

The Interplay Between Self-Efficacy, Writing Anxiety and Writing Complexities Among Low Proficiency Learners in Malaysia: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract—Developing strong writing skills is crucial for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in Malaysia. However, low-proficiency learners often face challenges, potentially linked to psychological factors like self-efficacy and writing anxiety, alongside inherent writing complexities. This systematic literature review examines these factors' influence on writing performance. The review aims to (1) systematically identify and analyze existing research on self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and writing complexities among low-proficiency ESL learners in Malaysia; (2) evaluate the methodologies employed in these studies to assess self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and writing complexities; (3) synthesize the findings to understand the relationships between these factors and their impact on writing performance; and (4) identify gaps in the current research and suggest directions for future studies. A systematic search strategy will be employed to identify relevant research articles from credible academic databases. Inclusion and exclusion criteria will be established to ensure studies meet the review's focus. Data extraction will be conducted to categorize key findings related to self-efficacy, writing anxiety, writing complexities, and their connections to writing performance. Thematic analysis will be used to synthesize the findings and identify recurring themes. This review is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of existing research on self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and writing complexities in the Malaysian ESL context; offer insights into the methodologies used to assess these factors; identify the relationships between these factors and their impact on writing performance among low proficiency learners; and highlight areas for further research to address existing knowledge gaps.

Index Terms—self-efficacy, writing anxiety, writing complexities, low-proficiency learners

I. INTRODUCTION

Developing strong English writing skills is an essential goal for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in Malaysia. These skills are crucial for academic success, career advancement, and overall participation in a globalized world (Tung et al., 2024). However, for low-proficiency learners, the journey to mastering written English can be fraught with challenges. These challenges can stem from various factors, including limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge (Akhtar et al., 2019). Recent research suggests that psychological factors also play a significant role in hindering writing performance. Two key psychological constructs that have emerged in this context are self-efficacy and writing anxiety (Baharudin et al., 2023; Ghulamuddin et al., 2021).

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to complete a specific task. In the context of writing, learners with high self-efficacy demonstrate confidence in their writing skills and a willingness to tackle challenging writing assignments (Rahman et al., 2020). Conversely, low self-efficacy can lead to avoidance behaviors, procrastination, and a reluctance to take risks in their writing (Busse et al., 2023). Writing anxiety, on the other hand, refers to the emotional state of apprehension or fear associated with the writing process (Abdullah et al., 2022). Learners experiencing high levels of writing anxiety may exhibit symptoms such as avoidance, physical tension, and negative self-talk, all of which can significantly hinder their writing performance (Hassan et al., 2021).

Adding another layer of complexity to the equation are the inherent complexities of the English writing system itself. These complexities can include mastering a vast vocabulary with nuanced word choices, understanding intricate grammar rules and their exceptions, and developing the ability to organize ideas coherently and express them clearly (Nor & Yunus, 2022). For low-proficiency learners, these complexities can be overwhelming and contribute to feelings of frustration and discouragement (Ahmad & Abdullah, 2019). Understanding the interplay between self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and writing complexities is crucial for educators and researchers seeking to improve the writing skills of low-proficiency ESL learners in Malaysia. Hence, this systematic literature review aims to delve deeper into this critical intersection by examining existing research on these factors and their impact on writing performance.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Self-Efficacy and Writing Performance*

Self-efficacy has been established as a cornerstone in understanding second language (L2) writing performance (Rahman et al., 2020). Learners with high self-efficacy in writing demonstrate a belief in their ability to successfully complete writing tasks. This confidence translates into a range of positive behaviors that contribute to improved writing outcomes. Studies have shown that learners with high self-efficacy exhibit greater motivation and engagement in writing tasks (Jasman et al., 2023). They are more willing to take risks and experiment with new strategies, such as using complex vocabulary or exploring different writing styles. Conversely, low self-efficacy in writing can have a detrimental impact on performance. Learners who doubt their writing abilities may exhibit avoidance behaviors, such as procrastination or delaying the start of writing assignments (Busse et al., 2023). They may also be reluctant to experiment with new strategies or engage in self-regulated learning practices, such as planning their writing or revising their work. This lack of engagement can lead to a decline in writing skills over time.

The role of self-efficacy in writing performance is particularly relevant for low-proficiency ESL learners. These learners are often faced with the dual challenge of developing their writing skills in a new language while simultaneously navigating the complexities of the writing system itself. Studies conducted in the Malaysian context highlight the importance of self-efficacy for low-proficiency learners. Kamaruddin et al. (2021) found a positive correlation between self-efficacy and writing achievement among low proficiency ESL learners. Similarly, Teng and Wang (2022) reported that learners with higher self-efficacy were more likely to engage in self-regulated learning strategies, which ultimately led to improved writing performance. These findings underscore the need for pedagogical approaches that explicitly target the development of self-efficacy alongside the development of writing skills.

B. *Writing Anxiety and Writing Performance*

Writing anxiety is a well-documented psychological construct that can significantly hinder L2 writing performance (Abdullah et al., 2022). Learners experiencing high levels of writing anxiety often exhibit a cluster of negative emotions and behaviors that can disrupt the writing process. These include:

Avoidance behaviors: Learners may procrastinate on writing tasks, avoid writing altogether, or choose to focus on less demanding activities (Hassan et al., 2021). **Physical tension:** Writing anxiety can manifest physically as symptoms such as increased heart rate, sweating, or difficulty concentrating (Nor & Yunus, 2022). **Negative self-talk:** Learners experiencing high anxiety may engage in negative self-talk, such as doubting their abilities or fearing failure (Manan et al., 2023). These behaviors can significantly hinder writing performance in several ways. Avoidant behaviors lead to a lack of practice and engagement, hindering the development of writing skills. Physical tension can interfere with focus and cognitive processing, making it difficult for learners to generate ideas, organize their thoughts, and express themselves clearly. Furthermore, negative self-talk can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, where learners' anxieties lead to a decline in performance, which in turn confirms their negative beliefs about their writing abilities.

The impact of writing anxiety is particularly concerning for low-proficiency ESL learners. These learners are already navigating the challenges of developing writing skills in a new language. When writing anxiety is added to this equation, it can create a significant barrier to learning and progress. Studies conducted in Malaysia support this notion. A study by Nor and Yunus (2022) found a significant negative correlation between writing anxiety and writing achievement among ESL university students. Similarly, Manan et al. (2023) reported that learners experiencing high levels of anxiety often struggled with aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, and organization in their writing. These findings highlight the crucial need for interventions that address writing anxiety alongside other factors influencing writing performance.

C. *Writing Complexities and Low Proficiency Learners*

The inherent complexities of the English writing system pose a significant challenge for low-proficiency ESL learners (Nor & Yunus, 2022). These complexities include mastering a vast vocabulary with nuanced word choices, understanding intricate grammar rules and their exceptions, and developing the ability to organize ideas coherently and express them clearly (Akhtar et al., 2020). For low-proficiency learners, these complexities can be overwhelming and contribute to feelings of frustration and discouragement (Ahamad & Abdullah, 2019). Studies conducted in Malaysia highlight these challenges. For instance, Manan et al. (2023) found that students with low proficiency often struggled with aspects like grammar, vocabulary use, and critical thinking in their writing. Another study (Jasman et al., 2022) reported that the transition from studies conducted in Malaysia highlight these challenges. For instance, Manan et al. (2023) found that students with low proficiency often struggled with aspects like grammar, vocabulary use, and critical thinking in their writing. Another study (Jasman et al., 2022) reported that the transition from formulaic writing to more complex and creative writing styles presented a significant hurdle for low-proficiency learners. These findings underscore the need for pedagogical approaches that address both the psychological factors influencing writing performance and the specific writing complexities faced by low-proficiency learners.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Literature Search Strategy

A comprehensive search was conducted across credible academic databases such as ERIC, EBSCOhost, Web of Science, and Scopus. The search terms utilized a combination of keywords and Boolean operators. Examples of keywords include ("self-efficacy" OR "confidence") AND ("writing anxiety") AND ("writing complexities") AND ("low proficiency learners") AND ("ESL") AND ("Malaysia").

In terms of inclusion and exclusion criteria, studies will be included if they focus on low-proficiency ESL learners in Malaysia, investigate the factors of self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and writing complexities; examine the relationship between these factors and writing performance; are published in peer-reviewed academic journals within the past 5 years (2019-2023), and are written in English. Studies are excluded if they focus on learners of other proficiency levels or languages other than English; do not investigate the interplay of all three main factors; are not published in peer-reviewed journals; and are not written in English. However, this systematic literature review is subject to limitations such as the availability of relevant research within the chosen timeframe and language (English). Additionally, the search strategy may not capture all studies pertinent to the topic.

B. Data Collection and Analysis

The search results from the chosen databases were exported to reference management software for organization and removal of duplicates. Titles and abstracts of identified studies were screened based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Potentially relevant studies were then retrieved for full-text review. A second screening of the full-text articles was conducted to ensure they directly address the research question and objectives. A thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes and patterns across the extracted data. Themes might include how self-efficacy and writing anxiety impact the way learners experience writing complexities, or the types of pedagogical approaches that can address all three factors simultaneously.

C. Synthesis and Reporting

The findings were synthesized and presented in a narrative format, highlighting the relationships between self-efficacy, writing anxiety, writing complexities, and writing performance among low-proficiency ESL learners in Malaysia. The methodologies employed in the included studies were critically evaluated. After that, gaps in the existing research were identified and suggestions for future studies were provided. The findings were presented clearly and concisely, appropriate for academic publications.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This systematic literature review has shed light on the multifaceted web of factors influencing the writing performance of low-proficiency ESL learners in Malaysia. This web is intricately woven from the threads of self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and writing complexities. Understanding how these factors interact and influence each other is crucial for developing effective pedagogical practices. Therefore, this systematic literature review explored the interplay between self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and writing complexities in the context of low-proficiency ESL learners in Malaysia. The review identified a significant body of research highlighting the impact of these factors on writing performance.

A. Data Screening and Extraction

Data screening and collection procedures are shown in Figure 1. There were a total of 643 records identified from the following databases ERIC (n = 211), EBSCOhost (n = 107), Web of Science (n = 205), and Scopus (n = 120). A significant number of records were removed due to duplication (n = 178) and irrelevance (n = 67). Screening of remaining records resulted in 199 records being excluded because they did not meet the proposed criteria. At this stage, the total number of records sought for retrieval is 199 from the previous records screened, minus records excluded (Shukri & Salam, 2024).

Later on, open access papers were targeted and 147 records were deleted due to no access and only 52 of total were evaluated for eligibility. Overall, this process took a significant time (Shukri & Salam, 2024), in which several more papers were excluded due to not being related to writing anxiety (n = 25) and writing complexities (n = 15). The last stage shows 12 records as included studies to be reviewed in the current research. Table 1 shows a list of included studies and details.

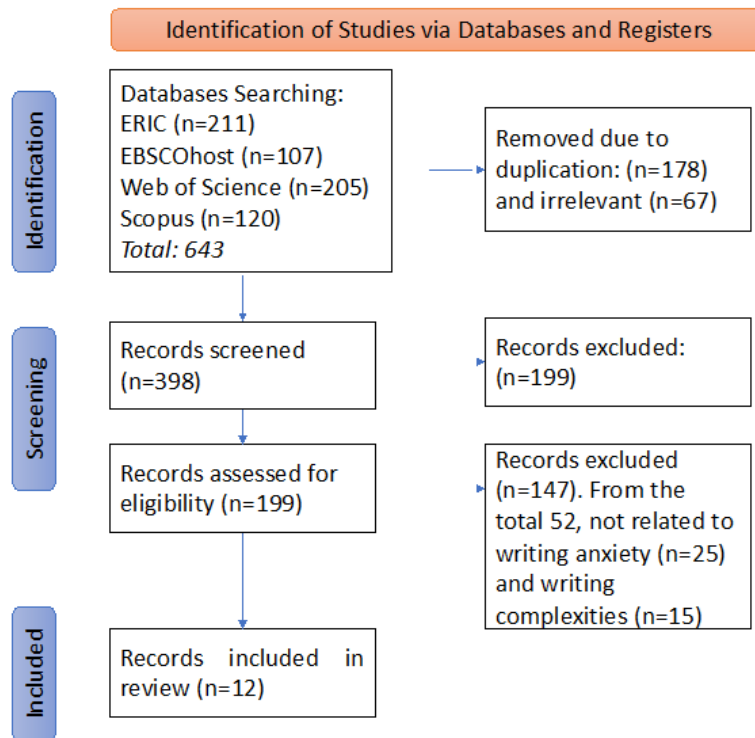


Figure 1. PRISMA Diagram of the Selected Studies

TABLE 1
LIST OF INCLUDED STUDIES AND DETAILS

No.	Author(s)	Year	Methodology	Summary
1	Ahamad, M. I. A., & Abdullah, N.	2019	Quantitative research design; Questionnaires on self-efficacy belief and Language Learning Strategies	The authors investigate the relationship between self-efficacy belief and language learning strategy. According to study findings, there is a relationship between self-efficacy and learners' level of proficiency in the English language.
2	Rahman, A. M. A., Azmi, M. N. L., & Hassan, I.	2020	Qualitative approach with focus group interviews; Case study at a public university in Malaysia	The study findings revealed that blended learning approaches can facilitate student learning. Further, it can help them to advance their skills such as written communication.
3	Hassan, I., Madarina Abdul Rahaman, A., & Latiff Azmi, M. N.	2021	Quasi-experimental analysis with pre-test and post-test data gathering instruments; Mann-Whitney U test for data analysis using SPSS	This study put forward that blended learning can potentially take leading part in development of writing performance among ESL students.
4	Kamaruddin, S. F., Daneil, I. L., & Eng, T. H.	2021	Qualitative study with nine students from the Diploma of Banking Studies; Interview questions focusing on writing anxiety	In this paper, a qualitative study found that the participants described external and internal reasons as the causal factors of their writing anxiety.
5	Abdullah, A. T. H., Alsohbo, K. S. I., & Hassan, I.	2022	Descriptive survey with self-administered questionnaire; Analysis using descriptive statistics and Chi-square test	The authors examined gender differences in Malaysian universities and found that most Libyan students experienced a moderate level of writing anxiety, whereas none of them experienced a low anxiety level.
6	Jasman, N. H., Saidalvi, A., & Yunos, D. R. M.	2022	Sequential explanatory mixed-method approach; Investigation of writing anxiety in L2 classrooms	In this article, a sequential explanatory mixed-method approach was used, and the outcomes from this research project are expected to assist educators in better understanding how to teach writing.
7	Nor, W. N. C., & Yunus, M. M.	2022	Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI); Semi-structured interview questions adapted from Rezaei and Jafari's Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory (CWAI)	In this article, the authors examined the types, levels, and causes of ESL writing anxiety among 43 participants and found that negative writing experience, negative writing attitude, and writing knowledge and skill were evaluated in relation to the types and levels of writing anxiety.
8	Soh, S. B.	2022	Repeated-measures design with 36 Malaysian university students; 9 Administered questionnaires collecting L2 learners' perceptions upon task completion.	This study assessed how complex tasks, pre-writing conditions can influence L2 Malaysia learners' perspectives about their argumentation writing, difficult views, stress, and efforts to complete the task.
9	Teng, M. F., & Wang, C.	2022	Assessment and validation through confirmatory factor analyses; Regression analysis to evaluate predictive effects	The authors assess and validate the Academic Writing Self-Efficacy Belief Questionnaire framed by social cognitive theory and evaluate the predictive effects of different aspects of self-efficacy beliefs on academic writing performance.
10	Busse, V., Graham, S., Müller, N., & Utesch, T.	2023	Response Surface Analyses are used to investigate the interplay between variables; Correlations and modeling are used to predict text quality.	The study focused on how effective factors and motivation among individuals can significantly influence who have migrated. It further tested the association between writing self-efficacy, anxiety, and text quality by comparing both students with and without migration backgrounds.
11	Jasman, N. H., Saidalvi, A., Mokhtar, M. I., Nasarudin, M. R., Rezwan, N. B. S., & Jasman, N. H.	2023	Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI); Causes and Strategies to Alleviate Writing Anxiety (CSWAS)	The study resulted put forward that few factors such as feedback fear, poor confidence, lack of subject understanding, poor writing and time-pressure can cause anxiety among students.
12	Manan, N. A. A., Yusof, J., & Azizan, N.	2023	Distribution of questionnaires; Pearson Correlation analysis	In this article, the authors found that language learning anxiety has a serious effect not only on students' language performance but also on second language learning processes.

B. *Self-Efficacy: The Foundation for Effective Writing*

A cornerstone of successful writing performance is self-efficacy, which refers to a learner's belief in their ability to write effectively (Rahman et al., 2020). Learners with high self-efficacy demonstrate a constellation of positive behaviors that contribute to improved writing outcomes. These include increased motivation and engagement with writing tasks (Jasman et al., 2023). They are more likely to adopt a growth mindset, readily experiment with new strategies, and persist through challenges. Conversely, low self-efficacy can manifest as avoidance behaviors, procrastination, and a reluctance to engage in self-regulated learning practices (Busse et al., 2023). Learners with high self-efficacy demonstrate greater motivation, engagement, and perseverance in writing tasks (Jasman et al., 2023). They are more willing to experiment with new strategies and tackle challenges with a growth mindset. Conversely, low self-efficacy can lead to avoidance behaviors, procrastination, and a reluctance to engage in self-regulated learning practices (Busse et al., 2023). These findings are further supported by Malaysian studies, demonstrating a positive correlation between self-efficacy and writing achievement among low proficiency learners (Teng & Wang, 2022).

The concept of self-efficacy is multifaceted and can be influenced by various factors. Mastery experiences, where learners complete writing tasks, are a key source of self-efficacy in writing (Rahman et al., 2020). In the classroom setting, educators can create opportunities for mastery experiences by providing scaffolded writing tasks that cater to the specific needs and abilities of low-proficiency learners.

Social persuasion, the influence of others' beliefs on an individual's self-efficacy, also plays a significant role (Kamaruddin et al., 2021). In the context of writing, positive feedback from teachers and peers can significantly boost a learner's self-efficacy. Educators can utilize various strategies to provide constructive feedback, such as focusing on the strengths of a learner's writing while offering suggestions for improvement. Additionally, creating a classroom environment that celebrates writing successes and fosters a growth mindset can contribute to a positive social influence on students' self-efficacy (Jasman et al., 2022).

Furthermore, self-efficacy can be influenced by vicarious experiences, observing others complete similar tasks (Soh, 2022). For low-proficiency learners, observing peers or role models who demonstrate strong writing skills can enhance their self-efficacy. This could involve showcasing student writing samples, inviting guest speakers, or incorporating peer writing workshops into the curriculum. By exposing learners to successful writing examples, educators can help them build a stronger belief in their own abilities to achieve similar success (Nor & Yunus, 2022). By understanding the multifaceted nature of self-efficacy and its impact on writing performance, educators can develop targeted strategies to support low-proficiency ESL learners in Malaysia. These strategies can empower learners to approach writing tasks with greater confidence and perseverance, ultimately leading to improved writing skills and a more positive overall writing experience.

C. *Writing Anxiety and Writing Performance*

The detrimental influence of writing anxiety on writing performance is well-documented (Abdullah et al., 2022). Learners experiencing high levels of writing anxiety exhibit a cluster of negative emotions and behaviors that disrupt the writing process. These include avoidance behaviors, physical tension, and negative self-talk (Hassan et al., 2021). These behaviors can significantly hinder focus, cognitive processing, and ultimately, the ability to express oneself clearly and effectively (Mulyono et al., 2020). The findings resonate with studies conducted in Malaysia, where a strong negative correlation was found between writing anxiety and writing achievement among ESL university students. This highlights the urgent need for interventions that address writing anxiety alongside other factors influencing writing performance. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) techniques, such as desensitization and cognitive restructuring, are seen as proven to reduce writing anxiety in L2 learners (Nor & Yunus, 2022). Educators can explore incorporating these techniques or similar anxiety-reduction strategies into their pedagogical practices.

The negative impact of writing anxiety on writing performance goes beyond the immediate emotional and cognitive effects. Learners who consistently experience anxiety during writing tasks may develop a sense of learned helplessness, believing that their efforts will not result in success. This can lead to a decrease in motivation to write and a reluctance to put in the necessary effort to improve their skills. Furthermore, writing anxiety can hinder the development of self-regulated learning strategies, which are essential for effective writing. Self-regulated learning involves activities such as planning writing tasks, setting goals, monitoring progress, and revising work.

The specific aspects of writing that are most affected by writing anxiety can also vary depending on the individual learner. Some studies suggest that writing anxiety can have a particularly detrimental impact on specific writing skills, such as grammar and vocabulary use (Hassan et al., 2021). Learners experiencing high anxiety may become hyper-focused on avoiding errors, leading to paralysis in their writing and an inability to express themselves creatively. Additionally, anxiety can disrupt memory and retrieval processes, making it difficult for learners to access the vocabulary and grammar knowledge they possess.

- Understanding the multifaceted nature of writing anxiety and its impact on writing performance is crucial for educators. By recognizing the signs of writing anxiety in their students, educators can develop targeted strategies to alleviate these anxieties and create a more supportive learning environment. These strategies may include:

- Desensitization techniques: Gradually exposing learners to writing tasks in a safe and supportive environment can help them become more comfortable with the writing process.
- Relaxation techniques: Teaching learners relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or mindfulness exercises can help them manage anxiety-related physical symptoms.
- Cognitive restructuring: Helping learners identify and challenge negative self-talk can help to replace it with more positive and empowering beliefs about their writing abilities.
- Peer support and collaboration: Creating opportunities for peer feedback and collaboration can foster a sense of community and reduce feelings of isolation associated with writing anxiety.
- By implementing these strategies, educators can create a learning environment that fosters confidence and reduces writing anxiety among low-proficiency ESL learners. This, in turn, can lead to increased motivation, engagement, and ultimately, improved writing performance.

D. Writing Complexities and Low Proficiency Learners

The inherent complexities of the English writing system pose a significant challenge for low-proficiency ESL learners (Nor & Yunus, 2022). These complexities encompass mastering a vast vocabulary, navigating intricate grammar rules, organizing ideas coherently, and adapting writing style to different contexts (Baydarova et al., 2021). These challenges can be overwhelming and contribute to feelings of frustration and discouragement among low-proficiency learners (Ahamad & Abdullah, 2019). Studies conducted in Malaysia highlight these struggles, with learners reporting difficulties in aspects like grammar, vocabulary use, and critical thinking in their writing (Manan et al., 2023). Process-based approach to writing instruction offers a valuable framework for addressing these complexities. By explicitly teaching grammar, vocabulary development strategies, and organization techniques, educators can equip learners with the necessary tools to navigate the labyrinth of writing complexities.

The inherent complexities of the English writing system pose a significant challenge for low-proficiency ESL learners (Soh, 2022). These complexities encompass various aspects of writing, which can be particularly daunting for learners still developing their foundational skills in the language. Some key complexities that low-proficiency learners often encounter:

- **Vocabulary:** The English language boasts a vast and nuanced vocabulary. Low-proficiency learners may struggle with mastering a sufficient range of words to express themselves clearly and effectively in writing. This can include challenges with synonyms, word choice based on context, and the ability to use vocabulary in grammatically correct sentences (Nor & Yunus, 2022).
- **Grammar:** English grammar rules can be intricate, with numerous exceptions and variations. Low-proficiency learners may grapple with aspects like verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, sentence structure, and the use of articles and prepositions (Jasman et al., 2023). These grammatical complexities can create significant roadblocks in constructing clear and coherent written communication.
- **Organization:** Effective writing requires the ability to organize ideas coherently and present them in a logical sequence. Low-proficiency learners may struggle with developing a clear thesis statement, structuring paragraphs with transitions, and ensuring a smooth flow of ideas throughout their writing (Manan et al., 2023).
- **Critical Thinking:** Strong writing often involves critical thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Low-proficiency learners may find it challenging to express complex ideas, provide evidence to support their arguments, or draw well-supported conclusions in their writing (Soh, 2022). These critical thinking skills are crucial for more advanced writing tasks.
- **Writing Style:** The writing style can vary depending on the context and purpose. Low-proficiency learners may struggle to adapt their writing style to different situations, be it a formal academic essay, an informal email, or a creative narrative (Rahman et al., 2020). This ability to adapt writing style is an important skill that develops alongside writing proficiency.

These writing complexities can be overwhelming and contribute to feelings of frustration and discouragement among low-proficiency learners (Ahamad & Abdullah, 2019). The struggle to grasp these complex aspects of writing can further exacerbate writing anxiety and hinder the development of self-efficacy. Studies conducted in Malaysia highlight the specific challenges faced by low-proficiency learners. Manan et al. (2023) found that students with low proficiency often struggled with aspects like grammar, vocabulary use, and critical thinking in their writing. Another study (Nor & Yunus, 2022) reported that the transition from formulaic writing to more complex and creative writing styles presented a significant hurdle for low-proficiency learners. These findings underscore the need for pedagogical approaches that address both the inherent complexities of writing and the specific challenges faced by low-proficiency learners.

E. The Interplay: A Dynamic Relationship

The review underscores the complex interplay between self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and writing complexities. High self-efficacy can act as a buffer against the challenges posed by writing complexities (Busse et al., 2023). Conversely, low self-efficacy can exacerbate the challenges of writing complexities, creating a self-defeating cycle that hinders progress (Ahamad & Abdullah, 2019). Similarly, writing anxiety can amplify the perceived difficulty of writing complexities, leading to a sense of paralysis and hindering the ability to engage with these challenges (Hassan et al., 2021).

On the other hand, successfully navigating writing complexities can boost self-efficacy and lower anxiety levels, creating a virtuous cycle that supports writing development.

The existing literature high self-efficacy can act as a buffer against writing anxiety, enabling learners to approach writing tasks with greater confidence and perseverance (Busse et al., 2023). Conversely, low self-efficacy can exacerbate writing anxiety, creating a self-fulfilling cycle that hinders writing performance (Cheng, 2004). Furthermore, the inherent complexities of writing can contribute to both self-efficacy and writing anxiety. When learners encounter difficulties with grammar, vocabulary, or organization, their self-efficacy may diminish, and their anxiety may increase (Ahamad & Abdullah, 2019).

V. CONCLUSION

Understanding the interplay between self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and writing complexities is crucial for educators seeking to improve the writing skills of low-proficiency ESL learners in Malaysia. Some key implications for pedagogical practices include promoting self-efficacy, reducing writing anxiety, and addressing writing complexities. Strategies that foster self-efficacy include providing opportunities for mastery experiences, positive feedback, and exposure to successful writing models. Furthermore, techniques such as desensitization, relaxation exercises, and cognitive restructuring can help learners manage anxiety and approach writing tasks with greater confidence. Additionally, explicit instruction on grammar, vocabulary development, and writing organization can equip learners with the necessary skills to navigate these complexities.

Differentiating instruction and providing scaffolded tasks can further support learners at different proficiency levels. For that reason, there should be a holistic approach to addressing this issue. Effective pedagogy should address all three factors – self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and writing complexities – holistically. This can create a more supportive learning environment that empowers low-proficiency learners to approach writing with confidence, perseverance, and the necessary skills to navigate the intricacies of the English writing system.

Future Research Directions

This systematic literature review has illuminated the intricate interplay between self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and writing complexities in the context of low-proficiency ESL learners in Malaysia. Understanding this interplay is crucial for developing effective pedagogical practices. However, this review also highlights several areas that warrant further investigation, such as exploring effective strategies to enhance self-efficacy, tailoring interventions to address writing anxiety, investigating the impact of learners' variables, conducting longitudinal studies, and integrating technology. While the importance of self-efficacy is established, further research is needed to identify specific strategies that are most effective in enhancing self-efficacy among low-proficiency ESL learners in the Malaysian context. This could involve investigating the efficacy of interventions based on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) within the Malaysian classroom setting.

Additionally, this review highlights the detrimental influence of writing anxiety. Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of tailored interventions specifically designed to address writing anxiety among low-proficiency ESL learners in Malaysia. This could involve investigating the efficacy of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Techniques and adapting and implementing CBT techniques such as desensitization and cognitive restructuring within the ESL writing classroom. Finally, this review has focused on self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and writing complexities as general factors. Future research could explore how learner variables, such as learning styles, motivation levels, and cultural backgrounds, interact with these factors and influence writing performance. Understanding these interactions could inform the development of more personalized and effective writing instruction for low-proficiency ESL learners. Future research could explore the effectiveness of incorporating technology-based interventions, such as online writing platforms, grammar checkers, or collaborative writing tools, to address self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and writing complexities in low-proficiency ESL learners.

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