

# WRITING IN CONTEXT: DEMOGRAPHIC DETERMINANTS ON ACADEMIC WRITING PROFECIENCY AMONG SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

*This study aimed to examine the academic writing proficiency of Senior High School students at Father Saturnino Urios College of Trento, Inc., with a specific focus on how selected demographic factors influence writing performance. Guided by the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRS) model, Social Cognitive Theory, Constructivist Theory, and Halliday's Functionalist Theory of Language, the research employed a descriptive-correlational design. A total of 70 students across various academic strands were selected using quota sampling. Data were collected through a validated Demographic Profile Questionnaire and a Standardized Essay Writing Assessment Tool adapted from the Transparent Academic Writing Rubric (TAWR), covering components such as grammar, citation, academic style, idea presentation, and mechanics. The findings revealed that students demonstrated moderate proficiency in areas such as academic writing style and idea presentation, but showed significant weaknesses in citation, abstract writing, and the use of multimodal elements like tables and figures. Statistical analysis showed no significant relationship between writing proficiency and fixed factors such as age, gender, or academic strand. However, socioeconomic status, parental educational attainment, English language proficiency, access to learning resources, parental involvement, and time management showed strong correlations with writing performance. The study concludes that contextual and environmental factors have a more substantial influence on students' writing skills than personal demographics or academic track. The results highlight the need for a school-wide, inclusive, and process-based academic writing program that incorporates digital literacy, structured modeling, and equitable resource access. Such initiatives can bridge performance gaps and empower all students to become proficient academic writers.*

**Keyword:** *Essay Writing Proficiency, Senior High School Students, Academic Writing, Demographic Factors*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is an essential skill for mastering the English language because it lays the groundwork for critical thinking and effective communication. It is an important component of the Basic Education curriculum, encompassing the fundamentals of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary. This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the essay writing proficiency of senior high school students. The primary focus is to examine how various demographic factors influence their proficiency as basis for tailored instructional interventions to enhance their writing skills.

Writing proficiency is an essential skill for Senior High School students, equipping them to communicate ideas effectively and achieve academic success. Key components of writing proficiency include fluency, syntax, semantics, vocabulary, and grammar, which collectively contribute to clarity, coherence, and precision in writing.

Fluency reflects a student's ability to generate and organize ideas smoothly, promoting logical flow and ease of expression (Hyland, 2019). Syntax, or the structural arrangement of words in a sentence, is crucial for ensuring coherence and grammatical accuracy (Huddleston & Pullum, 2021). Semantics, which deals with meaning in language, enables students to construct contextually appropriate and meaningful messages (Murphy, 2020). A rich and varied vocabulary empowers students to articulate complex thoughts and choose language with precision and impact (Nation, 2022). Grammar, as the foundation of standard written conventions, enhances the credibility and readability of students' work (Crystal, 2019). Mastery of these interrelated components is fundamental for developing proficient writing skills that are critical for both academic and future professional endeavors.

Essay writing is a crucial skill assessed in various national and international exams, such as the Philippine National Achievement Test (NAT) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). However, results from these evaluations reveal concerning trends in students' writing proficiency. According to the 2018 PISA results, only 10% of Filipino students demonstrated proficiency at or above the minimum level required for constructing clear and coherent written responses, placing the Philippines in the lowest ranks among 79 participating countries. Similarly, the Department of Education's NAT results show that only 20% of Senior High School students nationwide meet the expected competency levels in language-related tasks, which include essay writing, syntax, and grammar. These figures reflect significant nationwide challenges in written communication.

The significance of writing in language acquisition cannot be overstated. Abdelmohsen et al. (2020) highlight that writing is one of the most critical skills learners need to master, as it requires a profound understanding of grammar systems and writing conventions, surpassing other receptive skills (Mourssi, 2013; Ellis, 2014). Essay writing, in particular, is crucial for senior high school students as it underpins their academic success and communication prowess in higher education and beyond. However, many students grapple with organizing their thoughts, constructing coherent arguments, and accurately citing sources, as noted by Efendi and Pohan (2020). Seyoum et al. (2022), drawing from Aldersen and Bachman (2012), emphasize that writing serves as both a standardized communication system and a tool for learning, reflecting students' cognitive processes and reasoning abilities. This underscores the urgent need for high-quality instructional resources and methodologies to support essay writing.

### **1.1 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is rooted in several key educational theories, most notably the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) model, Social Cognitive Theory, Constructivist Theory, and Halliday's Functionalist Theory of Language. The SRSD model, developed by Harris and Graham, emphasizes a structured approach to teaching writing strategies while fostering self-regulation, with stages that guide students from developing background knowledge to independent writing. This model aligns with Social Cognitive Theory, which stresses the interaction between personal, behavioral, and environmental factors in learning, particularly self-efficacy and social influences. Constructivist Theory, as proposed by Vygotsky, further supports the framework by emphasizing the importance of scaffolding and guided practice in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), enabling students to build writing skills incrementally. Additionally, Halliday's Functionalist Theory views language as a tool for communication, focusing on the effective use of content, syntax, vocabulary, and semantics in writing. The conceptual framework of the study integrates these theories to explore how demographic factors—such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, and parental involvement—affect students' writing proficiency.

### **1.2 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study is designed to explore the relationship between various demographic factors and essay writing proficiency. At its core, the framework examines how factors such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, parental education, language proficiency, access to resources, parental involvement, and time management influence students' writing abilities. These demographic variables are seen as key determinants in shaping students' writing performance by affecting the support and resources available to them. The study focuses on assessing the current level of essay writing proficiency using standardized tools that measure grammar, organization, vocabulary, and argumentation. By integrating demographic analysis, the conceptual framework provides a structured approach to enhancing students' essay writing proficiency through targeted, research-based interventions.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to examine the academic writing proficiency of Senior High School students at Father Saturnino Urios College of Trento, Inc., with a particular focus on how selected demographic variables influence their writing performance. The investigation seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' writing skills across key components of academic writing and to identify relevant factors that may contribute to variations in proficiency.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Describe the demographic profile of the participants in terms of age, gender, academic strand, socioeconomic status, parents' educational attainment, language proficiency, access to learning resources, parental involvement, and time management;
2. Assess the level of academic writing proficiency of the participants based on key indicators, namely: introduction, citation, academic writing style, idea presentation, and mechanics;
3. Determine the significant correlation between the participants' demographic profile and their level of academic writing proficiency; and
4. Examine whether there is a significant difference in writing proficiency when participants are grouped according to their academic strands.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

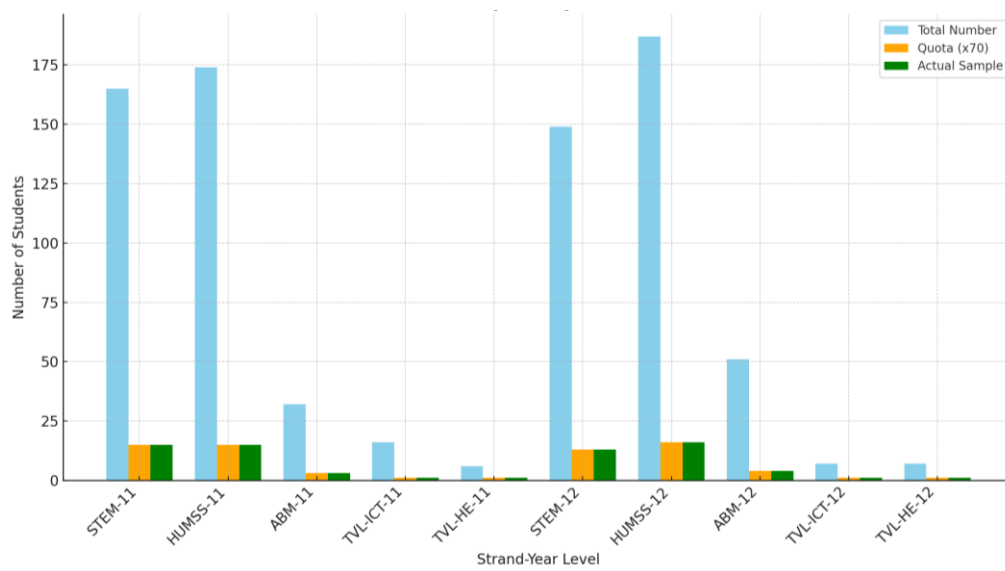
### 2.1 Research Design

This study employs a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the academic writing proficiency of Senior High School students at Father Saturnino Urios College of Trento, Inc. The descriptive component aims to determine the participants' demographic profiles and assess their level of writing proficiency across key indicators, including introduction, citation, academic writing style, idea presentation, and mechanics. Through the use of standardized assessment tools, the study quantifies students' performance in academic writing tasks. The correlational aspect of the design seeks to establish the relationship between selected demographic variables—such as age, gender, academic strand, socioeconomic status, parents' educational attainment, language proficiency, access to learning resources, parental involvement, and time management—and students' writing proficiency. Statistical techniques will be used to analyze the degree and direction of these associations.

This research design is appropriate for identifying patterns, describing existing conditions, and determining whether significant relationships exist among variables, without manipulating any of them. It provides a clear framework for understanding the factors that influence students' academic writing performance, thereby offering empirical evidence to inform relevant instructional practices and academic support interventions.

### 2.2 Research Participants

The study involves a carefully selected sample of 70 senior high school students. Participants are chosen through quota sampling guided by specific inclusion criteria to ensure a balanced and representative sample. The selection considers the students' academic tracks (STEM, HUMSS, ABM, and TVL), their participation in a comprehensive essay writing activity or contest, recommendations from their current and previous language teachers, their age range of 15 to 19 years old, and language grades of at least 80. This sampling method ensures equitable representation across diverse demographics, including gender, academic tracks, and prior essay writing experiences. By incorporating these criteria, the study aims to enhance the reliability and generalizability of its findings, providing insights applicable to the broader senior high school population.



**Chart -1:** Distribution of Participants by Strand and Year Level

### 2.3 Research Instruments

To effectively address the objectives of the study, two validated instruments were used: a Demographic Profile Questionnaire and a Standardized Essay Writing Assessment Tool. The demographic questionnaire gathered essential background information, including age, gender, academic strand, socioeconomic status, parents' educational attainment, language proficiency, access to resources, parental involvement, and time management—variables directly aligned with the study's first objective. The essay assessment, adapted from the Transparent Academic Writing Rubric (TAWR), evaluated key aspects of academic writing proficiency, including grammar, vocabulary, citation accuracy, organization, coherence, mechanics, and idea development. The rubric was modified for cultural and curricular relevance to Senior High School students, retaining its standardized structure. A five-point Likert scale (1–Poor to 5–Excellent) was used across each writing dimension, with scores averaged to determine individual and overall proficiency levels, enabling group comparisons and correlation analysis.

To ensure validity, the instruments underwent expert review and pilot testing, resulting in revisions for clarity and relevance. Reliability was established through inter-rater calibration using standardized scoring procedures, targeting a Cronbach's alpha of  $\geq 0.80$  to ensure consistency and accuracy in assessment outcomes.

### 2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection began upon securing approval from the school administration of Father Saturnino Urios College of Trento, Inc. and obtaining research ethics clearance. Informed consent was collected from participants and, where applicable, their parents or guardians, ensuring ethical compliance and voluntary participation. Participants first accomplished the Demographic Profile Questionnaire, which gathered essential background data aligned with the study's variables, including age, gender, academic strand, socioeconomic status, parental education, language proficiency, access to resources, parental involvement, and time management. Afterward, students completed the Standardized Essay Writing Assessment using a uniform writing prompt administered under controlled conditions. Responses were evaluated by trained raters using a modified version of the Transparent Academic Writing Rubric (TAWR), assessing five key areas: introduction, citation, academic writing style, idea presentation, and mechanics. Each essay was rated independently by at least two evaluators to ensure scoring reliability. All data were encoded and prepared for statistical analysis to address the study's objectives on profiling, correlation, and comparison. Ethical standards on confidentiality and data protection were strictly followed throughout the process.

## 2.5 Statistical Treatment of Data

After collecting and recording the data, the researcher employed the following statistical methods: descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarize the demographic profile of participants and assess their academic writing proficiency across key indicators. To examine relationships between demographic variables and writing proficiency, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was applied for continuous data, while Chi-square tests were used for categorical variables. Additionally, One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether significant differences in writing proficiency existed across academic strands. All statistical analyses were performed at a 0.05 level of significance to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and discussion on the essay writing proficiency of Senior High School students, focusing on the impact of demographic factors and proficiency levels assessed through standardized tools. The data are organized and presented according to the sequence of the objectives outlined in the study

### 3.1 The Demographic Profile of the Participants

**Table -1:** The Demographic Profile of the Participants

| <b>Indicators</b>                     |                  |                |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| <b>Age</b>                            | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
| 15 – 16 years old                     | 27               | 38.57%         |
| 17 – 18 years old                     | 42               | 60.00%         |
| 19 years and above                    | 1                | 1.43%          |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>70</b>        | <b>100%</b>    |
| <b>Gender</b>                         |                  |                |
| Female                                | 53               | 75.71%         |
| Male                                  | 16               | 22.86%         |
| Prefer not to say                     | 1                | 1.43%          |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>70</b>        | <b>100%</b>    |
| <b>Academic Strand</b>                |                  |                |
| STEM                                  | 28               | 40.00%         |
| ABM                                   | 8                | 11.43%         |
| HUMSS                                 | 30               | 42.86%         |
| TVL                                   | 4                | 5.71%          |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>70</b>        | <b>100%</b>    |
| <b>Socioeconomic Status</b>           |                  |                |
| Below P10,000                         | 15               | 21.43%         |
| 10,001 – 20,000                       | 12               | 17.14%         |
| 20,001 – 30,000                       | 6                | 8.57%          |
| 30,001 – 40,000                       | 8                | 11.43%         |
| Above 40,000                          | 8                | 11.43%         |
| Prefer not to disclose                | 21               | 30.00%         |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>70</b>        | <b>100%</b>    |
| <b>Parents Educational Attainment</b> |                  |                |
| <b>Father's Education</b>             |                  |                |
| No formal Education                   | 1                | 1.43%          |
| Elementary Graduate                   | 4                | 5.71%          |
| High School Graduate                  | 35               | 50.00%         |
| College Graduate                      | 26               | 37.15%         |
| Postgraduate Degree                   | 4                | 5.71%          |

|   |           |             |
|---|-----------|-------------|
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>70</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| <b>Mother's Education</b>                               |           |             |
| No formal Education                                     | -         | -           |
| Elementary Graduate                                     | 5         | 7.14%       |
| High School Graduate                                    | 31        | 44.29%      |
| College Graduate  | 25        | 35.71%      |
| Postgraduate Degree                                     | 9         | 12.86%      |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>70</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| <b>Primary Language Spoken at Home</b>                  |           |             |
| Cebuanon  | 65        | 92.86%      |
| Filipino  | 4         | 5.71%       |
| English   | -         | -           |
| Others  | 1         | 1.43%       |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>70</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| <b>English Language Proficiency</b>                     |           |             |
| Beginner  | 11        | 15.71%      |
| Intermediate  | 52        | 74.29%      |
| Advanced  | 5         | 7.14%       |
| Fluent  | 2         | 2.86%       |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>70</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| <b>Access to Learning Resources (Multiple Response)</b> |           |             |
| Personal computer/laptop                                | 38        | 19.39%      |
| Internet Access at Home                                 | 54        | 27.55%      |
| School Library  | 5         | 2.55%       |
| Personal Books and Study Materials                      | 34        | 17.35%      |
| Smartphone  | 65        | 33.16%      |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>70</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| <b>Parental Involvement in Academic</b>                 |           |             |
| Never   | 9         | 12.86%      |
| Rarely  | 12        | 17.14%      |
| Occasionally  | 14        | 20.00%      |
| Frequently  | 13        | 18.57%      |
| Always  | 22        | 31.43%      |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>70</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| <b>Time Management</b>                                  |           |             |
| <b>Studying Academic Subjects</b>                       |           |             |
| 0-3 hours   | 56        | 80%         |
| 4 – 6 hours   | 10        | 14.29%      |
| 7 – 10 hours  | 4         | 5.71%       |
| <b>Writing Assignment</b>                               |           |             |
| 0-3 hours   | 68        | 97.14%      |
| 4 – 6 hours   | 2         | 2.86%       |
| 7 – 10 hours  | -         | -           |
| <b>Reading books/articles</b>                           |           |             |
| 0-3 hours   | 63        | 90%         |
| 4 – 6 hours   | 6         | 8.57%       |
| 7 – 10 hours  | 1         | 1.43%       |
| <b>Using Social Media</b>                               |           |             |
| 0-3 hours   | 26        | 37.14%      |
| 4 – 6 hours   | 21        | 30%         |
| 7 – 10 hours  | 23        | 32.86%      |
| <b>Extracurricular Activities</b>                       |           |             |
| 0-3 hours   | 54        | 77.15%      |

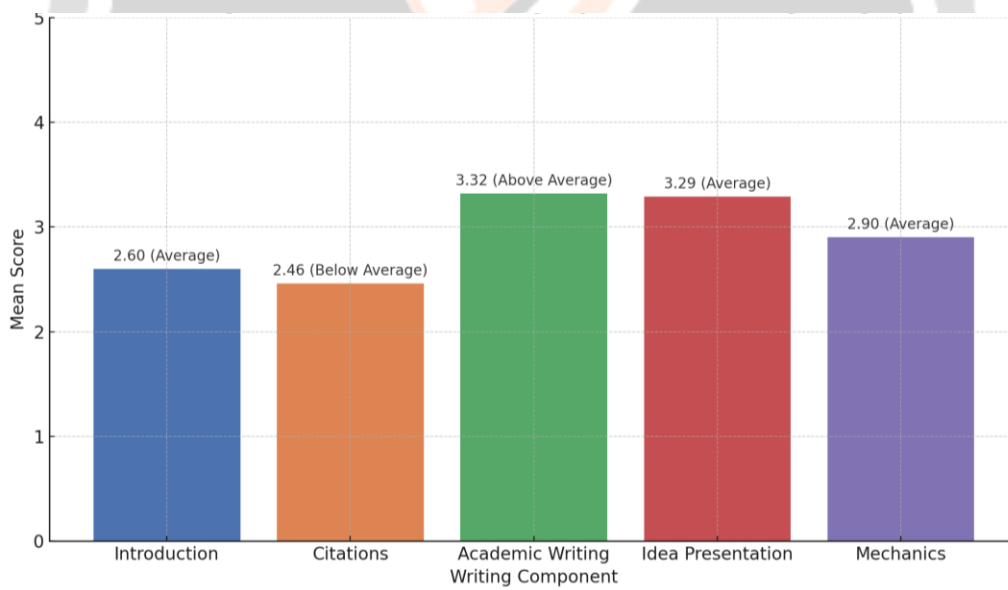
|              |           |             |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|
| 4 – 6 hours  | 12        | 17.14%      |
| 7 – 10 hours | 4         | 5.71%       |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>70</b> | <b>100%</b> |

Table 1 shows that the majority of participants are aged 17–18 years (n = 42, 60%) and are predominantly female (n = 53, 75.71%), which reflects typical enrollment trends in Philippine senior high schools where female students often outnumber males in academic tracks. Most students are from the HUMSS (42.86%) and STEM (40%) strands, suggesting an inclination toward humanities and science-related disciplines. Nearly half of the students (n = 33, 47.14%) belong to low-income households earning below ₱30,000, while 30% chose not to disclose their income, implying financial sensitivity or stigma. This economic disadvantage may restrict students’ access to learning resources and structured academic support.

Parental educational attainment is another limiting factor, with 57.14% of fathers and 51.43% of mothers having only reached high school. This may affect students' exposure to academically rich home environments and guidance. Moreover, 92.86% (n = 65) speak Cebuano at home, while 74.29% (n = 52) rate their English proficiency as intermediate. This language gap may influence students’ academic writing skills in English.

Despite high smartphone ownership (92.86%), only 19.39% have access to personal computers, and 80% of students spend fewer than three hours per day studying, which may hinder writing performance due to limited practice and feedback. These findings affirm that writing proficiency is not solely shaped by individual traits but by socio-environmental conditions (Hyland & Jiang, 2021; Zhou et al., 2023). Thus, targeted interventions in language support, digital access, and home-school collaboration are essential.

### 3.2 Level of Academic Writing Proficiency Across Key Indicators



**Chart -2:** Level of Academic Writing Proficiency Across Key Indicators

Chart 2 reveals a complex but telling narrative about the academic writing proficiency of senior high school students. While the data points to areas of emerging competence, it also highlights persistent gaps that constrain students from reaching higher levels of academic performance. Students scored highest in Academic Writing (M = 3.32, *Average*), reflecting their developing control over formal language, appropriate tone, and grammatical conventions—likely outcomes of repeated classroom exposure to general writing tasks. Similarly, their performance in Idea Presentation (M = 3.29, *Average*) suggests moderate ability in organizing thoughts and employing transitions, though coherence and paragraph unity remain underdeveloped.

In contrast, the findings expose significant challenges in areas requiring specialized academic conventions. Although students excelled in topic selection ( $M = 4.78$ , *Excellent*), their performance dropped drastically in writing abstracts, formulating keywords, and constructing reference entries ( $M = 1.00$ , *Poor*), indicating a lack of instructional emphasis on genre-specific writing. Citations ( $M = 2.46$ , *Below Average*) also emerged as a key area of concern, with students struggling to apply APA style and citation ethics—skills essential for academic integrity and scholarly engagement.

The consistently low rating in the use of tables and figures ( $M = 1.08$ , *Poor*) further underscores the lack of exposure to multimodal writing, a growing requirement in academic and professional communication. These findings affirm the need for a scaffolded, process-oriented curriculum, as advocated by Hyland and Jiang (2021), and the integration of digital citation tools and guided modeling (Labutap, 2020; Zhou et al., 2023) to foster deeper writing competence.

### 3.3 Correlation Between Demographic Variables and Academic Writing Proficiency

**Table -2:** Significant Correlation with Writing Proficiency

|                                       | Source of Variance                                 | p-value | Conclusion | Decision     |
|---------------------------------------|--|---------|------------|--------------|
| Level of academic writing proficiency | Age  | .073    | No Sig.    | Accept $H_0$ |
|                                       | Gender   | .331    | No Sig.    | Accept $H_0$ |
|                                       | Academic Strand                                    | .442    | No Sig.    | Accept $H_0$ |
|                                       | Socioeconomic Status                               | .033    | Sig.       | Reject $H_0$ |
|                                       | Parents Educational Attainment (Father and Mother) | .002    | Sig.       | Reject $H_0$ |
|                                       | English Language proficiency                       | .007    | Sig.       | Reject $H_0$ |
|                                       | Access to Learning Resources                       | .001    | Sig.       | Reject $H_0$ |
|                                       | Parental Involvement                               | .003    | Sig.       | Reject $H_0$ |
|                                       | Time Management                                    | .016    | Sig.       | Reject $H_0$ |

Table 2 reveals that writing proficiency is shaped not by inherent demographic traits but by socio-environmental factors. Variables such as age ( $p = .073$ ), gender ( $p = .331$ ), and academic strand ( $p = .442$ ) yielded no significant correlation, suggesting that writing performance is not predetermined by static personal attributes. In contrast, contextual variables showed strong statistical significance. Socioeconomic status ( $p = .033$ ) and parents' educational attainment ( $p = .002$ ) imply that family background influences students' access to literate environments and writing support. Similarly, English proficiency ( $p = .007$ ) and resource access ( $p = .001$ ) suggest that writing is reinforced by both language exposure and learning tools. Parental involvement ( $p = .003$ ) and time management ( $p = .016$ ) highlight the importance of sustained guidance and disciplined routines in shaping academic writing habits.

These results affirm Hyland and Jiang's (2021) assertion that academic writing develops within social and institutional contexts. They also support Tarrayo et al. (2022), who emphasize the influence of familial and material support, and Zhou et al. (2023), who advocate for empowering students with digital tools and structured environments to enhance academic literacy.

### 3.4 Differences in Writing Proficiency Across Academic Strands

**Table -3:** Significant Difference between Academic Strands

| Source of variance   | p-value | Conclusion | Decision     |
|--|---------|------------|--------------|
| Demographic profile of students and their level of academic writing proficiency when group according to their academic strands | .343    | No Sig.    | Accept $H_0$ |



Table 3 presents the results of the statistical test examining whether students' academic writing proficiency significantly differs across academic strands—STEM, ABM, HUMSS, and TVL. With a p-value of .343, the findings indicate no statistically significant difference in writing proficiency when grouped by academic track. This suggests that writing performance is not inherently determined by curricular specialization, but rather by other influencing factors such as instruction quality, home literacy environments, language exposure, and access to learning resources. This finding further implies that academic writing is a universal skill that transcends disciplinary boundaries. Students, regardless of their strand, share similar levels of proficiency because they likely receive comparable exposure, or lack thereof, to formal instruction in academic writing. This finding supports the integration of writing pedagogy across all tracks rather than limiting it to language or humanities-focused strands.

Moreover, the absence of significant differences reinforces the earlier correlational findings that socioeconomic status, parental education, language proficiency, and resource access are more impactful on writing proficiency than academic strand alone. As Hyland and Jiang (2021) argue, writing development is socially situated and requires explicit instruction across contexts. Similarly, Tarrayo et al. (2022) highlight the role of family and institutional scaffolding in student success. These results justify the need for school-wide, strand-inclusive writing interventions, ensuring all learners have equal opportunities to master essential academic communication skills—regardless of their academic path.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study present a compelling portrait of how academic writing proficiency among senior high school students is shaped more by contextual realities than by personal characteristics. While students exhibit strong potential in generating relevant topics and expressing ideas clearly, they struggle with the technical demands of academic writing—such as citation, referencing, abstract writing, and the use of multimodal elements like tables and figures. These challenges point to the lack of structured instruction and practice in formal academic genres within the current curriculum.

Importantly, the study reveals that writing proficiency is significantly influenced by environmental and social factors. Students with greater access to learning resources, stronger language foundations, higher parental support, and effective time management practices tend to perform better. In contrast, academic strand, gender, or age do not appear to determine writing success, affirming that writing is a cross-disciplinary competence rather than a strand-specific skill. These findings emphasize the urgent need for a school-wide, process-based writing program that integrates academic conventions, critical thinking, and digital literacy. A supportive learning environment—both at home and in school—combined with equitable access to writing resources and scaffolded instruction, is key to fostering proficient, confident, and independent academic writers.

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