Understanding Writing Habit in College: A Survey of Higher Education Students

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Abstract

This research investigates the writing habits of students in higher education, using a case study approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of these practices. The case study is used to delve deeply into the intricate writing behaviors, motivations, and challenges faced by individual college students. Through a sample of 232 students from diverse faculties, insights were gathered via a meticulously designed survey covering aspects such as writing frequency, time allocation, methodologies employed, and difficulties encountered. The findings reveal that, despite the diversity of academic disciplines, there are observable trends in writing habits among students. The initiation of writing might appear straightforward; however, challenges emerge during the process. These challenges often lead to task-driven completion rather than fostering consistent writing habits. These findings emphasize the value of personalized interventions that recognize the unique obstacles and motivations in each field, enabling educators to refine writing support programs. This research contributes to a nuanced understanding of writing practices in higher education and illuminates students' writing habits. By recognizing the varied motivations and challenges, educators can strategically enhance writing support initiatives, creating an environment where effective writing habits flourish. The insights from this study not only inform academic discourse but also provide practical implications for educators seeking to empower student writers.

Keywords: Higher education, writing habit, writing practices, motivations, and challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a fundamental skill for academic success in higher education (Cole & Feng, 2015; Essex, 2000; Schulze & Lemmer, 2017; Tzivinikou et al., 2021). It is not just a means of conveying information but is also a tool for critical thinking and analysis. Through writing, students communicate their thoughts and ideas, learn how to organize their understanding, evaluate evidence, and develop arguments. In academics, writing is a key avenue by which students can demonstrate their knowledge, analytical skills, and ability to apply concepts and theories to real-world situations. Participating in the intellectual discourse of their

chosen field and articulating ideas with clarity, students must be proficient writers. Proficiency in writing requires an understanding of how sentences cohesively form ideas and how readers can readily interpret them.

Developing consistent writing habits is crucial for individuals. Writing habits refer to the ways in which individuals approach writing, including their strategies, preferences, and practices (Beard et al., 2009; Durrant et al., 2021; Gere, 2018). These habits can be shaped by various factors, from one's field of study and the demands of their coursework to personal writing skills and style (Mills, 2004; Tredinnick, 2008; Tulley, 2018). In higher education, teaching styles and expectations of lecturers, as well as available resources, also play roles. A true writing habit extends beyond the act itself—it encompasses the mindset and discipline required to consistently engage in the creative process.

However, existing research on college students' writing habits is somewhat limited, often narrowing its focus to specific groups or disciplines. This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining writing habits across various fields of study. Surveying a diverse sample of higher education students, the research aims to gain a comprehensive view of prevailing writing habits. Some common practices among students, such as setting dedicated writing times, drafting outlines, revising work, and seeking feedback, may exhibit variations influenced by their major or coursework.

Understanding these writing habits can help institutions offer better support to their students, thereby enhancing academic outcomes. This study aims to detect similarities and differences among the responses based on participants' academic disciplines and to identify shared writing habits. Ultimately, the findings are anticipated to not only deepen the academic understanding of writing practices but also guide improvements in tailored writing support initiatives within higher education.

METHOD

This study explores the writing habits of students in the context of higher education. A case study approach was effectively used to get a thorough grasp of these behaviours. An in-depth investigation of a single entity, such as a person, a group, an event, or an organization, is part of the case study technique (Yin, 2014b, 2018). In this particular situation, the case study method was used as a lens to examine the complex writing styles of particular college students. This approach gives researchers the capacity to glean priceless insights into both the fundamental attitudes of pupils as well as the practical aspects of writing.

The research design encompassed a diverse sample of higher education students representing various academic disciplines. A central focus was placed on assembling a participant group that reflected the rich diversity present in higher education environments. The group of participants consisted of 232 students drawn from five distinct faculties, namely Sharia Accounting, Arabic Language and Literature, Information Systems, Family Law, and Mathematics. These students were engaged in an active role through the distribution of questions via Google Forms. Through the application of a survey approach, the investigator tapped into the collective experiences of college students to understand their writing practices better.

In addition, the survey instrument was carefully designed to cover a wide range of questions about writing practices, including time-consuming writing places, tools, strategies,

and reasons for writing to ensure the survey's validity and comprehensiveness, two experts in the field of academic writing and research methodologies were consulted. Their invaluable feedback informed the final iteration of the survey, ensuring its alignment with the study's objectives. One of the study's primary highlights was its comprehensive analysis of the acquired survey data. With the unique perspective of the participants' academic majors, a comprehensive analysis of the responses was conducted. By using an analytical method, it was possible to compare writing habits across many fields and identify trends and patterns.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Writing habits refer to the regular and consistent practices that individuals engage in to produce written work. These habits can include setting aside dedicated time for writing, creating a specific writing environment, and using certain tools or strategies to help with the writing process. Research suggests that developing positive writing habits can be beneficial for individuals, as it can help to improve the quality and quantity of their written work, as well as increase their overall motivation and engagement with the writing process. In general, the key factors that are associated with their writing habits include having a dedicated time and place for writing and setting clear goals and deadlines. Additionally, regular self-reflection and revision and seeking feedback from others can also help to develop their writing habits.

The survey from the questionnaires given to the students reveals that most of the students have high motivation for writing. Data showed that their frequency of writing is more than average, around 162 participants in total. Students from all majors agreed that they produced numerous writings during their studies. The following charts show the way students shape their writing.
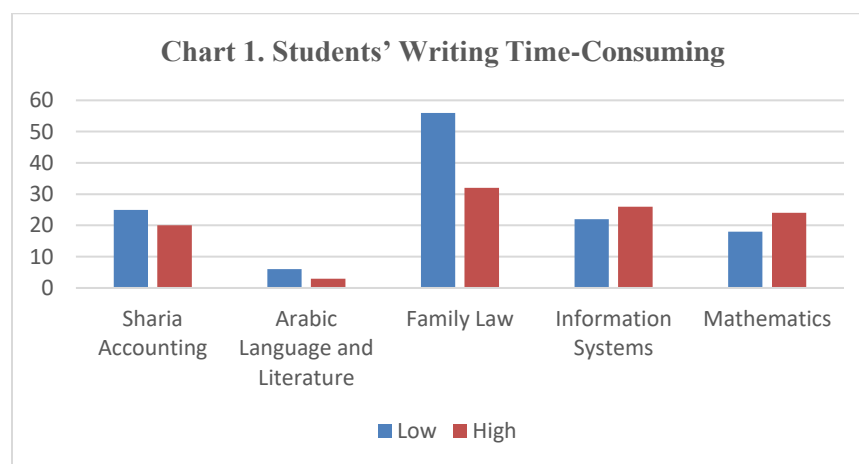

Figure 1. Students' writing time-consuming

The temporal aspect of writing presents a significant challenge for students seeking to enhance their writing skills. A noteworthy proportion of students attributed their struggles in improving their writing prowess to the time-intensive nature of the task. This

perspective aligns with previous research on writing habits, which underscores the inherent time demands associated with the writing process. For instance, Zarestky et al. (2022) found that time constraints often hindered students' ability to engage in thorough and reflective writing practices. This inclination toward perceiving writing as time-consuming was echoed in the data, wherein a substantial 127 participants acknowledged taking less time to compose their written pieces.

Interestingly, among the surveyed students, certain academic majors displayed variations in their approach to time allocation for writing. Three specific majors—Islamic accounting, family law, and information studies—reported that they typically invested less than an hour in writing tasks. This tendency to allocate minimal time was often attributed to feelings of boredom while writing, resulting in frequent distractions even from technological devices. This aligns with the cognitive load theory by Sweller et al. (1998), which posits that when individuals find a task monotonous, their attention and cognitive resources tend to waver, affecting the efficiency of the task completion.

Conversely, two other academic majors (Information Systems and Sharia Accounting)—devoted more than an hour to their writing endeavors. Their extended writing periods were motivated by distinct factors. These students expressed that writing provided them with a platform to freely express their thoughts without external judgment. This sentiment resonates with theories of self-determination and intrinsic motivation, suggesting that autonomy and self-expression are vital drivers of sustained engagement in tasks. Additionally, the act of writing served as a means to utilize leisure time meaningfully, reinforcing the idea that writing can be an avenue for both self-expression and productive leisure. These findings illuminate the intricate interplay between perceptions of time, personal motivations, and the perceived value of the writing process in shaping students' writing habits.
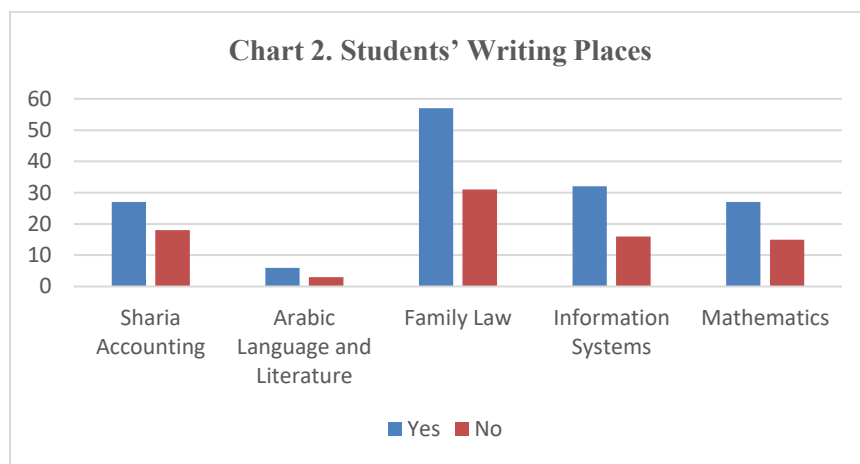

Figure 2. Students' writing places

When considering factors that enhance students' motivation for writing, it is intriguing to note that a significant portion, 149 participants, expressed that they require a designated or specific space to channel their writing ideas. In contrast, a minority,

constituting one-third of the participants, emphasized the importance of locating a distinct environment to bolster their focus during writing endeavors. To contextualize these findings, previous studies on writing habits have highlighted the influence of external surroundings on creativity and productivity. For instance, research by Wu and Zhang (2017) indicated that conducive writing environments can positively impact idea generation and overall writing quality. The rationale behind the perceived necessity of a dedicated writing space is multifaceted. Many participants attributed it to the potential of such a space to provide the necessary inspiration for generating ideas. Moreover, the inclination toward places such as beaches and private cafes stems from the idea of utilizing serene and comfortable settings as a means of escaping the pressures of impending deadlines.

In contrast, a total of 83 participants held the perspective that they did not require a specific writing environment, contending that any conducive space for learning sufficed. This aligns with the notion that individual preferences and learning styles play a substantial role in determining optimal writing conditions, a concept underscored by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978). Interestingly, some students expressed a preference for crowded spaces as a means of sparking their writing ideas. This sentiment resonates with the cognitive theory proposed by Bruner (1966), which emphasizes the role of external stimuli, including bustling environments, in promoting cognitive processes. Overall, the variety of participants' perspectives highlights the complex interplay between environmental factors and individual propensities in shaping effective writing habits.
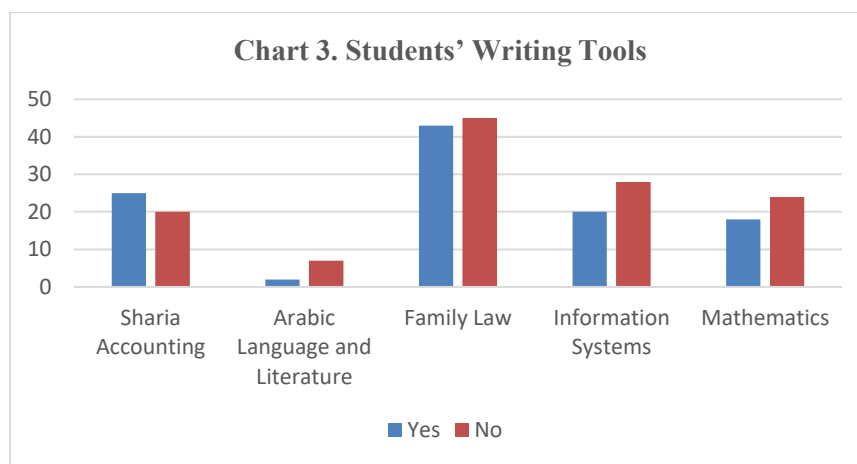

Figure 3. Students' writing tools

When considering the resources essential for effective writing, it's important to acknowledge that students require a range of tools beyond their creative abilities. In addition to their innate skills, students often rely on tangible items such as pens, books, and paper, as well as digital applications that contribute to their motivation and writing enhancement. A comprehensive understanding of the writing process reveals that these tools play a pivotal role in supporting students' endeavors.

The writing process necessitates consideration of both the content and the aesthetics of the finished work, as seen in the bar chart. Students who are actively writing understand

the value of presenting their work as an artistic endeavor. This goes beyond just picking the right ink and includes making a careful selection of the right pens, premium paper, and appropriate applications. Students are becoming more conscious of how these resources help them on their creative journey and improve the overall quality of their written work. These resources can be found in different places, and students use whatever resources they can improve their writing. Most of them stated that they did not need any specific tools to write to improve their creativity in writing. In contrast, only Sharia Accounting students chose more than half that they need special tools to write.
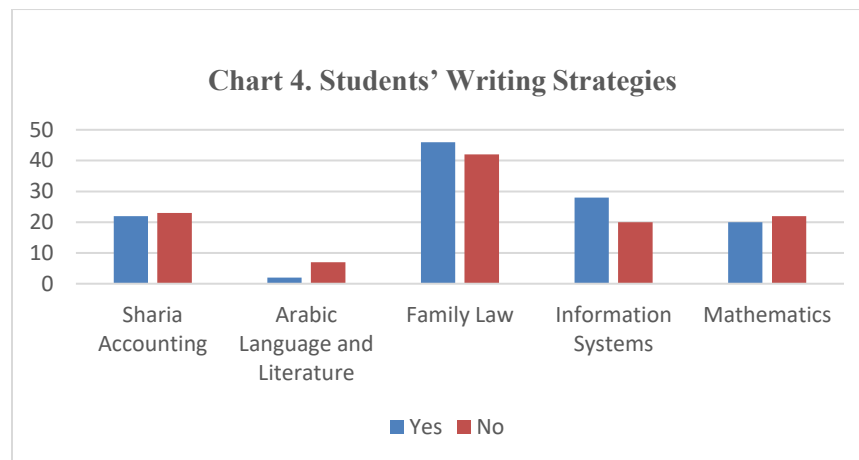

Figure 4. Students' writing strategies

When delving into the realm of effective writing, the strategies become a critical consideration. Numerous processes and methodologies have been explored to enhance the quality of written work. Previous studies, such as those conducted by Hayes and Flower (1980), have emphasized the significance of deliberate planning and structured approaches to writing. However, an intriguing observation arises from recent data, which suggests that a substantial portion of students diverge from prescribed writing processes. This phenomenon raises questions about the underlying motivations and implications of such non-adherence.

The majority of the students did not follow any specific strategies in starting their writing. There were 114 students who were not of any strategy, especially in writing. To contextualize this finding, the reluctance of some students to follow established rules or procedures can be attributed to various factors. According to Bereiter and Scardamalia's theory of knowledge transformation (1987), novice writers often lack metacognitive awareness and might not possess a deep understanding of the strategies required for proficient writing. These students perceive writing as a formidable challenge and recognize the need for strategies to augment their proficiency. This echoes the sentiments expressed by (Hayes & Flower, 1980) in their cognitive process theory of writing, wherein they advocate for a recursive approach involving drafting, revising, and generating ideas.
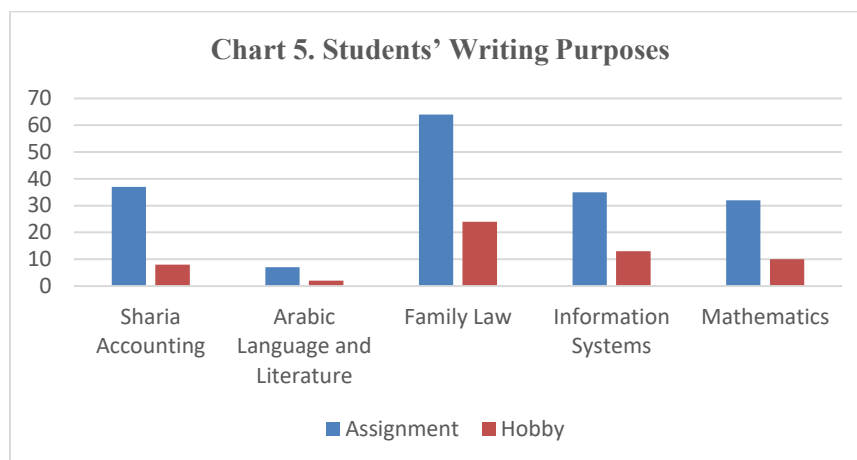
Chart 5. Students' Writing Purposes

Figure 5. Students' writing purposes

In addition to the aforementioned criteria, students encountered various challenges while engaging in writing tasks. An interesting observation is that their motivation for writing predominantly stemmed from the need to fulfill assignments rather than a personal passion for writing. The emphasis on completing tasks for grades, rather than viewing writing as a skill to be nurtured, resonates with the findings of De Smedt et al. (2018), who highlighted the prevalence of performance-oriented writing motivations among students. While many participants found initiating the writing process relatively straightforward, the complexity arose when they needed to sustain their efforts or conclude the writing task. This recurring pattern of struggle in the later stages of writing often led them to approach writing solely as a task to be finished rather than an opportunity for skill development. A large number of pupils were considering their writing only for completing their assignment. Since they do not have the motivation to write and put it as their hobby. In total 175 participants put their attention only on fulfilling their tasks, not on improving their writing skills.

Interestingly, this inclination to prioritize task completion over skill refinement resulted in participants neglecting the potential benefits of cultivating consistent writing habits. This behavior aligns with Bandura's theory (1977), which emphasizes the role of self-efficacy beliefs in influencing one's approach to tasks. Many students encountered common obstacles that hindered their writing progress, such as uncertainty about where to begin, selecting appropriate vocabulary, maintaining a coherent flow of thoughts and ideas, feelings of boredom, and susceptibility to distractions. These difficulties mirror the challenges identified in studies by Williams and Takaku (2011) and Lee (2020), both of which explored the multifaceted nature of writing apprehension and its impact on the writing process.

The cumulative impact of these challenges underscores the necessity of promoting a more holistic approach to writing. Encouraging students to recognize writing as a means of enhancing their overall competency and cognitive abilities can mitigate the short-term focus on task completion. By fostering a growth mindset toward writing, educators can align with (Elliot et al., 2017) and empower students to perceive challenges as opportunities for development. This shift in perspective, combined with targeted interventions addressing

common writing barriers, can effectively nurture enduring writing habits, leading to improved writing outcomes and a deeper sense of accomplishment.

CONCLUSION

The research offers a detailed exploration of student writing habits in higher education, revealing the intertwining of individual predilections, external factors, and academic pressures. Notably, while a majority of students possess strong motivation for writing, it is primarily anchored to task completion rather than genuine affection for the art of writing. Such an inclination implies a broader issue in academia where achievement metrics overshadow the intrinsic value of learning. Furthermore, students' approach to writing significantly varies based on academic majors and individual preferences. Certain disciplines harness writing as a liberating form of self-expression, while others view it as just another mundane task.

Moreover, the environments in which students prefer to write are diverse. Some find inspiration in quiet, dedicated spaces, while others thrive amidst the hustle and bustle, indicating that an optimal writing environment is highly personal and influenced by individual cognitive styles. The study also highlighted the lack of structured strategies among many students, pointing to a potential deficit in metacognitive awareness and suggesting a need for more specialized writing training. However, the universal struggle seems to be maintaining the momentum in the writing process. Many students approach writing as an isolated task rather than a continuous journey of growth. For educational institutions to truly nurture profound writing habits, there is an urgent call to shift from a task-centric approach to cultivating a deeper appreciation for writing.

With a deep understanding of these writing habits, educators and institutions can harness this knowledge to inform and enhance writing support programs. The findings of this research provide a solid foundation for the development of interventions that cater to the diverse needs and preferences of students. By recognizing the unique challenges faced by students and acknowledging the motivations that drive their writing practices, educators can tailor their approach to foster an environment conducive to effective writing. In essence, this research underscores the significance of understanding students' writing habits within higher education.

By unraveling the intricacies of these practices and attitudes, we pave the way for informed strategies that empower students to enhance their writing skills, ultimately contributing to their holistic development as scholars and future professionals. Additionally, this study focused on a single institution with different faculties while investigating writing habits across multiple institutional contexts can be conducted to see how cultural factors influence writing habits in higher education.

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