study aims to explore the specific writing challenges faced by students at Aung Nan Taw Academy, investigating their root causes, including instructional methods, learner characteristics, and sociocultural factors. The goal is to generate insights that can improve teaching strategies and curriculum design.

By addressing these issues, the research aims to support the development of more effective writing instruction not only at Aung Nan Taw but also in similar EFL contexts, contributing to a broader effort to improve writing education globally.

## Objectives of the Research

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To study the English writing problems of students at Aung Nan Taw Buddhism Academy in Yangon of Myanmar

2. To find out the solutions of English writing problems of students at Aung Nan Taw Buddhism Academy in Yangon of Myanmar

## Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies.

**Quantitative Data Collection:** A structured questionnaire was administered to 50 students to assess their writing skills, challenges, and areas requiring improvement.

**Qualitative Data Collection:** In-depth interviews were conducted with five teachers who are Tejadhamma, Mo Mo Kyaw, Nyein Chan Aung, Phyo Pa Pa Khaing and Ye Thu Soe to gather insights into students' difficulties and effective teaching strategies.

**Observations:** Classroom observations were conducted during student writing to analyze performance in real time.

**Data Analysis:** Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed to identify recurring patterns and key findings. The data collection period spanned from November to March 2025.

## Results of the Study

### 1. Writing Problems Findings Results

The study surveyed 50 participants, primarily male (88%) and young adults aged 20–25 (46%), with a mix of laypeople (52%), monks (40%), and novices (8%). The findings revealed varied levels of confidence in English writing. While about half of the students felt confident in writing essays and letters, many lacked confidence or remained neutral. Only 48% practiced writing outside the classroom regularly, and access to writing support was limited for over a third of participants.

Common challenges included grammar and sentence construction (40%), spelling (over 50%), and vocabulary usage (30%). Many students struggled with complex sentence structures, organizing ideas, and using connectors effectively. Experiences with different writing formats varied, with some students comfortable using formal/informal language, while others found formats like essays or reports difficult. Cultural differences also affected writing for some learners.

Feedback on writing was inconsistent in its effectiveness—46% found it helpful, while 40% did not. Punctuation was another recurring issue. Overall, the findings highlight a need for



improved instruction in grammar, structure, organization, and effective feedback to enhance students' writing proficiency.

## 2. Summary of Interview Findings on English Writing Problems

To investigate the challenges in teaching English writing at Aung Nan Taw Buddhism Academy in Yangon, Myanmar, five open-ended interview questions were posed to English language instructors. The purpose was to gain qualitative insights into the writing problems students face, the methods used to address them, and the broader contextual factors influencing writing instruction. The responses provided rich data that complements the quantitative findings of the study.

### 2.1 Main Challenges in Student Writing

Teachers consistently identified foundational writing problems as the most pressing challenge. Students struggle particularly with grammar, such as subject-verb agreement and parts of speech, which impedes sentence formation. Many learners also experience difficulty in initiating writing due to a lack of confidence and exposure to structured writing instruction. A strong reliance on memorization and limited critical thinking further hinder independent writing. Language interference, especially from students' first language, contributes to errors in coherence and syntax.

To address these issues, instructors employ explicit grammar instruction, sentence-building exercises, and vocabulary development. Encouraging students to think creatively and independently is a key strategy in moving away from rote-based habits toward analytical writing practices.

### 2.2 Specific Areas of Struggle and Teaching Strategies

Students face particular difficulty with verb tenses, sentence construction, vocabulary usage, and idea generation. Teachers respond to these issues through targeted activities such as grammar drills, brainstorming sessions, and collaborative writing tasks. These activities are designed to strengthen both accuracy and fluency while encouraging peer interaction and critical reflection. Repetitive practice and structured guidance are emphasized to build student confidence and writing competence.

### 2.3 Influencing Factors in Writing Development

Several key factors shape students' writing development. These include motivation, interest, teacher support, and the integration of language skills (reading, listening, and writing). Teachers noted that the classroom environment, access to technology, and student-teacher dialogue all significantly affect learning outcomes. Students from monastic backgrounds often have limited exposure to English and rely heavily on memorization, which restricts



engagement with creative writing. Initial language proficiency and access to authentic English materials are also critical in determining progress.

#### 2.4 Assessment and Feedback Practices

Assessment is integral to tracking student development. Teachers use both formative and summative tools to evaluate student writing in areas such as grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and organization. Observational assessments allow teachers to gauge how students apply writing rules in context. Feedback is dialogic and formative, often delivered through guiding questions and concrete examples. This approach helps students reflect on their errors and understand the rationale behind corrections. Final assessments are typically rubric-based, providing clear criteria for evaluation and improvement.

#### 2.5 Effective Methods for Improving Writing

Teachers emphasized a multifaceted instructional approach. Core strategies include daily writing practice, structured lessons, writing workshops, and the use of writing templates. Reading and note-taking are promoted to enrich vocabulary and develop writing fluency. Peer feedback and collaborative learning are central to building confidence and improving stylistic awareness.

### Conclusion

This study investigated the English writing skills and challenges faced by students at Aung Nan Taw Buddhism Academy in Yangon, Myanmar, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The demographic analysis revealed that most participants were young males, including a mix of laypeople, monks, and novices, reflecting the distinct religious and educational context of the academy.

Quantitative findings showed that while some students expressed confidence in their writing abilities, many struggled with grammar, vocabulary, sentence construction, and organization. Significant difficulties were also observed in areas such as spelling, punctuation, paragraph coherence, and understanding various writing formats. Cultural differences and limited access to writing resources further impacted performance. The qualitative data from teacher interviews provided deeper insights into these challenges, highlighting issues like students' dependence on memorization, low self-confidence, and lack of early structured writing exposure.

Teachers reported using a range of targeted strategies—including explicit grammar instruction, vocabulary development, collaborative activities, and feedback mechanisms—to address these problems. Writing development was found to be influenced by motivational, instructional, and environmental factors. Assessment practices and effective feedback played a

critical role in student progress. Ultimately, the findings underscore the need for a comprehensive, process-oriented approach that integrates grammar, practice, reading, and peer collaboration to enhance students' writing competence.

This study contributes to a better understanding of writing instruction in monastic and mixed-ability learning environments and provides practical implications for improving English writing pedagogy in similar contexts.

## Discussion

### 1. English Writing Skills of Students

This study confirmed that writing is one of the most complex skills for EFL learners, as noted by Brown (2014). Students at Aung Nan Taw Buddhism Academy face multiple writing challenges, including grammar errors, limited vocabulary, weak sentence construction, and poor organization. Only 42% felt confident with writing formats like essays and letters, while 38% lacked confidence in using appropriate tone and formality—echoing Harmer's view that writing requires more than grammar.

Cultural influences also play a role, with 38% of students reporting difficulty adapting to English rhetorical structures. Mechanical issues such as spelling (52%) and grammar (40%) further hinder clear expression. Despite some engagement in writing outside class, limited resources and inconsistent practice impact performance. These findings support Richards' (2002) claim that regular practice and support are essential for writing development.

### 2. Categories of Writing Problems

Interviews with teachers highlighted core issues such as poor grammar foundations, lack of confidence, and reliance on memorization. These align with Aporna's view of writing as a communicative act. Teachers address these through explicit instruction, sentence-building, peer review, and guided writing tasks.

Common problems include verb tense, vocabulary use, and generating ideas. Teachers also noted the importance of motivation, access to resources, and constructive feedback. Dialogic feedback and both formative and summative assessments help students reflect and improve. As Barton and Hall (2000) suggest, writing must be taught as both a technical and expressive skill, tailored to learners' needs.

## Suggestions for Future Studies

Based on this study's findings, several recommendations are offered for future research. First, expanding the sample size across various regions and both religious and secular institutions would provide a broader understanding of English writing challenges in Myanmar. Second, conducting longitudinal studies could help track students' writing development over time and assess the long-term effectiveness of instructional methods.

Future researchers may also focus on specific aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, cohesion, or the influence of the first language to gain deeper insights. Exploring the role of digital tools and technology in writing instruction is another valuable direction, especially in low-resource contexts.

Finally, including the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and parents can offer a more holistic view of the learning environment and support systems. These efforts can contribute to more effective strategies for improving English writing skills among EFL learners.

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