

# GUIDED WRITING APPROACH: AT-RISK STUDENTS' WRITING PERFORMANCE

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## ABSTRACT

*This study investigated the writing performance of at-risk students through the lens of teachers who employed the guided writing approach in the classroom. Using a phenomenological research design, the study explored the lived experiences and insights of seven English language teachers who regularly handle learners with persistent writing difficulties. Their narratives revealed three major challenges that shape students' writing performance: limited vocabulary and weak sentence construction, difficulty in presenting coherent and meaningful ideas, and low self-confidence that hinders active engagement in writing tasks. These issues were found to significantly influence how students organize, refine, and communicate their thoughts in written form.*

*In response to these challenges, the participating teachers described several strategies they developed over time. These included providing explicit and step-by-step writing instructions, enhancing students' exposure to varied word forms and contextual vocabulary, and offering feedback that is both constructive and motivating. Teachers emphasized that these approaches helped reduce students' anxiety and gradually improved their sense of competence.*

*From their collective reflections, three broader insights emerged: sustained reading exposure is essential in shaping effective writers; continuous professional improvement is necessary for teachers to address evolving learning needs; and writing instruction must be intentional, guided, and regularly reinforced. Overall, the findings suggest that strengthening pedagogical strategies and addressing students' attitudes toward writing are equally important in improving performance. The study offers meaningful implications for educators, school administrators, and future researchers who aim to design interventions tailored to the needs of at-risk learners and to contribute to the growing discourse on effective writing instruction.*

**Keywords** - *Guided writing approach, reading attitude, writing habits, curriculum, Tagum City*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a key literacy skill necessary for expressing ideas clearly, participating in academic tasks, and engaging in lifelong learning. Yet many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners continue to find writing difficult, particularly in generating ideas, organizing them logically, and applying correct grammar and mechanics. As scholars note, writing involves not only producing ideas but shaping and refining them throughout the process, a task that demands attention to content, structure, and language use all at once. These complexities often contribute to students' anxiety and reluctance to write.

Studies from different contexts confirm these challenges. Research in the United States reports persistent writing difficulties among learners, while work in Hong Kong shows how guided and multimedia-supported instruction can enhance students' motivation and creativity. In the Philippines, problems with grammar, punctuation, and paragraph organization remain common among secondary students.

Similar issues are observed at La Filipina National High School, where teachers note that many at-risk learners have limited vocabulary, weak grammatical foundations, and minimal reading exposure. Because of these factors, students often struggle to express ideas coherently in writing. Various instructional approaches—such as modeling, shared writing, and guided writing—have been used to support learners. Guided writing provides structured scaffolding that allows students to plan, draft, and revise their work more confidently.

Recognizing the need to strengthen writing proficiency, this study investigates the experiences of teachers who implement guided writing with at-risk learners. It focuses on the challenges they encounter, the strategies they employ, and the insights they gain that may guide educational management and instructional improvement.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study explored the writing performance of at-risk students as observed by English teachers using the guided writing approach. It sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of English teachers in facilitating students' writing performance using the guided writing approach?
2. How do teachers cope with the challenges related to the writing performance and attitudes of at-risk students?
3. What educational management insights can be drawn from these experiences?

### 1.2 Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to describe teachers' experiences in implementing guided writing among at-risk learners. Specifically, it intended to:

1. assist school administrators in designing relevant technical assistance and teacher development programs;
2. support teachers in improving their instructional approaches in teaching writing; and
3. provide baseline information for future research on writing instruction.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1 Research Design

A phenomenological research design guided the collection and interpretation of data. In-depth interviews served as the primary source of information. Interview transcripts were read repeatedly, compared, and analyzed to identify recurring ideas and patterns. Bracketing was applied throughout the process to minimize the influence of the researcher's prior experiences.

Following Corbetta's view of interviews as rich sources of contextualized data, participants' accounts were examined for both common and unique meanings. Codes were organized into clusters to form textural descriptions (what the teachers experienced) and structural descriptions (how they experienced them).

### 2.2 Research Subjects

Seven English teachers from La Filipina National High School participated in the study. They were purposively selected based on specific criteria, including having at least five years of teaching experience, being currently assigned to secondary English classes, and having prior experience in using guided writing strategies with at-risk learners. These qualifications ensured that the participants could offer relevant, informed, and meaningful insights into the investigation.

### 2.3 Research Instrument

The primary research instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide designed to gather in-depth insights from the participating English teachers. The guide consisted of open-ended questions focusing on teachers' experiences in implementing the guided writing approach, their observations of at-risk learners' writing performance, and the challenges and strategies involved in supporting struggling writers. The structure of the instrument allowed the researcher to explore participants' perspectives while providing flexibility to ask follow-up questions for clarification or elaboration. This ensured rich, detailed, and contextually grounded qualitative data suitable for thematic analysis.

### 2.4 Data Collection

Data collection followed established health and institutional protocols. The steps included:

1. *Approval from the Schools Division Superintendent.* A formal request and research documents were submitted for permission.
2. *Coordination with School Head.* Principal was informed and consented to the conduct of the study.
3. *Informed Consent.* Participants were oriented about the purpose and requirements of the study, and written consent was obtained.
4. *In-depth Interviews.* Semi-structured interviews were conducted, recorded, and supplemented with field notes. Responses in the vernacular were translated carefully to preserve meaning.
5. *Transcription and Analysis.* Transcripts were reviewed, coded, and organized to generate themes. A follow-up discussion was conducted to validate emerging interpretations.

## 2.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, guided by Creswell's procedures, was used to interpret the data. The process involved familiarization with the interview transcripts, coding significant statements, and clustering related codes to form emerging themes. These themes were then reviewed, refined, and organized into a coherent narrative supported by direct participant excerpts. Through this systematic approach, the study generated a comprehensive understanding of teachers' experiences in implementing the guided writing approach with at-risk learners.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents and discusses the findings of the study in relation to its aim: exploring English language teachers' experiences in teaching writing to at-risk students using the guided writing approach. The findings are organized according to the main themes that emerged from the data. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to ensure confidentiality.

### 3.1 Experiences of English Language Teachers in Students' Writing Performance Using the Guided Writing Approach

English, as an international language, is a core subject for Filipino students. Writing, as a fundamental skill, contributes significantly to their overall communication competence. While the guided writing approach is widely employed by teachers to support students' writing development, challenges remain, particularly among at-risk learners. The study identified three main themes regarding students' difficulties in writing: limited vocabulary and sentence mastery, difficulty in expressing ideas and organizing content, and low self-esteem.

#### 3.2 Limited Vocabulary and Sentence Mastery

Participants consistently observed that students struggle with vocabulary and grammar, which impedes their ability to translate thoughts from the vernacular into English and construct coherent sentences. Writing, as participants described, is a complex cognitive task that requires mastery of these skills, which many at-risk students lack.

"I have noticed that the students have very poor vocabulary skills. They often use the wrong words and even misspell them." (P2)

"When students have poor vocabulary, they often struggle with grammar. They tend to space out when encountering words they cannot translate into English." (P4)

"Many of my students only know basic English even in high school." (P6)

Teachers attributed these challenges to limited reading habits, low motivation, and various distractions that reduce study time. Consequently, students' weak vocabulary and grammar hinder their ability to organize ideas, produce coherent sentences, and respond effectively to writing tasks. These observations align with prior studies emphasizing that vocabulary development requires repeated use in context and learner motivation (Mehring, 2005), while grammar mastery is essential for effective writing (Bahri & Sugeng, 2010).

#### 3.3 Difficulty in Expressing Ideas and Organizing Content

Another key challenge identified was students' difficulty in planning and structuring their writing. Many struggled to present ideas logically, resulting in outputs of lower quality. Teachers linked this difficulty to students' limited background knowledge, which is critical for connecting ideas and expressing meaning clearly.

"There are students who have no idea about the topic, making it difficult for them to share their viewpoints." (P1)

"Students need rich experiences to present strong points in writing, but most are not wide readers." (P3)

Teachers noted that background knowledge is built through diverse reading, media exposure, and meaningful conversations. Enhancing this knowledge improves both comprehension and writing skills. These findings are consistent with Davis and Winek (2005), who stressed that students with minimal prior knowledge about a topic struggle to communicate ideas effectively in writing.

#### 3.4 Students' Low Self-Esteem

Participants emphasized that students' self-esteem significantly affects their writing performance. Many at-risk learners perceive writing tasks as intimidating, which reduces motivation and confidence. Peer comparison and fear of mistakes exacerbate this issue.

"Most students find writing activities intimidating and doubt their ability to produce quality work." (P5)

“Students feel anxious and pressured when comparing themselves with peers, which reduces self-confidence.” (P7)

Teachers highlighted the importance of fostering a supportive learning environment, encouraging students to learn from errors, and referring those with persistent low self-esteem to appropriate professionals. These findings are supported by Brown (2000), who noted that self-esteem and confidence are critical for cognitive and affective engagement. Structured, clear feedback, as Lerdeman (2010) suggests, can mitigate students’ feelings of being overwhelmed and improve writing performance.

### 3.5 Reading Makes a Writer

Participants consistently emphasized that reading is a critical foundation for improving students’ memory, cognitive function, and writing ability. They observed that students who read extensively tend to demonstrate stronger comprehension, broader vocabulary, and clearer writing. One participant explained:

“In order for students to write a good composition, they have to read and read more books to exercise their brains.” (P1)

“Students should read many books to improve comprehension, vocabulary, and deeper understanding.” (P3)

“Those who are wide readers can write well-composed texts.” (P4)

Teachers highlighted that being well-read not only strengthens writing mechanics but also broadens students’ perspectives and fosters empathy. This enables learners to approach different genres thoughtfully and write for a wider audience. Participants shared:

“I encourage students to read different types of books so they can gain ideas for writing in various genres.” (P1)

“Reading helps students develop understanding toward the differences they encounter in texts.” (P3)

“Reading exposes students to new writing styles and fresh perspectives to use in their work.” (P4)

These observations align with previous studies indicating that reading and writing are interconnected skills; exposure to texts of interest enhances idea generation, vocabulary, and overall writing competence (Zhes, 2012; Hao & Sivell, 2002). The findings suggest that cultivating regular reading habits is an essential strategy to improve students’ writing performance.

### 3.6 Enhancing Professional Competence

Participants emphasized that continuous professional development is vital for teachers to stay updated with evolving pedagogical strategies and to respond effectively to diverse student needs. Trainings, seminars, and Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions provide opportunities for sharing best practices and mentoring between experienced and new educators. They noted:

“Once a teacher, always a learner.” (P2)

“Professional development allows teachers to grow and improve classroom skills through updated pedagogy.” (P5)

“Benchmarking with other schools helps apply effective strategies in our context.” (P5)

Teachers also highlighted the integration of technology in writing instruction to engage students and enhance learning outcomes. Lifelong learning allows educators to adapt to rapid changes in pedagogy and student needs, turning challenges into opportunities for professional growth (Fischer, 2018; Jun, 2018). These insights underscore the importance of teacher readiness in implementing effective guided writing approaches.

### 3.7 Train for Better Writing

Participants agreed that becoming a competent writer requires consistent and deliberate practice. They encouraged students to engage in daily writing activities, both in class and at home, to strengthen independence and writing skills. Participants shared:

“Practice makes right; providing daily writing activities helps students become independent writers.” (P6)

“I assign a mixture of in-class and outside writing tasks to give students the practice they need.” (P7)

Teachers stressed that structured writing habits, such as outlining essays and identifying key points, help students organize content clearly. They also emphasized the importance of correct practice and timely feedback to prevent reinforcement of poor writing habits:

“Students must practice the correct way, which is why feedback is essential in writing development.” (P6)

These observations are supported by studies on deliberate practice, which involve goal setting, focused effort, feedback, and pushing beyond comfort zones, allowing learners to strengthen cognitive areas associated with writing and improve skill development (Ericsson, 2019; UAGC, 2021). The findings suggest that integrating structured, regular writing practice with constructive feedback can significantly enhance students’ writing performance.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the writing performance of at-risk students using the guided writing approach, based on English language teachers’ perspectives. Findings revealed three key challenges that affect students’ writing: limited vocabulary and sentence mastery, difficulty in organizing ideas and expressing content, and low self-esteem. Participants highlighted that these challenges hinder students’ ability to produce coherent and meaningful texts, emphasizing the need to develop both technical skills and emotional confidence for improved fluency and writing competence.

Regarding teachers’ coping strategies, participants reported providing direct instruction, broadening students’ word connections, and offering meaningful feedback. These approaches help identify learners’ strengths and weaknesses, strengthen essential English skills, and guide students toward more structured and confident writing.

The study also underscored the importance of educational management strategies, summarized in three themes: reading makes a writer, enhancing professional competence, and training for better writing. Participants emphasized that cultivating strong reading habits, engaging in continuous professional development, and implementing structured writing practice are essential for improving student outcomes.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that a holistic approach—combining reading, guided writing practice, targeted teacher support, and ongoing professional growth—can help at-risk students overcome challenges and develop meaningful, well-structured, and expressive writing skills. Teachers play a pivotal role in applying these strategies, ensuring that students receive the guidance and confidence needed to improve their writing performance.

#### 5. Future Directions

Based on the findings of this study, the following directions are suggested for future research and practice:

- *Policymakers:* Develop policies that address challenges identified in this study, such as limited vocabulary, difficulty organizing ideas, and low self-esteem, by supporting guided writing programs and ensuring resources for literacy development.
- *School Administrators:* Evaluate and enhance guided writing strategies in schools, create initiatives that cultivate reading and writing habits, and provide technical and pedagogical support to teachers to address at-risk students’ specific needs.
- *Teachers:* Expand instructional strategies that not only improve writing skills but also foster motivation, positive attitudes, and confidence in students when composing texts. Implement structured practice and feedback mechanisms based on the study’s findings.
- *Future Researchers:* Explore additional perspectives by including educators from various subjects and grade levels and incorporate students’ voices to generate findings that can be applied in broader educational contexts. Longitudinal and cross-disciplinary studies could provide deeper insights into guided writing effectiveness.

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