

Proficiency in Written English among College of Education Students: Implications for Digital Learning

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Abstract: Written English proficiency is an important competency for students in teacher education, particularly as academic communication and writing activities increasingly occur in digitally mediated learning environments. This study assessed the written English proficiency of College of Education students at Kalinga State University, identified factors affecting their proficiency, and determined remedial measures that may support its improvement. A descriptive research design was employed using a structured questionnaire administered to College of Education students during School Year 2022–2023. Data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, ranking, and weighted mean. The findings showed an overall weighted mean of 3.64, interpreted as Very Good. General English Writing Skills obtained a weighted mean of 3.53, while Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Skills obtained 3.75. Among the identified factors affecting written English proficiency, poor reading and study habits ranked first, with 33 responses (38.82%). Among the proposed remedial measures, joining campus journalism was the most frequently selected, with 29 responses (34.11%), followed by doing action research and business letter writing. The findings indicate that the students have a generally strong foundation in written English while specific learning needs remain in developing writing practices and sustaining effective reading and study habits. The findings further provide implications for digital learning, particularly in using digitally supported reading, research, writing, and authentic communication activities to complement existing English instruction. The study provides a basis for integrating appropriate digital learning opportunities into writing instruction without replacing established pedagogical practices.

Keywords: written English proficiency; academic writing; digital learning; digital writing; English language learning; teacher education

1. INTRODUCTION

Written English proficiency remains an important competency in higher education because students are expected to communicate ideas clearly, organize information logically, and produce academically appropriate texts. Academic writing is particularly demanding because it requires students to coordinate linguistic knowledge, organization, planning, and content development. Recent research shows that university students, including those studying English and teacher education, continue to experience difficulties in grammar, sentence construction, organization, and academic expression [1], [2]. In the Philippine context, recent studies involving English-major and English education students likewise report persistent concerns involving grammatical accuracy, sentence structure, punctuation, and word choice, indicating that writing development remains an important concern even at the tertiary level [2], [3].

At the same time, academic writing is increasingly situated within digitally mediated learning environments. Students now use online resources, word-processing applications, digital reference materials, collaborative platforms,



and other technologies throughout the writing process. A meta-analysis of technology-enhanced language learning research found an overall positive effect of educational technologies on ESL/EFL writing performance, although the effectiveness varied according to the type of technology and writing genre [4]. Recent systematic research on technology-enhanced collaborative writing similarly indicates potential benefits for writing performance, engagement, collaboration, and learner participation [5]. These findings suggest that digital technologies can provide additional environments for practicing, revising, and communicating written language rather than functioning merely as substitutes for conventional classroom instruction [6].

Digital learning also provides opportunities for more immediate and varied forms of writing support. Automated writing evaluation systems can provide feedback on linguistic features and may promote learner autonomy, although their effectiveness depends on the quality and appropriate use of the feedback [7]. Research comparing automatic writing evaluation and teacher-focused feedback has likewise examined effects on writing quality, syntactic complexity, accuracy, lexical diversity, and fluency [8]. Similarly, automated written corrective feedback has been investigated as a supplementary mechanism for helping EFL students identify and revise writing problems [9]. These developments are particularly relevant to areas of written English involving grammar, punctuation, mechanics, organization, and revision. However, digital feedback should complement rather than replace teacher guidance because students still require contextual interpretation and pedagogical support.

The broader development of digital learning has also expanded the possibilities for authentic writing activities. E-learning courseware has been used to support undergraduate English writing, while online collaborative writing can provide opportunities for students to generate ideas, compose, edit, and reflect on their written work [10], [11]. Digital environments can also support multilingual learners through online search strategies, translation resources, and other tools that assist with lexical and syntactic problems [6]. In the Philippine setting, the continued transition toward digitally mediated learning has created opportunities for students to access learning resources beyond the physical classroom. Consequently, writing instruction can increasingly connect conventional activities such as research writing, campus journalism, and formal correspondence with digital forms of reading, information searching, composition, collaboration, and publication.

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has further changed the landscape of academic writing. Recent studies have examined how students use AI-based systems for brainstorming, drafting, feedback, revision, and academic communication [12]–[15]. Evidence suggests that students may perceive GenAI as a writing assistant or feedback resource, while also encountering concerns related to accuracy, academic integrity, authorship, and overreliance on technology [13]–[15]. Research on ChatGPT-assisted writing has also reported potential benefits for academic writing development under appropriate instructional conditions [12]. These findings reinforce the need to develop students' underlying writing competence alongside their ability to use digital tools critically and responsibly. Digital learning, therefore, should not be viewed as a replacement for fundamental writing instruction but as an environment in which writing skills can be practiced, supported, and applied in authentic contexts.

Despite these developments, the present study is not an evaluation of a specific digital platform, automated writing system, or AI intervention. Rather, it examines the existing written English proficiency of College of Education students and the factors and remedial measures associated with their writing development. This focus is important because understanding students' existing competencies and learning needs provides a basis for determining how digital learning opportunities can be appropriately integrated into writing instruction. Recent research emphasizes that academic writing in the digital age involves both linguistic competencies and students' ability to navigate online resources, feedback, and digital tools strategically [15]. Thus, identifying students' strengths and areas requiring further development can inform more responsive approaches to digitally supported writing instruction.

In this context, the present study assessed the **written English proficiency of College of Education students at Kalinga State University**, identified the factors affecting their proficiency, and determined the remedial measures perceived as appropriate for its improvement. Specifically, the study sought to: **(1)** determine the students' written English proficiency; **(2)** identify the factors affecting their written English proficiency; and **(3)** identify remedial

measures that may improve their writing proficiency. The findings are further considered in terms of their **implications for digital learning**, particularly the potential use of digitally supported reading, research, writing, feedback, revision, and authentic communication activities. This framing preserves the study's original focus while situating its findings within the contemporary digital learning environment.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a **descriptive quantitative research design** to assess the written English proficiency of College of Education students at Kalinga State University, identify factors affecting their proficiency, and determine perceived remedial measures for its improvement. The data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and ranking.

2.2 Participants and Sampling

The participants were **first- to fourth-year students enrolled in the College of Education at Kalinga State University during the second semester of School Year 2022–2023**. Participants were selected through **random sampling using stratified proportional allocation** to provide representation across the student population.

2.3 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a **structured survey questionnaire**. The instrument included items assessing students' written English proficiency, particularly **General English Writing Skills** and **Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Skills**, as well as factors affecting proficiency and possible remedial measures. The proficiency items used a five-point scale from **1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent)**.

Because the instrument asks students to rate statements describing what they can do, the results represent **students' self-assessed written English proficiency** rather than performance on an externally administered writing test. This distinction should be maintained in the Methodology and Discussion.

2.4 Data Collection

Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the appropriate university authorities. The questionnaires were distributed through the assigned advisers of each year level. Respondents were informed that their responses would be treated confidentially and used for academic and research purposes. Completed questionnaires were retrieved, checked, organized, coded, and prepared for analysis.

2.5 Data Analysis

Frequency and percentage were used to summarize the factors affecting written English proficiency and the proposed remedial measures. **Weighted mean** was used to determine the students' self-assessed proficiency in General English Writing Skills and Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Skills, while **ranking** was used to order the identified factors and remedial measures according to frequency.

The weighted means were interpreted using the following scale:

Table 1. Weighted Mean

Weighted Mean	Interpretation
4.21–5.00	Excellent
3.41–4.20	Very Good
2.61–3.40	Good
1.81–2.60	Fair

1.00–1.80	Poor
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3. RESULTS

3.1 Self-Assessed Written English Proficiency

Table 2 presents the students' self-assessed proficiency in written English in terms of General English Writing Skills and Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Skills. The overall weighted mean was 3.64, interpreted as Very Good.

Table 2. Self-Assessed Written English Proficiency of College of Education Students

Area	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
General English Writing Skills	3.53	Very Good
Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Skills	3.75	Very Good
Overall	3.64	Very Good

The higher rating for Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Skills (3.75) indicates stronger perceived competence in language conventions than in broader writing skills (3.53). The results nevertheless show that both areas were rated **Very Good**, indicating a generally strong foundation in written English.

The findings suggest that students have established basic writing competencies but may still benefit from activities that strengthen planning, organization, research-based writing, and revision. These areas are particularly relevant to digitally mediated writing, where students increasingly use online information sources and word-processing tools to develop and communicate written work.

3.2 General English Writing Skills

The General English Writing Skills indicators received generally favorable ratings. Students reported relatively strong ability in brainstorming, selecting research topics, developing research questions, organizing ideas, and writing academic texts.

The results indicate that students perceive themselves as capable of performing major stages of the writing process. However, differences among the individual indicators suggest that specific writing processes may still require reinforcement. In particular, activities involving planning, research, organization, and revision can provide opportunities for students to further develop their writing competence.

These findings also have implications for digital learning because these writing processes can be supported through digital research resources, word-processing applications, collaborative writing environments, and electronic feedback.

3.3 Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Skills

The students likewise obtained a **Very Good** assessment in Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Skills, with a weighted mean of **3.75**.

The result indicates that students generally perceive themselves as capable of applying appropriate grammar, punctuation, spelling, and mechanics in written English. Nevertheless, continued practice and feedback remain important because accuracy in these areas contributes to clarity and effective academic communication.

Digital writing tools may provide additional opportunities for students to identify and revise mechanical and grammatical problems. Such tools should be treated as supplementary learning resources, with teacher guidance remaining important in interpreting and correcting writing errors.

3.4 Factors Affecting Written English Proficiency

The study identified several factors affecting the students' written English proficiency. **Poor reading and study habits** ranked first, accounting for **33 responses (38.82%)**. This was followed by lack of interest, teachers' methods or techniques, family or home-related problems, insufficient books at home, and classroom conditions.

Table 3. Factors Affecting Students' Written English Proficiency

Rank	Factor	Frequency	Percentage
1	Poor reading and study habits	33	38.82%
2	Lack of interest in the subject	15	17.65%
3	Teachers' methods, techniques, and styles of teaching	13	15.30%
4	Family/home problems	10	11.76%
4	Insufficiency of books at home	10	11.76%
6	Classroom condition	4	4.71%
	Total	85	100.00%

The prominence of reading and study habits suggests that writing development is influenced not only by students' language knowledge but also by their engagement with learning activities. Digital learning environments may provide additional reading resources and structured writing activities, but access to digital resources alone may not address ineffective study habits. Guided activities and sustained engagement remain necessary.

3.5 Preferred Remedial Measures

Table 4 presents the remedial measures identified by the respondents. **Joining campus journalism** ranked first with **29 responses (34.11%)**, followed by **doing action research (24.71%)** and **business letter writing (22 responses; 25.88%)**.

Table 4. Proposed Remedial Measures for Improving Written English Proficiency

Rank	Remedial Measure	Frequency	Percentage
1	Joining campus journalism	29	34.11%
2	Doing action research	24	28.24%
3	Business letter writing	21	24.71%
4	Speak English in class policy	6	7.06%
5	Reading books	5	5.88%
	Total	85	100.00%

4. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the College of Education students had a **very good self-assessed level of written English proficiency**, with an overall weighted mean of **3.64**. General English Writing Skills obtained a mean of **3.53**, while Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Skills obtained **3.75**. This pattern suggests that students perceived themselves as relatively more confident in language conventions than in broader writing processes. Such a distinction

is important because academic writing requires more than grammatical accuracy; it also involves planning, organizing ideas, developing arguments, and revising texts. Recent research likewise identifies academic writing as a multidimensional activity influenced by students' prior preparation, learning context, perceived writing ability, and writing strategies [1].

The relatively favorable assessment of General English Writing Skills suggests that the students possess a functional foundation for academic writing. However, the lower mean compared with Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Skills indicates that continued development of higher-order writing processes remains appropriate. This is consistent with recent evidence showing that writing difficulties may involve both surface-level features, such as grammar and mechanics, and deeper processes, such as planning, organization, and coherence [2]. Thus, writing instruction should continue to address both linguistic accuracy and the processes through which students develop and communicate ideas.

The findings are also relevant to the study's digital-learning orientation. Contemporary writing increasingly occurs through digitally mediated environments in which students search for information, compose and revise documents, and receive feedback through technology. A recent meta-analysis of 64 studies found a substantial positive effect of technology-enhanced language learning on ESL/EFL writing performance, although the effects varied according to technology type and writing genre [3]. More recent evidence focusing specifically on higher education likewise reports a large positive effect of technology-assisted academic writing instruction and emphasizes that **pedagogical and contextual factors**, rather than technology alone, influence effectiveness [4]. These findings support the use of digital tools as complementary resources for writing development rather than as replacements for writing instruction.

The identification of **poor reading and study habits as the leading factor affecting written English proficiency (33 responses, 38.82%)** is particularly important. The finding suggests that students' writing development may be constrained not only by language-related difficulties but also by how frequently and systematically they engage with reading and study activities. This supports the need for structured learning practices that provide regular opportunities to read, process information, develop ideas, and write. Digital learning environments can potentially support these practices through accessible reading materials, guided activities, electronic resources, and structured writing tasks. However, technology access by itself should not be assumed to resolve poor study habits; effective instructional design and learner engagement remain necessary.

The remedial measures further reinforce the importance of **authentic and practice-oriented writing activities**. Campus journalism ranked first with **29 responses (34.11%)**, followed by action research with **24 (28.24%)** and business letter writing with **21 (24.71%)**. These preferences indicate that students value opportunities to use English for meaningful purposes rather than relying exclusively on isolated language exercises. Campus journalism, for example, can provide opportunities to research, organize information, write for an audience, revise texts, and communicate ideas. When appropriately adapted to contemporary learning environments, such activities can extend to digital campus publications and other forms of online communication.

The preference for **action research** also has implications for digitally supported learning. Research writing requires students to locate information, formulate questions, organize evidence, and communicate findings. Digital databases, online information resources, collaborative writing platforms, and electronic reference tools can support these activities. However, the present study did not evaluate the effectiveness of any particular digital tool; therefore, these should be considered **potential instructional applications rather than demonstrated outcomes**.

The findings on **business letter writing** similarly suggest the value of authentic communication tasks. With 21 respondents (24.71%) selecting this measure, students appear to recognize the importance of practicing formal written communication. In contemporary settings, these skills can extend beyond conventional letters to professional emails, electronic correspondence, and other digitally mediated forms of workplace communication. This provides a practical connection between written English development and digital learning without changing the original focus of the study.

The role of feedback is also relevant to these findings. Recent meta-analytic evidence indicates that feedback can improve both surface-level and deeper aspects of writing, with combined feedback addressing both types of outcomes [5]. The implication for the present study is that digital learning activities may be most useful when they provide opportunities for **drafting, feedback, revision, and reflection**, rather than simply allowing students to produce text more quickly. This is particularly relevant to the students' identified need for continued development of writing competencies.

Overall, the findings support a **complementary model of digital learning for written English development**. The students already perceive themselves as having a strong foundation in written English, but the results also identify areas that require sustained practice, particularly reading and study habits and authentic writing activities. Digital learning can therefore be positioned as an enabling environment for extending reading, research, writing, feedback, revision, and communication activities. This interpretation is consistent with recent research showing that technology-assisted writing can be effective when its use is connected to appropriate pedagogical approaches and learning contexts [3], [4].

5. CONCLUSION

The study found that the College of Education students had a **very good self-assessed level of written English proficiency**, with an overall weighted mean of **3.64**. Both General English Writing Skills ($M = 3.53$) and Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Skills ($M = 3.75$) were rated Very Good. These findings indicate that the students perceived themselves as having a generally strong foundation in written English, although continued development of broader writing competencies remains appropriate.

Among the factors identified, **poor reading and study habits** was the most frequently reported, with **33 responses (38.82%)**. This highlights the importance of sustained reading, effective study practices, and regular opportunities to use written English. Among the proposed remedial measures, **joining campus journalism** ranked first with **29 responses (34.11%)**, followed by action research and business letter writing. These findings emphasize the value of authentic and purposeful writing activities in strengthening students' writing competence.

The findings also provide implications for **digital learning**. Existing writing competencies and identified learning needs may be supported through appropriate digital resources for reading, research, writing, feedback, revision, and communication. However, the study did not test a digital-learning or AI intervention; therefore, these applications should be regarded as potential instructional directions rather than demonstrated effects. Overall, the findings support the integration of appropriate digital learning opportunities with established writing instruction to provide students with additional and authentic opportunities to develop their written English skills.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, English instruction in the College of Education should continue to strengthen students' writing competencies through **research writing, outlining, reading activities, and authentic writing tasks**. Particular attention should be given to developing effective reading and study habits, which was the most frequently identified factor affecting written English proficiency.

The College of Education may further strengthen **campus journalism, action research, and other authentic writing activities** as opportunities for students to practice writing for meaningful academic and professional purposes. These activities may also be extended into digital formats, such as online student publications, digital research activities, collaborative writing, and electronic professional communication.

Digital learning resources may be used to complement classroom instruction by providing accessible reading materials, writing and revision activities, research resources, and appropriate feedback mechanisms. However, technology should support rather than replace teacher guidance and students' active engagement in the writing process.

Finally, future researchers may examine written English proficiency among larger or more diverse student populations and investigate the effectiveness of specific **digital writing and learning interventions**. Such studies

could provide empirical evidence on which digital approaches are most appropriate for improving students' academic writing skills.

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