



## **Frequent failures in the English language of secondary school students: writing skills**

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### **Abstract**

This study analyzes the frequent writing failures faced by secondary school students in Manabí, Ecuador, when writing in English as a foreign language. The work adheres to the modern paradigm and the mixed-methods research approach. A survey, a semi-structured interview guide, and a focus group guide were used as data collection instruments. The results identified recurring errors in paragraph organization, spelling errors, punctuation, use of connectives and coherence, vocabulary limitations, and difficulties developing complex ideas. Among the most frequent causes of these writing errors in English are the influence of the native language, low student motivation, and the scarcity of resources in rural areas of the country. To improve writing skills, teachers employ strategies that include feedback, listening comprehension, guided writing, and collaborative work. However, there is a lack of technology in writing instruction. Categorical analysis of the collected evidence is necessary. The study concludes with the need for improved teacher training that not only covers grammar but also implements more comprehensive communication skills.

**Keywords:** didactics innovations, grammar difficulties, secondary education, strategies, student motivation, writing skills.

## Introduction

Writing in a second language is an intricate interplay of cognitive, linguistic, and socioeducational factors. For Ecuadorian secondary students, writing in English, as a Foreign Language (EFL), continues to be a frustrating reality, representing not just ongoing deficits in writing grammar, but larger pedagogical and structural concerns. Learners and teachers also struggle with correct spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, and cohesion. According to Cabrera Solano et al. (2014), syntactic patterns driven by Spanish as the first language lead to unclear, unfocused collections of pieces that lack organization.

Therefore, pedagogical innovations are needed to reduce frequent writing failures in the English language and to complement the training of English language teachers in Ecuador. This work is part of a larger research project entitled: Pedagogical Innovations and Internationalization of Teacher Training for Human and Sustainable Development *Innovaciones Pedagógicas e Internacionalización de la Formación Docente para el Desarrollo Humano y Sostenible* and the Pedagogical Innovations for Sustainable Development research group *Grupo de investigación Innovaciones Pedagógicas para el Desarrollo Sostenible* at the Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro in Manabí, Ecuador.

The Ecuadorian Ministry of Education launched several reforms in English teaching through curriculum reform and national language policy direction (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). Nonetheless, in rural schools, inequities in access to adequately trained teachers and resources limit the utilization of more communicative approaches, CLT, and CLIL (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Teachers also described having a lack of training specifically for writing instruction and the formative assessment of writing, which limits helpful feedback and individualization. When learners perceive writing as irrelevant to their life, their ability or willingness to take risks or revise their text diminishes (Saha, 2017). This is particularly troubling if writing is scored as part of the assessment, not only for accuracy but as a conduit to academic success and certification. Considering these concerns, this work identifies the causes of writing failures in EFL students to consider beneficial strategies that teachers use to explain writing failures.

The study expanded in inclusive, context-sensitive ways (meaningful) to teach writing in secondary education in Ecuador. Given these issues, this study explores the potential underlying causes of common English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing failures and the strategies to correct and prevent writing failures. The intention is to contribute to the local educational system, producing more inclusive, context-sensitive approaches to teaching writing in Ecuadorian secondary education. The research questions to answer are:

1. What are the frequent failures students make when writing in the English language?
2. What are the frequent grammar failures students make when writing in English?
3. How does students' mother tongue influence frequent failures?
4. What are the students' motivations for correcting their frequent failures when writing in EFL?

This study analyzes the frequent writing failures faced by high school students in Manabí, Ecuador.

### **1. Common failures in EFL Writing**

Many students learning English as a foreign language find writing to be particularly challenging. These struggles typically don't stem from a single cause; they often result from a combination of factors that are closely intertwined. Below are three of the most common issues that can hold students back when it comes to developing their writing skills:

1.1. Grammar and Punctuation Identified Issue.- Many English language learners have difficulty correctly applying English grammar and punctuation marks, among other things. Errors such as subject-verb disagreements, misaligned verb tenses, misplaced commas, and periods hinder both the intelligence and quality of their writing. These persistent errors hinder speech fluency and hurt students' grades. Thus, Chapelle (2003) advocates the use of online grammar checkers in EFL classes, stating that they help learners identify and correct their own mistakes. To Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), understanding the mechanics of language is crucial to producing clear and coherent texts, especially in academic expression. Besides, Ur (2012) explains that, when it comes to grammar rules, one must know when it is appropriate to use them to avoid ambiguities.

1.2. Vocabulary Limitations Identified Issue. - Another prominent obstacle in EFL writing is a narrow vocabulary. A limited lexicon makes students tend to use basic words repeatedly and avoid sophisticated phrases while expressing complex thoughts. In addition, Schmitt (2000) advocates the teaching of vocabulary through contextual instruction where learners derive meanings of new words and use them appropriately in their writing. Besides, Nation (2013) emphasizes that vocabulary development is crucial if students wish to write with more precision and sophistication. To support this, Renandya and Jacobs (2016) recommend extensive reading, which equips learners with different language structures and vocabulary available in context.

1.3. Writing Structure Identified Issue. - EFL learners tend to disregard the systematic arrangement of their writing. As a result, they usually do weak introductions, chaotic body



paragraphs, and incomplete conclusions. These writings are structured so poorly that it becomes almost impossible for readers to follow the intended sequence and logic, which defeats the purpose of writing. Rollinson (2005) emphasizes that students' understanding of text structure is reinforced by collaborative writing tasks coupled with peer review, as reflection after feedback deepens structural understanding. In harmony with Hirvela and Belcher (2007), effective teaching should include coherent staging approaches that aid students in planning and organizing their ideas in a step-by-step manner. This idea aligns with Graham and Perin's (2007) findings on text structure instruction, outlining, paragraph development, and text cohesion, which lead to improved composition skills for increasingly complex texts. Finally, Kapranov (2020) states academic writing's discourse markers, explaining their important role in guiding readers through cohesive transitions between points.

## **2. Instruction of English as a Foreign Language in the Secondary Education in Ecuador**

During the Government period of Galo Plaza Lasso, in the 1950s, the instruction of English as a Foreign language in Ecuador. At that time, the lack of English teachers was a significant problem, as students received only one hour of English classes. In addition, the British Council Academy and the Ministry of Education created the CRADLE project in 1942. According to Muñoz et al. (2018), the CRADLE project marked the first effort to transform the teaching methodology, incorporating valuable learning for students. It also introduced a curriculum with books that included communicative strategies with themes centered on values and Ecuadorian culture.

The government of Ecuador introduced the Ten-Year Education Plan in 2006, with the objective of increasing quality and equity in education. That same year, the United Kingdom stopped supporting the English teaching program in the country, and the collaboration ended completely in 2008. In 2010, the Ministry of Education carried out the first evaluation of English teachers. It revealed that more than 50% of the teachers had an A2 level according to the Common European Framework, which is equivalent to a basic level (Calle et al., 2015).

In 2012, the Ministry of Education introduced a new national English curriculum along with several strategies. These initiatives aimed to eliminate inequalities in access to English language learning and to improve the quality of English language teaching in the public sector. Since 2016, English has been a compulsory subject from the second year of basic education to the last year of high school (Ministry of Education, 2016). In addition, the government established that students must reach an intermediate level (B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages - CEFR) to graduate. It demonstrates Ecuador's commitment to improving the quality of English language teaching. Today, learning English in Ecuador is considered a vital factor for academic and professional development. It demand the use of communicative approach to allow students to learn more grammar and use language in common situations (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

The most common strategies of the new curriculum are the inclusion of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), the application of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and



the use of technology for educational purposes (Ministry of Education, 2016). The most widely used method for teaching English is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes interaction, real communication, and practical use of the language.

Despite efforts, CLT implementation faces several challenges. For example, in many rural schools, students do not have resources, forcing teachers to use more traditional methods, such as text translation, which do not develop listening and speaking skills (Bolaños Saenz et al., 2018).

The Introduction of English as a Foreign Language in Ecuador (Ministry of Education of Ecuador, 2016), this document which stipulates the general orientations of the English curriculum, defines “CLIL as a means of access and learn English in an authentic, meaningful context. Thus, the focus will be on language and language use, rather than knowledge of content” (p. 17).

Urban schools in Ecuador tend to have better access to resources and qualified teachers than rural schools (Barre-Parrales & Villafuerte-Holguín, 2021). These are inequities in English language instruction comparing teaching conditions between rural and urban areas (Villa Villa, 2023). In addition, studies have shown that prospective EFL teachers perceive flaws in their training, particularly in terms of modern methodologies and classroom management, which further exacerbates these challenges (Burgin & Daniel, 2023). It is relevant to address these differences to improve the quality and equity of ESL instruction in the country. One approach that could be effective is to adopt multilingual approaches that value and leverage students' home languages as a resource in learning. Such approaches foster inclusion and enrichment of language learning with learners' existing language skills (Giannini, 2024). However, it is necessary to have the technological facilities, equipment and quality internet access to make efficient use of educational technology, since the most frequent problems that negatively impact effective teaching time are related to internet access and the lack of ongoing training of teachers in the use of ICT (Villafuerte et al., 2025).

### **3. Writing Skills Assessment**

Evaluating writing skills is a vital component of teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly in secondary school settings. As noted by Weigle (2002), writing assessments are crucial for understanding students' challenges and steering them towards effective writing techniques. In the EFL classroom, teachers assess writing for grading purposes, point out frequent mistakes, or offer constructive feedback. Various strategies and tools are used in secondary schools to assess writing skills. According to Andrade (2000), rubrics are effective because they provide clear criteria for both teachers and students, speeding up the assessment process and improving self-assessment. Typically, these rubrics focus on key aspects such as content, structure, and language use, as well as on linguistics. In addition, peer assessment and self-correction activities have become increasingly important in recent years as they foster learner autonomy and stimulate reflection (Brown, 2004). Peer evaluation helps develop analytical, argumentative, and empathetic skills, focusing on understanding the work of peers. Also, self-correction helps to strengthen the ability to identify errors.



However, evaluating the school writing skills of secondary school students presents specific difficulties to teachers. The restricted vocabulary and grammar understanding of students, coupled with large class sizes and time limitations, can complicate the assessment process greatly.

On the other hand, summative assessment has an evaluative, certifying, or culminating function: it is used to gauge what students have accomplished after completing a unit of study. The primary purpose of making an appraisal is often regarded as issuing a final stamp of judgment; however, summative assessment can be enhanced with analytic rubrics, which outline criteria clearly, enhancing alignment with learning objectives. Andrade (2000) explains that focusing on specific criteria serves to clarify expectations and empowers learners to evaluate themselves and set better goals with the help of thoughtfully structured evaluation frameworks.

Furthermore, diagnostic assessment has its unique importance because it tries to simplify and identify a learner's strengths and weaknesses before any form of instruction. In a diverse classroom setting, where students possess different personal attributes, using diagnostic tests becomes imperative as they are equipped with very useful information that can assist educators in designing personalized strategies for each student. Alderson (2005) states that differential diagnosis helps in more effective differentiation by unraveling some of the underlying details that can be linguistic, structural, or organizational difficulties in writing.

Dynamic assessment provides an interactive model and integrates evaluation with instruction based on sociocultural theory by Vygotsky. This model attempts to shift attention from static measurement of ability toward the possibilities active within a learner through help provided externally. According to Poehner & Lantolf (2005), dynamic assessment not only attempts to determine what a learner can do independently but also focuses on what the learner can do under appropriate supportive conditions, which allows for greater understanding of developmental progress.

As Ferris (2011) notes, responding to learners' work needs to be more than correcting mistakes; it must encourage learners to engage actively and motivate them to want to improve their writing. Therefore, improving students' writing skills should employ continuous assessment strategies that are carried out systematically to assist students' ability to communicate effectively in English.

Assessment of writing within an EFL classroom presupposes a rationale about the specific goal and objectives of the assessment. Therefore, one can classify writing assessments as formative, summative, or diagnostic, which clarifies the pedagogical functions of assessment. Formative assessment is a type of evaluation for progress throughout the educational journey. It provides feedback that helps students to reflect on their writing and improve over time. Moreover, it encourages self-evaluation and development of metacognitive strategies, removing reliance on rote correctness. Assignments are also characterized by writer independence. Lee (2011) asserts that formative assessment creates a model classroom where teachers and learners engage in conversations to enhance proficiency through meaningful interaction.

Hyland (2019) emphasizes that assessment practices should consider factors such as coherence, cohesion, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary diversity, and the organization of ideas, all of which are essential for achieving successful written communication.

In previous studies, researchers point out that high school learners encounter a wide range of challenges in developing their writing proficiency in English as a foreign language. Some of the more prevalent difficulties include poor spelling, untidy punctuation, weak sentence coherence, inadequate use or complete absence of phrase linkers, and overall weak coherence. The work of Rehman et al. (2021) shows that the lack of punctuation and precise word choice frequently reflects a lack of understanding of the structure of academic texts. Besides, Hassan and Malik (2020) highlighted the same problem when learners do not organize their ideas systematically, resulting in texts with weak style, repetitive words, and poorly linked sentences. Above all, these studies reinforce the fact that cohesion and coherence, paragraph organization, spelling and punctuation errors, style, and vocabulary use are the crucial problem areas that deeply affect learners' English writing. Furthermore, Imtiaz et al. (2023) made an in-depth analysis of spelling errors among high school ESL students and found that phonetic confusion, the low level of spelling rules, and the influence of mother tongue structures were among the main causes of consistent spelling errors. These problems tend to change meaning and affect overall comprehension. Taye and Mengesha (2024) also mentioned the most common writing problems among students and found that issues such as limited vocabulary, poor grammar usage, and insufficient exposure to written English in academic contexts significantly diminished students' ability to write coherently. According to their data, these factors not only cause grammar errors but also reflect broader difficulties with language use. Studies of Asad (2025) show that writing problems remain common at different educational levels and confirm the need for more effective teaching strategies that address these difficulties within schools.

## **Methodology**

The research team used the modern paradigm and a mixed research approach to explore in depth the recurrent participants' writing difficulties in the usage of the English language. This research invited 40 teachers domiciled in the Manta canton of the province of Manabi, all of whom are instructors of the subject English as a Foreign Language. 15 teachers accepted to participate in the research, but 10 teachers completed the process. Among them, 40% are female and 60% are male, 80% work in the public sector, and 20% in the private educational institutions. They are between 20 and 40 years old. All of them agreed to participate voluntarily. The quantitative data were collected through structured surveys from students, and the qualitative part consisted of collecting information from semi-structured interviews with EFL instructors.

## **Instruments**

The instruments used in the research are the following

**Structured Survey.** - The instrument is a survey designed ad hoc, to perceive the most common writing difficulties faced by students as perceived by their teachers. The instrument was evaluated by an expert panel from the areas of educational administration, EFL instruction, and Educational Psychology, all of them affiliated with ULEAM University in Ecuador. The final version administrated in the study, focused on eight key areas: (1) Paragraph structure, (2) Spelling, (3) Punctuation, (3) Use of linking words and connectors, (4) Coherence and cohesion of the written text, (5) Sentence style and clarity, (6) Vocabulary usage, and (7) Formulation of compound and (8) complex ideas. The research team administered a Google Form format. The overage time required to complete the format is 6 minutes.

**Semi-Structured Interview.** - The instrument designed ad hoc has the purpose of exploring the reasons why students tend to make writing errors more frequently in English. Categories used are (1) reasons students tend to make writing errors more frequently in English, (2) strategies teachers use to detect errors, and (3) techniques instructors use to solve learners' frequent writing failures. The instrument was evaluated by an expert panel from the areas of educational administration, EFL instruction, and Educational Psychology, all of them affiliated with ULEAM University in Ecuador. The final version administered in the study consisted of 3 open questions that revolved around these categories: (1) Grammar errors, (2) Influence of the mother tongue versus insufficient grammatical understanding, (3) Motivation for learning. The interviews were conducted via Zoom, which allowed flexibility and accessibility for both the interviewer and the participants, and each session lasted about 40 minutes. It facilitated open, safe, and efficient communication. The total of the recordings is 120 minutes.

**Focus group.** - The instrument designed ad hoc has a purpose to determine strategies and techniques teachers use to detect and solve these writing problems. It is administered by seven EFL instructors. The instrument was evaluated by an expert panel from the areas of educational administration, EFL instruction, and Educational Psychology, all of them affiliated with ULEAM University in Ecuador. The final version administered in the study consisted of 4 open questions that revolved around these themes: (1) Motivations for learning and (2) Use of technological tools in writing instruction. The focus group lasted 80 minutes.

## **Procedure:**

The research executed the following stages:

Stage 1: Selection of participants. - The participants in this study were English teachers working in secondary schools in the province of Manabí, Ecuador.

Stage 2: Selection and design of data collection instruments. Validation of the instruments.

Stage 3: Execution of survey. It was conducted and shared through a link to a Google form to the ten instructors who took part in the study.

Stage 4: Individual interviews were conducted with three instructors selected for their experience and commitment to personal development. Interviews used Zoom. Each interview lasted at least 40 minutes.

Stage 5: Data analysis. The survey used statistical analysis, and the interview a categorical analysis.

Stage 6: Writing reports and socialization of results to participants

## Results

The results presentation follows the order of the research questions.

Question 1. What are the common mistakes students make when writing in the English language?

In answer to question 1, the following table shows the instructors' perceptions about the frequency at which their students make common errors when writing in English.

**Table 1:** Frequency of students' common errors when writing in English

<b>Common errors students do when writing in English</b>	<b>Very Frequent</b>	<b>Frequent</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Rarely</b>
1. Paragraph Organization	10%	90%	0%	0%
2. Spelling	40%	50%	10%	0%
3. Punctuation	30%	50%	20%	0%
4. Sentence Connectors	40%	40%	20%	0%
5. Coherence	20%	60%	20%	0%
6. Style	10%	50%	40%	0%
7. Vocabulary	30%	40%	30%	0%
8. Compound/Complex Ideas	20%	30%	40%	10%

Source: Survey / 2025.

Each cluster represents a kind of difficulty participants have in writing in the English language.

1. Paragraph Organization. - According to the results, 90% of respondents frequently struggle with paragraph organization, while only 10% indicated it as a persistent difficulty. This high percentage of frequent responses suggests that, although paragraph structure may not be perceived as a significant problem, it is a recurring challenge for most students. It may be the result of inadequate teaching of paragraph unity and coherence. Students also often seem to understand individual sentences but struggle to get the correct version. This research found that

too many students forget to plan before writing a paragraph. Some students also bring L1 writing skills to their L2 writing. However, the flow and organization of English texts vary greatly, which can appear confusing and fragmented. To develop writing skills, learning environments such as practical writing workshops and peer-review activities can help. Through this experience, students can also delve deeper into paragraph structuring in English and gain more confidence with sentence structure practice.

2. Spelling. - 40% of participants reported problems with spelling. Thus, it is a difficult practice, according to the results. Researchers suspect this could be due to several reasons. Spelling in English is unsystematic. It can be particularly confusing for students, especially those from languages with clearer phonetic orthography. Second, students often rely on their phonetic assumptions for spelling and make errors when using them to write. Similarly, the reliance on auto-correction tools in digital writing could be limiting students' spelling skills. It is suggested that increasing reading opportunities, in addition to spelling-focused activities, could increase students' sensitivity to English word forms and patterns.

3. Punctuation. - Regarding punctuation, 30% of respondents considered it a frequent problem, while 50% described it as frequent. This indicates that 80% of students consistently face difficulties with punctuation marks.

This is key because punctuation is essential for comprehension and clarity in written documents. The researchers also noted that incorrect use of punctuation (including missing commas) is a very common error. The problems in question may be due to a lack of understanding of English sentences or a lack of formal instruction on punctuation. Furthermore, students focus more on content than on the structure. Therefore, instructors can practice punctuation as a writing activity rather than teach it in isolation.

4. Sentence connectives - The survey revealed that 40% of participants face this problem frequently, and another 40% moderately. Only 20% experience it occasionally, indicating that sentence connectives are a widespread concern. Sentence connectives play a fundamental role in connecting ideas in written discourse. Some students seem familiar with simple connectives (e.g., "and," "but," or "because") but hesitate to use more complex connectives (e.g., "however," "consequently," or "in contrast"). This may be due to limited vocabulary and limited exposure to academic writing styles. Here, it is suggested that students focus on the logical relationships between ideas and offer guided practice in the effective use of discourse connectives to help connect ideas. To overcome this, the researchers argue that writing instruction should emphasize the relationships between ideas and offer guided practice in the appropriate use of discourse markers.

5. Coherence. - While only 20% reported coherence problems as very frequent, 60% rated them as frequent, making coherence a constant concern for 80% of students. The researchers take this to suggest that many students appreciate the importance of making their texts coherent but



struggle to do it in practice. Writers also need to work on consistency at both the micro (i.e., distance between sentences) and macro (i.e., between paragraphs) levels of the text. In other words, the researchers found that when instructors teach, students tend to "jump" from one idea to another without logical connections or providing an adequate explanation. An explanation for this may be the lack of time dedicated to brainstorming ideas. Therefore, the researchers suggest strengthening the habit of brainstorming and outlining to improve overall coherence.

6. **Style.** - Only 10% of students rated style as a frequent problem, but 50% found it frequent and 40% occasional. This indicates that while style may not be a major obstacle for most, it still affects a significant number of students. Writing style consists of tone, formality, and appropriateness of language. In this research, participants write conversationally and sometimes closer to spoken English than to academic terms. It could be indicative of a lack of knowledge of the genre or exposure to formal models of written reference. Furthermore, students may not fully understand how to modify their style to suit the purpose and audience. The researchers recommend comparative assignments in which students examine different writing styles across genres and develop structure and organization

7. **Vocabulary.** - Vocabulary emerged as a considerable challenge, with 30% citing it as very frequent, 40% as frequent, and 30% as occasional. The distribution suggests that vocabulary limitations affect nearly all students to varying degrees. From our perspective, the realization that an impoverished vocabulary hinders both clarity and expressiveness in student writing. For many learners, however, the dependence on repetition or general terms leads to unspecific or dull texts. Perhaps a learned word list with no application context. Also, fear of using words that are unfamiliar to you can lead to a student sticking to 'safe' vocabulary. Researchers think that by embedding the instruction of vocabulary in writing tasks related to content students will learn new words and use them more naturally.

8. **Compound and Complex Ideas.** - This category displayed the most diverse responses: 20% very frequent, 30% frequent, 40% occasional, and 10% rare. This variation indicates that the ability to develop compound and complex ideas varies significantly across students. The creation of intricate ideas demanded a high level not just of grammatical ability, but of intellectual development to organize and link ideas. In our experience, learners who have difficulty with complex sentences tend to write in an overly simple or disjointed manner. On the flipside, those who endeavor to make longer sentences generally get into trouble with syntax and punctuation. Researchers take this as a development problem: students must be systematically built up and explicitly instructed in how to generate more complex sentences. It could be helpful to model and practice sentence combining.

In answer to question 2: What are the grammar errors students make when write in English?

The interviews analysis used the following three categories.



Category 1: Grammar errors. - According to Al-Khasawneh (2016), grammatical errors are failures in the application of the rules that structure sentences in English as a foreign language, which is a way of affecting both the clarity and correctness of texts written in English as a second language.

Subcategories: Adjectives, tense conjugation, spelling.

Table 2: Teachers' perceptions about students common errors

Evidence	Sub category
<b>Teacher 1:</b> <i>"Students tend not only to write, but also to speak, just as they think in Spanish. So, if they write 'carro negro', they're going to say, 'car black,' but we already know that in English we're going to use 'black car.'"</i>	Adjective
<b>Teacher 2:</b> <i>"The most common writing mistakes I've noticed among students are mainly two. First, they struggle with verb tenses, they don't know how to properly use the simple past, the simple present, or the future tense with auxiliary verbs."</i> <i>"Second, there's a clear difficulty with subject-verb agreement. For example, in the simple present tense, third person singular subjects require the verb to end in -s or -es. Many students forget this rule, which leads to frequent errors. So those are the most common issues I've seen: they forget to add the -s in the third person singular form of the present tense, and they also forget how to conjugate verbs in the past, present, and future."</i>	Verbs' conjugation.  Add "s" in third person in present.
<b>Teacher 3:</b> <i>The most common errors are grammatical mistakes with verb tenses, subject omission, incorrect use of prepositions, and spelling mistakes like confusing "there," "their," and "they're".</i>	Verbs' conjugation. Spelling caused for words that sound similar

Source: Semi-structured interview (2025)

In the three interviews conducted with English teachers, numerous patterns were observed in the writing errors committed by secondary school students. One of the challenges most highlighted by educators is the interference of Spanish. For example, the first teacher commented that students confuse what they write in English with Spanish, which affects the coherence of the grammatical structure. Furthermore, the second teacher commented on the weakness in the correct use of verb tenses, especially in the distinction between them and auxiliary verbs. This problem is accompanied by errors in subject-verb relationships, particularly in the third person singular, where students tend to omit the -s or -es endings. Finally, the third teacher identified other relevant grammatical errors, such as the omission of subjects in sentences, the incorrect use of prepositions, and recurring spelling errors, especially among homophones that are confusing to students, such as "there," "their," and "they're." These

errors show not only grammatical limitations but also reflect a partial understanding of the contextual meaning of certain words.

In answer to question 3.- How does students' mother tongue influence their grammatical understanding? Researchers present the following categorical analysis.

Category 2.- Influence of the mother tongue versus insufficient grammatical understanding: According to Asad (2025), mother tongue interference contributes significantly to students' grammatical knowledge and difficulties. Besides, the relevance of teaching strategies that compare the structures of the native language with those of the target language.

Subcategories: High, Moderate, Low levels

Table 3: Influence of mother tongue versus insufficient grammatical understanding

<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Sub categories</b>
<b>Teacher 1:</b> <i>"It's a little bit more difficult for them to adapt, like to certain grammatical rules, they say, no, but I was taught that way in Spanish. "</i>	High level
<b>Teacher 2:</b> <i>"In my view, the first language (L1) does not hinder second language (L2) acquisition. The real problem lies in students' limited mastery of their L1. Since English and Spanish share similarities, L1–L2 transfer can be helpful. However, many students struggle to identify basic grammatical elements in their own language, making it difficult to recognize them in L2. The core issue is a lack of grammatical awareness in both languages."</i>	Moderate level
<b>Teacher 3:</b> <i>"Both factors influence, but in my experience, Spanish interference is the main cause, especially with structures like "I have 15 years."</i>	High level

Source: Semi-structured interview (2025)

Regarding the factors that hinder the development of writing skills in English, teachers' opinions refer to possible causes: interference from the native language (Spanish) and a lack of grammatical mastery, both in the native language and in the second language. The first teacher indicated that students find it very difficult to adapt to grammatical rules with the second language (L2) because they are accustomed to their native language (L1). In contrast, the second teacher believes that the native language (L1) is not an obstacle, since their experience is that the real problem lies in the fact that many students do not master the grammatical foundations of their language. This hampers language transfer by limiting their ability to recognize and understand grammatical structures in English. From this perspective, a key factor influencing the learning of English as a foreign language appears to be the lack of

metalinguistic awareness. The last teacher held an intermediate position: both interference with the native language and insufficient grammatical understanding are factors that influence students' difficulties writing in English.

In answer to question 4: What are the students' motivations for learning writing in EFL? Researchers present the following categorical analysis.

Category 3: Motivation for learning. - It helps students achieve their goals with the best results during the English learning process. Internal factors, such as personal interests, and external factors like emotional support or motivation from other peers.

Subcategories: Intrinsic and extrinsic; high, medium, low levels.

Table 4: Motivation for learning EFL.

<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Sub categories</b>
<p><b>Teacher 1:</b> <i>"I think, sometimes students will say: 'No, I do not want to learn English; it's not going to help me.' Therefore, it is important for us to motivate students... not necessarily to learn the language but to understand the significance of the language."</i></p> <p><i>"Sometimes students say: 'No, I do not want to learn English, it is not going to help me'. So, it is important that we motivate students...not so much to learn but also for them to understand the importance of the language."</i></p>	<p>Low level Extrinsic</p>
<p><b>Teacher 2:</b> <i>"There are several factors involved, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. One of which is motivation; it is one of the most important factors. Maintaining students' interest in learning the second language is a must. However, the challenge is to maintain an entire class of students, with different interests and preferences, until the point where they have mastered the skills they need." "Another important factor is the students' lack of authentic and consistent practice. Most students are not willing to put the effort in their learning, especially when they do not understand. Additionally, they do not recognize that learning requires time and effort, and when we practice regularly, sometimes difficult tasks become easier."</i></p>	<p>Medium level Intrinsic and Extrinsic</p>
<p><b>Teacher 3:</b> <i>"Yes, lack of writing practice affects this key writing ability! Furthermore, low motivation, fear of making mistakes, and limited class time spent writing in English can all contribute too."</i></p>	<p>Low level Intrinsic</p>

Source: Semi-structured interview (2025)

Educators identified internal and external reasons that contributed to persistent writing difficulties. Lack of interest emerged as a significant factor, as students frequently showed a lack of interest in English or considered it unimportant. This lack of interest led to counterproductive learning and reduced engagement in writing tasks.

Another factor is a lack of exposure. Students rarely write in English; therefore, they do not develop grammar or fluency. Regarding recording criteria, educators observed that fear of making mistakes prevents students from taking risks in certain types of writing. This inhibits development as writers.

Furthermore, educators identified external factors such as limited time to write in class or the presence of large groups of students as barriers to improvement. These findings highlight the relevance of learning contexts characterized by opportunities for regular writing, lower anxiety, and a greater perception of the value of learning English.

Teachers use many methods to motivate students to learn EFL. From the focus groups are extracted the following evidence:

**Participant a:** *"Sometimes students say: 'No, I do not want to learn English, it is not going to help me'. So, it is important that we motivate students...not so much to learn but also for them to understand the importance of the language. Now with technology, we have a lot of tools...students really like to work this way, because they no longer learn by simply writing on the blackboard."*

**Participant b:** *"There are several factors, both intrinsic and extrinsic. Motivation is both, and it is essential for helping students stay interested in learning a second language. However, this is a huge challenge for teachers, since students have different tastes and preferences, and keeping them engaged is complex."*

**Participant c:** *"Other factor is the lack of practice. Students are often not eager to practice or make an effort in something they do not fully understand. They need to become aware that practice leads to improvement. At the beginning, it is difficult, but as they keep trying and getting used to it, the process becomes easier. Learning is gradual, and over time, the knowledge they build helps them overcome the difficulties they faced."*

**Participant d:** *"I use written feedback with correction codes, such as 'VT' for verb tense errors, and then give students the opportunity to rewrite their texts. To prevent errors before they happen, I use text models, step-by-step guided writing, and peer reviews before students submit their final drafts."*

Inspirational methods are critical to change their students' perspectives about studying English. There were references to using technology tools, images, and engaged materials to lead (proactive) unique engagement.

Regarding patterns of correction, teachers often mentioned methods of written feedback with



error coding to allow students to notice and correct their own errors. The participants similarly referenced the use of example texts, sequenced writing instructions, and peer feedback tasks that provided structure and some level of support for students to self-correct.

The methods employed are consistent with evidence-based practice in English writing instruction and reflected on the necessity for continuous support, concentrating purely on the process of learning, and facilitating students to self-learn. However, how well the methods worked is dependent on an array of factors, including class size, teacher workload, and willingness for students to improve their assignments.

The use of technology as part of writing instruction was uneven across classrooms. While some teachers reported using rubrics, digital feedback, and online resources as a part of writing instruction, some teachers reported not using technology as part of writing tasks. This inconsistency may largely be due to lack of training, elements of decreasing resources, and an unfamiliarity with digital tools that support language learning.

From the focus groups evidence are extracted the following evidences:

**Participant a:** *"As for writing, I do not really use a specific technology as such. I mean, I use a wide range of ICTs"*

**Participant e:** *"I provide written feedback regularly during my Reading and Writing classes. In each of these sessions, I give feedback at the end of the lesson to address the writing errors that occurred during the activity. In contrast, during Listening and Speaking classes, I focus exclusively on oral skills."*

**Participant f:** *"Once a week during specific writing activities. I mark errors directly and use a rubric, so they understand their weaknesses."*

When used appropriately, technology can help teachers provide immediate feedback, a creative collaborative writing experience, and authentic contexts for language use. In the educational setting, the use of technology such as grammar checkers, educational apps, and collaborative spaces (Google Docs) appears particularly useful in large classes where individualized attention is either impossible or limited. The findings of this study reflect the need for professional development that supports the use of ICTs in EFL writing practice.

## Discussion

This section begins by explaining that secondary school students learning English as a foreign language face multiple challenges in developing their writing skills. The analysis of the research results allows the authors to express agreement with the works of Rehman et al. (2021), Imtiaz et al. (2023), and Taye and Mengesha (2024). They support the assertion that errors such as poor paragraph organization and inconsistent spelling are the main errors found

in writing practices. Furthermore, spelling mistakes, the limited use of linking words, and a lack of textual coherence remain very common and difficult to correct in EFL students.

In this study, it is observed that students understand simple sentences but have difficulty structuring ideas clearly and logically. This is consistent with the position of Hassan and Malik (2020), who assert that poor organization of ideas leads to poor writing style. In this context, the lack of knowledge about the academic structure of the text, mentioned by Rehman et al. (2021), is confirmed as one of the causes of punctuation, connective, and style errors.

The results obtained in this study indicate that one of the most common errors is spelling errors in EFL writing. These results confirm the findings of Imtiaz et al. (2023), who state that such errors are due to (1) phonetic confusion, (2) lack of knowledge of spelling rules, and (3) the influence of the native language. Furthermore, such influence was observed in interviews with English teachers. Thus, teachers and students often write in English the same way they think in Spanish, which leads to serious grammatical errors, for example, the incorrect placement of adjectives or the use of Spanish sentence structures when writing in English.

Another key point is the influence of the L1 on English and the lack of grammatical understanding. On the one hand, some teachers believe that Spanish directly affects the way students write in English. On the other hand, other teachers claim that students lack mastery of grammar in their native language, which makes learning English difficult. This supports Asad's (2025) assertion about the need to compare first language (L1) and second language (L2) to help students learn better and develop greater linguistic awareness.

A lack of motivation to learn EFL and slowness in practical writing are also key common difficulties. Students often failed to see the point of learning English or felt discouraged due to fear of making mistakes.

Among the unintended findings of this research is that teachers use different strategies, such as (a) providing written feedback through brainstorming, (b) using model texts, and (c) incorporating technological tools. However, the use of technology varies, even if digital tools are not used due to a lack of training or access. Studies indicate that, when used correctly, these tools can facilitate rapid correction, group writing, and independent learning, especially in large classes.

These results also offer teaching strategies that teachers can implement in the classroom, such as written feedback and the use of reading and listening. Writing instruction must evolve from a traditional text, limited by a few brief, methodical units, to a holistic model where the writing process incorporates feedback, peer collaboration, and technological advances.

It is essential that preservice teacher training include writing pedagogy, especially in resource-limited settings. Ultimately, building a writing culture in EFL classrooms requires a shift in instruction, but also a reconceptualization of the idea of writing in English as something personal, purposeful, and possible.

## Conclusion

Based on the theoretical review and the results obtained in the empirical section, the authors declare full compliance with the objective presented in this research: to analyze the frequent writing failures faced by high school students in Manabí, Ecuador, when writing in English as a foreign language. Thus, this research establishes that writing in English remains one of the most complex and least developed skills for Ecuadorian students of English as a foreign language (EFL). The analysis reveals that grammatical errors, lack of vocabulary, and deficiencies in structural planning are common. Interviews with teachers highlight that both linguistic factors, such as interference from the native language, and motivational factors, such as lack of metalinguistic awareness and fear of making mistakes, affect student performance. Furthermore, teaching practices often fail to consider the cognitive and emotional depth of the writing process. The results of this research help teachers understand the most common errors in writing in English as a foreign language among secondary school students, such as spelling errors, limited vocabulary, poor text structure, and interference with the first language. The weakness of the study lies in the sample size, which does not allow for generalizations, but it does contribute to the analysis of the topic. For future research aimed at strengthening students' English writing skills, it is proposed to expand the corpus and propose the use of artificial intelligence in creative and academic writing practices in English. This work confirms that overcoming writing barriers is not enough to simply switch from physical to electronic media or delay feedback; it is also necessary to innovate specific writing pedagogies in the use of English as a foreign language.

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