



Challenges and Strategic Approaches in EFL Students' Prose Analysis Essays

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the difficulties experienced by EFL students in writing essays for prose analysis, along with the strategies they use to overcome these challenges. This research used qualitative research with a case study design. The participants of the study were 14 students of the English Language and Literature department from one of the state universities in Malang, East Java. The data collection took two months. The instruments used were interviews, questionnaires, observation, and documentation. The result shows that students face major challenges in essay writing, particularly in content and organization, such as making good thesis statements and conclusions, and moderate difficulties with grammar. However, they demonstrated sufficient vocabulary and mechanical skills. To address these issues, students reported employing different types of strategies. The most common were mind mapping, continuous practice, and peer discussions. Moderately used strategies included seeking feedback, using audiovisual resources, and consulting dictionaries. The least used were translating, watching YouTube videos, and using AI tools or application. These strategies were applied throughout the writing process—pre-writing, whilst writing, and post-writing—and students found them effective in improving their prose analysis essays.



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INTRODUCTION

Writing is a crucial English skill used to convey ideas/thoughts and emotions through written communication. According to Junianti et al. (2020), writing is an intellectually stimulating process that requires structuring thoughts effectively. To write proficiently, students must comprehend a broad range of ideas and master several essential components, such as including punctuation, vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and paragraph organization. Furthermore, a well-written paragraph should demonstrate coherence, meaning that all ideas are logically connected (Chicho, 2022).

Research on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing difficulties has been expanding, particularly in response to the growing global emphasis on academic English proficiency and curriculum reforms that prioritize written communication skills (Ratnawati et al., 2018). Previous studies have examined both the challenges students face and the strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles. Mohammad and Hazarika (2016) analyzed common writing-related issues among EFL students, focusing on capitalization, punctuation, language use, and spelling. Their findings revealed frequent writing errors and an overreliance on exam-passing strategies, such as memorization, rather than genuine comprehension and application of writing techniques. Similarly, although conducted in an English as a Second Language (ESL) context, the study by Aluemalai and Maniam (2020) offers relevant insights by identifying writing strategies – planning, while-writing, and revising – that can also inform EFL instruction due to shared challenges in second language writing development.

Other studies have explored internal and external factors contributing to students' writing difficulties. Novariana et al. (2018) conducted a study at an Indonesian senior high school, identifying low motivation, limited vocabulary, spelling difficulties, grammatical errors, and passive classroom participation as major internal challenges. External challenges included inadequate practice and limited feedback. Likewise, Alisha et al. (2019) found that in general, students' writing skills in English were lacking, , primarily due to insufficient grammar and vocabulary knowledge. Their study also highlighted students' struggles with spelling and overall writing confidence. Additionally, Suryanto and Sari (2021) reported that students commonly faced difficulties in grammar, sentence structure, idea development, and vocabulary, often adopting coping strategies such as using online translation tools, social media, and additional reading to improve their writing skills.

Research on tertiary-level students has yielded similar findings. Bulqiyah et al. (2021) categorized writing difficulties into three areas: affective issues (attitudes of students and lecturers), cognitive challenges (language transfer and writing process difficulties), and linguistic problems (vocabulary, lexico-grammar, and essay structure). Similarly, Febriani (2022) found that undergraduate students struggled with grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and idea development. Factors influencing these difficulties were classified into internal (psychological and linguistic) and external (peer and lecturer support). To overcome these challenges, students employed strategies such as self-motivation, extensive reading, practice writing, and seeking feedback from peers and lecturers.

Several studies have examined students' strategies for improving writing skills. Boonyarattanasoontorn (2017) found that Thai university students frequently employed dictionaries as a resourcing strategy. Yulianti (2018) identified six key learning strategies that influenced writing performance: metacognitive, compensatory, cognitive, affective, mnemonic, and social strategies. High-achieving students predominantly utilized metacognitive strategies, whereas average-performing students relied more on affective strategies. Similarly, Yuliani and Fadhly (2020) investigated the writing strategies of male and female EFL learners, revealing that both groups commonly adopted compensatory strategies, though female students demonstrated a broader strategic repertoire. Additionally, Ambarwati and Listyani (2021) found that students composing procedural essays benefited from teacher feedback, outlining, and peer discussions. Meanwhile, Dari et al. (2022) observed that students followed a structured writing process, encompassing pre-writing, drafting, and revising strategies.

Recent studies have further explored writing strategies in various educational contexts. Adelita et al. (2023) identified four key approaches employed by students: mind mapping (to summarize main ideas), translation (from Indonesian to English), consistent writing practice, and peer review. These strategies not only enhanced students' structural and linguistic competence but also contributed to greater coherence and depth in their written output. While extensive research has investigated writing difficulties and strategies among senior high school students (Novariana et al., 2018; Yuliani & Fadhly, 2020; Alisha et al., 2019) and university students (Febriani, 2022; Yulianti, 2018; Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016; Bulqiyah et al., 2021), the specific challenges and strategies related to writing essays for prose analysis have received limited scholarly attention. This gap is notable, as prose analysis demands that students critically examine literary works—a process that fosters higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) (Rosadi & Utama, 2023). Given that critical thinking is essential for understanding societal issues and making informed decisions, the ability to analyze and articulate perspectives

on literature, which often reflects societal values, holds significant pedagogical importance.

Setiawan and Mulyadi (2021) emphasized that writing opinion essays requires students to present well-supported arguments, using evidence from academic sources to substantiate their claims. In prose analysis, students examine a literary work's intrinsic and extrinsic elements to uncover deeper meanings. Setyowati and Sukmawan (2018) argued that essay writing enhances students' reading and writing skills while improving their comprehension of literary texts. Furthermore, Rorintulus et al. (2023) highlighted that prose analysis enables students to interpret style, structure, and underlying messages, thereby deepening their understanding of historical and cultural contexts. By analyzing prose critically, students connect textual interpretation to analytical writing, uncovering the author's underlying message.

Given the limited research on students' difficulties and strategies in writing essays for prose analysis, this study aims to fill the gap by investigating the challenges students face and the strategies they employ to overcome them.

Research Questions:

1. What are the students' difficulties in writing essays for prose analysis?
2. What strategies do students use in writing essays for prose analysis?

METHOD

Research Design

This research employed a case study design, a qualitative approach that enables in-depth investigation of a specific individual, group, or context to yield comprehensive insights (Latief, 2019). The study focused on a single class within the English Language and Literature study program at a state university in Malang, which served as the experimental unit to examine how Project-Based Learning (PjBL)—implemented through an e-magazine project—enhanced students' prose analysis essay writing skills. In this Reading English Fiction class, students analyzed both contemporary and classic short stories, composing their analysis as essays, which were then compiled into a collaborative e-magazine. This class was selected as a unique case due to its distinctive characteristics, including its emphasis on literary pedagogy, innovative language teaching methods, and its integration of digital literacy with literary analysis.

Instruments and Procedures

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, questionnaires, and document analysis. A semi-structured interview was

conducted to collect data on students' difficulties and strategies in essay writing. The interview framework was based on Jacobs et al.'s (1981) ESL composition profile, which assesses writing content, essay organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. The students' strategies were analysed using the writing process model by Oshima and Hogue (2006), which includes prewriting, planning, writing, and post-writing (polishing and publishing).

The researchers also used observation. The researchers observed classroom activities to understand students' difficulties and strategies in essay writing. Observations took place over five sessions: two offline and three synchronous online meetings. Notes were taken based on predefined observation points related to the research questions. The third instrument was documentation. Documentation served as an additional method to validate findings (Waruwu, 2023). Data collection included reviewing students' essays, e-magazine project results, and students' self-reflections on story analysis for the e-magazine project.

To get more comprehensive data, the researchers also used questionnaires for all fourteen students. The questionnaire items corresponded to those used in the interview. It covered the students' difficulties in writing essays for prose analysis and their strategies. The questions are in the form of multiple-choice items in which students should choose only one answer from the options. There were five questions in the questionnaire. The first two questions were about the students' difficulties, the third was about the strategies, the fourth was about their opinion on using essays for prose analysis, and the last question was about the self-reflection. The last instrument was documentation. The researchers documented all the students' essays, and their self-reflections in Padlet during and after the project implementation.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis followed Miles et al.'s (2014) interactive model, which comprises five stages. The first stage, *data reduction*, involved summarizing key points, focusing on relevant material, and identifying emergent themes and patterns. Next, *data display* organized the findings through written descriptions, visual aids (e.g., graphs or tables), and systematic coding. During coding, responses were labeled and categorized according to their relevance to the research questions. Each interview transcript was assigned a unique code consisting of the student's initials, key indicators (e.g., difficulties or strategies), and the last three digits of their student ID. The third stage entailed *drawing preliminary conclusions* to formulate tentative findings. Finally, *conclusion validation* ensured the robustness of the results.

The researchers refined and confirmed conclusions through thorough analysis. In analysing the data, the researchers used thematic analysis (Sitasari, 2022) to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns in the data. The two primary themes identified were students' difficulties and their strategies. To highlight thematic relevance, key responses from interview transcripts were bolded in the research findings.

FINDINGS

Students' Difficulties in Writing Essays for Prose Analysis

This section presents the difficulties students face when writing essays for prose analysis. The findings from interview with the students highlight key challenges in idea generation, essay organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics.

Table 1. Difficulty in Content

No.	Transcripts	Final Codes
1.	For me, I'm looking for a way to get ideas, I look at the background story (to be analyzed), like the background story of why...why it was written like that. Like for example, this story was made in what era and why it was created. So I use it for ideas to add to what I will write in the essay.	W.F/A Lack of Ideas/149
2.	The lack of ideas often happens. I can't stay silent, so in the end I keep trying to find ideas. Well, looking for ideas is sometimes like this, maybe I can look for references, whether it's from the internet or maybe I ask my friends for the example, I don't cheat on them (my friends' work), just for reference (So that I can do my own).	D.Z.A/A Lack of Ideas/568
3.	Definitely (I have the lack of ideas). So, I often asked my friends next to me or my friends in front of me. I said I need ideas like this, this, and this.	D.C.R/A Lack of Ideas/222
4.	Give each other ideas. Once we were given a material, and we need to develop it into an essay. We thought about what we wanted to write, so it was a little difficult to get the idea. So, we talked to friends left right left finally.	F.N.D/A Lack of Ideas/302
5.	I have to read the story over and over again before I think about what to write, or sometimes it has to be provoked by, for example, reading a work...who was it yesterday...Oscar Wilde. Then it's like I'm confused about how to analyse the story, like I need a feel for it	Y.P/A Lack of Ideas/991

	and then it's like right there I finally looked for images on Pinterest that have something to do with his work and then "oh yes I have an idea."		
6.	So far, I don't have any (problems) because I also like to think about it (idea) and then suddenly "oh like this," but before that there were already plans, so it's easier to find ideas. For example, if tomorrow is this course (Reading English Fiction) and I'm told to do this, and that, I know I have to do this, I already have a plan.	M.W.S.R/A	Lack of Ideas/956
7.	When it comes to idea, sometimes there are difficulties. Like how can I attract readers to be interested in my essay? To solve the problem, usually I watch the references in YouTube, and read famous articles.	S.D/A	Lack of Ideas/016

Table 1 presents students' responses regarding their struggles in generating ideas. Many students reported difficulty in finding ideas for analysing stories. To address this, some students discussed topics with peers, searched for references online, or read more works by the same author. Others relied on YouTube videos related to the stories or made prewriting plans to ensure they had sufficient ideas before writing.

Difficulty in Essay Organization

Table 2 summarizes the organizational challenges students faced. Several students found it difficult to write an engaging introduction, particularly the first sentence.

Table 2. Difficulty when Writing the Essay Organization (Introduction Paragraph, Thesis Statement, Body Paragraphs, or Conclusion)

No.	Transcripts	Final Codes
1.	The most difficult ones are in the introductory paragraph, the hook and the thesis statement. The difficulty is that sometimes when writing an essay, the first sentence in the introduction is the most difficult. The first sentence is always the hardest thing to do.	W.F/Organization/149
2.	I don't have difficulty with the essay format. I have taken the essay writing course in the 1st semester, so there is no difficulty in making the essay.	D.Z.A/Organization/568
3.	As for the content of the essay, we have learned from last semester how to write essays. We already know	D.C.R/Organization/222

	what an introduction is, what a thesis is, what a body is, and so on.	
4.	For myself, when I was working on the essay, the lecturer repeatedly reminded me. She said that my thesis statement doesn't match with the body paragraph. So, from there I knew where my mistake was.	F.N.D/Organization/302
5.	The conclusion is sometimes still a bit difficult, but not for the introduction. (I am) still a bit confused about what to write (in the conclusion) sometimes. I'm still confused about how to write a good conclusion.	Y.P/Organization/991
6.	I think it's more difficult (to write) the intro. Yesterday there was a class on how to make a good introduction, and to provide examples. When I started writing, it was like, how should I start? So, I was confused.	M.W.S.R/Organization/956

Some also struggled with writing a coherent thesis statement and a strong conclusion. However, other students expressed confidence in structuring essays due to prior experience in writing courses. When the class were asked to identify which part of the organization element that was the hardest part, the students believed that writing the thesis statement was the most difficult one.

Difficulty in Grammar

Table 3 presents students' struggles with grammar. Most students admitted to having grammatical difficulties, particularly in verb tense usage and sentence structure.

Table 3. Difficulty with the Use of Language (Grammar)

No.	Transcripts	Final Codes
1.	As for grammar, (I have) the difficulty may be a little bit. It can be overcome with many tools on the internet.	W.F/Grammar/149
2.	I admit that grammar is a bit difficult, probably because of my lack of studying it.	D.Z.A/Grammar/568
3.	Of course, grammar is definitely difficult, like it's really difficult. If I can be honest, maybe I personally still use a little...what's the name...AI to correct the grammar, to help me improve my grammar.	D.C.R/Grammar/222

4.	Yes, there is always a correction between verb 2 verb 3. We often forget how to use it.	F.N.D/Grammar/302
5.	For now, there are also many applications that can help to correct the grammar. Sometimes if there is a word that comes to mind, I just write it down. But to make sure whether the grammar is correct or not, I like to recheck it again using Quill Bot or Grammarly.	Y.P/Grammar/991
6.	There is a difficulty in grammar. I also happen not to be too fluent, so I'm afraid whether my grammar is correct or not.	M.W.S.R/Grammar/956
7.	Yes, it is (I have grammar problem). That seems to be the problem of all students. I like writing with my own words. After that I crosscheck (my writing) with Grammarly to check the grammar.	S.D/Grammar/016

The finding in Table 3 shows that many students experienced difficulties in the use of grammar. According to the students, they find it challenging to write sentences with proper English structure. The students' reasons for grammar becoming one of the most difficult aspects in writing essay for prose analysis were because of two things; their confusion of using correct tenses and their feeling unconfident with their own grammatical ability. To overcome these issues, many used grammar-checking tools such as Grammarly and QuillBot to improve their writing.

Difficulty in Vocabulary

As shown in Table 4, occasionally students struggled with vocabulary, especially when analysing stories with advanced or literary language. Many relied on digital tools such as Google Translate and online dictionaries to find appropriate words. Others reported difficulty in writing during exams when digital assistance was unavailable.

Table 4. Difficulty With Vocabulary

No.	Transcripts	Final Codes
1.	So far, no. I have mastered the vocab quite a bit, even though it is still basic, but it can still be used to write essays.	W.F/Vocabulary/149
2.	There is sometimes vocabulary problem. But the difficulty is in the story. Sometimes there are words that I don't know, or the language (in the story) is too advanced, so I don't understand. I have to check the meaning.	D.Z.A/Vocabulary/568

3.	Maybe for the pop-up exams it might be a little difficult to find vocabulary. Even if it (the writing assignment) is used as homework or as assignments in the class. I think (I take) longer time to find the right vocabulary to express my ideas.	D.C.R/Vocabulary/222
4.	If without the help of a cell phone or laptop (we cannot write because we don't have enough vocabulary). In an exam, it is difficult to express our ideas, so we need gadgets to find the right language. Our vocabulary is less expanded.	F.N.D/Vocabulary/302
5.	No, Alhamdulillah. (I did not have difficulty with vocabulary)	Y.P/Vocabulary/991
6.	I can do writing with my vocab. But when it comes to grammar, I think I struggle the most.	M.W.S.R/Vocabulary/956
7.	As for vocabulary so far no (no difficulty). But maybe there are some new vocabulary. There are times when I go to Google Translate to translate it.	S.D/Vocabulary/016

Difficulty in Mechanics (Punctuation and Spelling)

Table 5 highlights students' perceptions of punctuation and spelling difficulties. Most students reported minimal issues with punctuation and spelling, as they frequently used digital spell-check tools. However, a few mentioned occasional uncertainties about correct spelling when encountering unfamiliar words.

Table 5. Difficulty with Mechanics (Punctuation, Spelling)

No.	Transcripts	Final Codes
1.	Punctuation? No. Also no problem in spelling.	W.F/Mechanics/149
2.	There's no (no problem in spelling) so far. Spelling is actually not difficult.	D.Z.A/Mechanics/568
3.	I have no problem in punctuation. In the class, we are always reminded of periods, commas, exclamation mark, question mark and semicolon. When I took an exam, I need more paper to write because I'm not sure whether the word is correct or not. I'm not sure whether the spelling is correct or not. So, it's time-consuming.	D.C.R/Mechanics/222
4.	We don't have any problems with punctuation. Sometimes when we write the word down, we are not	F.N.D/Mechanics/302

	sure if it's right or not. It's also a problem, but it's not like grammar. Grammar is the biggest (problem), but spelling is just a little bit (problem).	
5.	No, it seems to have more difficulty in grammar than punctuation. Sometimes I like to check my documents to make sure that there are not spelling problem. There are not too many spelling mistakes because if there are any, they are immediately visible in red, right? Yes, in Gdocs or in Words sometimes it looks like that. Most of spelling problems are because of typos. So spelling is not a big problem.	Y.P/Mechanics/991
6.	For punctuation I have no problem. For spelling, maybe there are some problems, for example when we get new vocabulary.	M.W.S.R/Mechanics /956
7.	There are not any (problems) so far. There are new words that I think are unfamiliar. Sometimes I have difficulties, but again I check it on the websites for translators.	S.D/Mechanics/016

Based on the data of interview and the documented analysis of students' essays, it was found that students have problems in thesis statement formulation, absence of topic sentences in body paragraphs, and underdeveloped paragraph structure. Additionally, some grammatical and mechanical errors were observed in students' writing.

The Overall Difficult Aspects of Writing Essays for Prose Analysis

The result of the questionnaire shows that there are three main areas that they felt challenging in writing essays for prose analysis. The data of the questionnaire supports the data from the interview in which ideas generation, essay organization, and the use of proper grammar are the challenges the students often face in writing essays for prose analysis.

Table 6. Difficult Aspects in Writing Essay for Story Analysis

Essay elements	%	f
The content (ideas)	50%	8
The organization (how to write the first paragraph, the body, the conclusion)	28.6%	4
The use of language / grammar	21.4%	3
The Vocabulary	0	0
The mechanic (spelling and punctuation)	0	0

Firstly, content (ideas) is the most challenging (50%) for half of the students (8 out of 16. This suggests that they may find it difficult to analyze the story

critically or organize their thoughts coherently. Secondly, writing a well-structured essay, including the introduction, body, and conclusion, is the second biggest struggle (28.6%). This may indicate a need for more guidance in structuring their writing. Meanwhile, a smaller percentage (3 students) struggle with grammar and sentence structure, which may hinder clarity and coherence. Interestingly, no students reported difficulties with vocabulary or mechanics (spelling and punctuation), meaning their fundamental language skills are relatively strong.

Table 7. Parts of the Essay Organization considered Difficult

	%	f
Making the thesis statement	43%	6
Making good conclusion	28.6%	4
Writing the first sentence in the introduction	21.4%	3
Writing the body of the essay	7%	1
Giving details and evidence	0	0

Table 8 shows that nearly half (6 students) struggle to make a clear thesis statement, which is a crucial part of essay writing. This may indicate difficulty in formulating a strong central argument. Four students (28.6%) find writing conclusions challenging, possibly due to difficulties in summarizing their arguments effectively. Additionally, starting the essay is a struggle for some students, which may be linked to challenges in generating ideas (as seen in table 7). Only one student struggles with the body of the essay, suggesting that once the structure is clear, they can elaborate on their ideas. Interestingly, no students reported issues with adding supporting details, indicating they may understand how to use examples from the story effectively.

Students' Strategies in Writing Essays for Prose Analysis (*prewriting strategies and keep practicing*)

Table 9 presents students' responses regarding prewriting strategies (mind mapping, outlining, drafting). Many students used mind mapping to organize their ideas before writing. This approach helped them plan paragraph structures and ensure logical flow. Some also used discussing with friends' strategies to get ideas, and keep practicing strategy to improve the writing skills.

Table 9. The Writing Strategies

No.	Transcripts	Final Codes
1.	If the story is too long, I use a strategy of mind mapping. After I read the story, I will make a kind of mind mapping. (I plan) what should be written in each	W.F/Strategy/149

	paragraph. I use English directly; I never use Indonesian because if it's translated from Indonesian to English sometimes the language is too difficult. (I also use) a thesaurus, like this one word I can write using other alternatives, like "big" and "huge". For the writing part, the strategy that I have been doing is always looking for...always looking at what dialogs I can take to write in the first sentence, Let's just give an example to make it easier, like "The Story of a Mother" There's a dialog where the mother prayed to God if her prayer is bad so that it won't be granted, "Grant not my prayers, when they are contrary to Thy will," I was confused about what to write, so I used that dialog as the first sentence in my essay. So, when I find it difficult to write an essay, I always take a sentence from the story that I think I can use in the first sentence like that. Then, I will continue with what I'm going to describe through what I took from the dialog.	
2.	I use Keep practicing strategy. We keep getting assignments every week, so I automatically use it most of the time. I also use peer review strategy to make sure, or just in case there is something missing from my essay. I also use dictionary. If I'm confused about one word, I just looked up the word in the dictionary.	D.Z.A/Strategy/568
3.	At the beginning, I might have gone straight to the point, but because I was often in the same group with F.N.D. I was also told that we have to write this first then that...so maybe for now I use mind mapping. I still use dictionary. I (feel) I lack vocabulary in English, so I still use the help of a dictionary.	D.C.R/Strategy/222
4.	I usually use mind mapping. If I I have an idea, then I work on it. First, we create an idea then we just go into small sub-themes. I also often discuss with friends if I want to make a story analysis. I also practiced writing. I read comics, read manga, read manhwa. I see English spelling in the stories I read. For example, there is an English term or sentence that I have never heard of and then I look it up on Google the meaning. So, I put the new word into my essay to make it beautiful. It adds insight too. (I also use) dictionary. (It) expands our vocabulary.	F.N.D/Strategy/302
5.	I make an outline. I personally like to write on Twitter after reading a novel, like making a thread about something like this review or sometimes. I like to read people's threads about the novels they have read so it is motivating. Yes, I like reading reviews on Goodreads	Y.P/Strategy/991

	before reading the book. I like it, it is good for practice. Sometimes I have found the word, but it doesn't seem right for the sentence, so I'm looking for the synonyms in the dictionary.	
6.	For me, it's like just write it down...spontaneously. Sometimes, I translate Indonesian to English. For example, when I'm tired and have a lot of assignment, I used translation. I use dictionary sometimes. But sometimes I ask my friends. If they know the vocabulary, I will not open the dictionary.	M.W.S.R/Strategy/ 956
7.	I'm just writing directly quickly. And I keep practicing. I mostly use the keep practicing strategy.	S.D/Strategy/016

The result of the interview is supported by the result of the questionnaire, showing that students have various strategies to help them write essays for story analysis. There three most common strategies used by the students, namely keep on practicing strategy, mind mapping strategy, and discussion strategy. Most students (12 out of 14) believe that continuous practice helps improve their writing skills. This aligns with the idea that writing is a skill that improves with regular effort. Nine students use mind mapping to organize their thoughts before writing. This is an effective strategy for overcoming content and idea generation struggles (as seen in Table 7 from your previous data). Eight students prefer collaborative learning to generate ideas, which could help them overcome difficulties in content and thesis statement formulation.

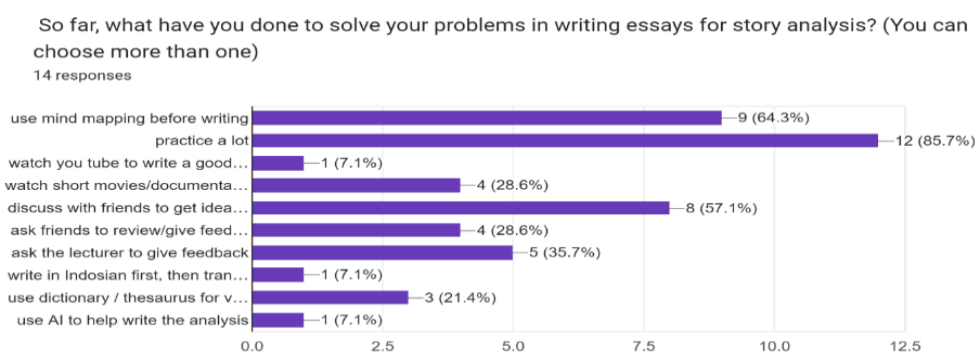


Figure 1. The Students' Strategies

There are four moderately used strategies used by the students. Five students ask the lecturer for feedback (35.7%) to get guidance from their lecturer, which can help them refine organization, grammar, and clarity. Four students use audiovisual resources (28.6%) through short movies or

documentaries to enhance their understanding of stories to help them with content generation and analysis. Other ask friend to review/give feedback (28.6%), which can improve organization and clarity in writing. Three students use a dictionary/thesaurus for vocabulary (21.4%) to refine their vocabulary, although Table 7 indicates vocabulary was not a major difficulty.

The tree least used strategies used by the students are translating, watching You tube tutorials and using AI for writing essay. One student confessed that he writes the essay in Indonesian first, then translating it into English (7.1%), indicating that most students feel comfortable writing directly in the required language. The interview data also reveal the use of digital tools to write the essays. During the whilst-writing phase, many students used online dictionaries, thesauruses, and Google Translate to address vocabulary issues. In the post-writing phase, peer reviews and discussions with friends played a crucial role in refining their essays. Some students also relied on their lecturer's feedback to improve their work. Interestingly, students minimized the use of AI-based translation tools, as their lecturer encouraged them to rely on their own skills. Classroom observations confirmed that students were able to write essays independently, using online resources only for vocabulary assistance.

DISCUSSION

Students' Difficulties in Writing Essays for Prose Analysis

The data shows that the students have various difficulties in writing essays for prose analysis. The two major difficulties were, first, generating content and ideas (50%) in which students struggle in analyzing the prose and developing strong arguments. Second, they also have a difficulty in organizing the essay (28.6%) in relation to writing the introduction, body, and conclusion which poses challenges, especially formulating a thesis statement (43%) and conclusion. And the moderate problem is using appropriate grammar and sentence structure (21.4%) to gain clarity for their essay. The data also shows that in general, students have sufficient vocabulary and spelling/punctuation skills in writing the essays.

The findings of this study align with recent research in relation to students' difficulties in writing. Recent studies have highlighted that students often encounter challenges in developing ideas and applying correct grammar in their writing (Saprina et al., 2020). Similarly, Ananda et.al (2024) found that EFL university students struggle with writing task due to difficulties in, among them, formulating thesis statements, and integrating sources, including finding evidence and using proper citation.

In relation to grammar, the findings align with previous research by Ariyanti and Fitriana (2017), who found that grammar remains one of the most challenging aspects of writing for EFL students. Similarly, Handayani

and Johan (2018) established a correlation between grammatical difficulties and students' overall writing performance, particularly in verb usage. This aligns with Setiyorini et al. (2020), who found that students commonly make grammatical errors in essay writing, as well as Fitrawati and Safitri (2021), who observed frequent mistakes in verb usage due to confusion about grammatical rules. Yet, the students need to understand that it is common for students to make grammatical mistakes and errors in writing essays (Setiyorini et al., 2020). However, with the advancement of technology nowadays, using writing tools applications is a good way to help improve the quality of the essay.

Students' Strategies in Writing Essays for Prose Analysis

The study found three types of strategies: the most used strategies, moderately used strategies, and the least used strategies to solve the writing difficulties. The findings indicate that students frequently used mind mapping, continuous practice, and peer discussion to improve their writing. As Oshima and Hogue's (2006) point out, it is important for the students to practice the mind mapping strategy during prewriting stage. It helps students to generate ideas. These findings align with Adelita et al. (2023), who found that mind mapping helps students synthesize key points and structure their essays effectively. Similarly, Oktavianti et al. (2021) emphasized that mind mapping inspires students and provides reference material to strengthen their arguments. Additionally, Khudhair (2016) found that mind mapping fosters clearer thinking and helps students identify logical connections in their writing. Wahid and Sudirman (2023) said that the mind mapping/outlining technique was effective for the students' writing skills because it helped them to overcome problems such as nervousness, lack of confidence in improving their writing skills. Furthermore, it also helped the students to arrange structured ideas and made them easy to understand.

Another commonly used strategy was continuous practice, where students sharpen their writing skills through regular assignments and exercises. Some students also engaged in peer review sessions to receive feedback and improve their writing. This finding supports Adelita et al. (2023), who highlighted that regular writing practice enhances confidence and expands vocabulary. Similarly, Ismiati and Pebriantika (2020) found that diary writing, and guided practice helped students refine their writing through frequent feedback and structured exercises. The result of the questionnaire also reveals similar findings. The first two highest results of the questionnaire show that keep practicing strategy and mind mapping are the most commonly used strategy in writing essays for prose analysis.

The result of this research aligns with Ananda et al. (2024), who found that the students employ three main strategies to solve the writing problems.

Based on the findings of their research, the students employ three strategies. Firstly, the students acquire information through extensive reading, video learning, and essay analysis. Secondly, the students make use of technology, including AI tools to help improve the writing quality. Furthermore, finally the students improve their work through revision, rechecking, and seeking feedback. The findings reveal that students encounter various difficulties in writing essays for prose analysis, particularly in idea generation, grammar, and essay organization. However, through strategic approaches such as mind mapping, continuous practice, and digital assistance, they were able to improve their writing skills. These findings align with previous research, emphasizing the importance of structured writing strategies in overcoming common challenges.

In this current study, most students reported that their chosen strategies were effective in improving their writing. Some found that starting essays with an excerpt or dialogue from the story helped overcome difficulties in writing the first sentence. Others believed that continuous writing practice and peer discussions significantly improved their skills. Additionally, many students found that mind mapping and outlining were valuable tools for generating ideas and structuring essays logically. Several key points are addressed as follows. Firstly, students are actively addressing their struggles, yet they find some solutions to overcome them, even though some of them can made more effective. High reliance on practice and peer discussion shows they recognize the need for improvement. However, lecturer feedback and structured guidance from the lecturer could be further encouraged to improve thesis statement clarity and organization.

Secondly, idea generation is the biggest challenge, but students are making efforts to overcome it. The use of mind mapping, drafting, and discussions are beneficial, but they may need more structured activities like guided brainstorming or essay planning frameworks. Thirdly, it was found that students are not struggling with vocabulary and mechanics so that they can focus more on content and structure. This suggests that the lecturer can give more priority to developing critical thinking and analytical writing skills rather than basic language proficiency. Moreover, fourth, some potentially useful strategies (e.g., AI, online resources) are underutilized. Using more exposure to structured online learning (YouTube, AI, or interactive writing tools) might help students develop better analytical writing skills.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data, it can be concluded that students faced major difficulties in content and essay organization—such as making a thesis statement and conclusion—alongside moderate difficulties in using appropriate grammar when writing prose analysis essays. To overcome the difficulties, students had

different types of strategies. Among the most frequently employed strategies were mind mapping and peer discussion (for generating and organizing ideas) along with continuous practice (to improve writing skills). The moderate strategies are asking for the lecturer's and peer feedback to improve organization and clarity, using audio visual resources and dictionary/thesaurus to improve vocabulary. Moreover, the three least-used strategies were translation, watching YouTube videos relevant to the writing task, and using AI for essay writing. Students applied these strategies during all stages of the writing process: pre-writing, drafting, and post-writing. The students believe that these strategies effectively support their writing of essays for prose analysis.

However, this study has some limitations. First, although students reported that certain strategies (e.g., mind mapping, continuous practice, peer discussion) were effective for them, there is no evidence to confirm this effectiveness. Future research could use a before-and-after study to see if these strategies improve writing performance. Second, this study's data rely solely on students' self-reported perceptions of their difficulties and strategies, which may introduce response bias. Some students might not accurately assess their own struggles or strategies. Therefore, additional data from direct writing performance analysis (e.g., scoring their essays) would provide more objective evidence. Third, while the study identified students' struggles with grammatical accuracy in prose analysis essays, it did not examine specific error patterns. This gap presents an opportunity for future research to conduct content analysis of student writing to classify prevalent grammatical errors. Lastly, the study does not evaluate the overall quality of students' essays based on structural elements such as the introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. Future researchers could use a case study or content analysis to investigate this area. Investigating these aspects could provide valuable insights for writing instructors to better support students in enhancing their essay-writing skills.

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