

# Nurturing Writing Confidence: A Case Study on the Effects of Free Writing in an EFL Classroom

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## Abstract

This case study investigates the impact of free writing activities on students' confidence in writing English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Conducted at SMPN 5 Anggeraja with 20 students, the study examines how the integration of free writing influences students' writing confidence, comfort with writing tasks, perceptions of their writing abilities, and reduction in writing anxiety. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted after three free writing sessions, which were observed by the researcher across 16 classroom meetings. The findings revealed that free writing significantly improved students' confidence in writing, as many students felt freer to express their ideas without the pressure of grammatical accuracy. Additionally, the study found that students became more comfortable with writing tasks, with 17 out of 20 students reporting increased engagement in writing activities. Students also reported enhanced perceptions of their writing abilities, with many expressing improved fluency and organization. Furthermore, a majority of students experienced a reduction in writing anxiety, as they began to approach writing tasks with greater ease. These findings suggest that free writing is an effective method for fostering writing confidence and reducing anxiety in EFL classrooms. The study underscores the importance of providing students with opportunities for low-pressure writing activities that prioritize content and self-expression over grammatical accuracy.

**Keywords:** *Free writing, Writing confidence, EFL, Writing anxiety, Self-expression*

## Introduction

In the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), writing is often identified as one of the most difficult skills for students to master. Research has consistently highlighted that many learners face significant challenges in developing their writing proficiency due to factors such as a fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and concerns about grammatical accuracy (Lee, 2021; Yulianti, 2022). These obstacles not only affect the quality of students' written outputs but also contribute to their reluctance to engage with writing tasks. According to Tseng and Schmitt (2023), writing anxiety is particularly prevalent among EFL learners, often resulting from their inability to meet native-like expectations in their written work. This anxiety can deter students from taking risks or attempting to express their ideas freely, further exacerbating their struggles in writing.

Additionally, lack of confidence in one's writing ability is a significant barrier to the development of writing skills. Students with low writing confidence tend to avoid engaging in writing tasks or exhibit minimal effort in their work, which ultimately hinders their language development (MacIntyre & Gardner, 2020). A study by Zhang and Yang (2022) found that when students are not confident in their writing, they tend to focus excessively on formal accuracy, which limits their ability to produce coherent, fluent text. Therefore, fostering confidence in writing is essential to encourage EFL students to actively participate in writing tasks and improve their writing skills. By promoting a positive and supportive environment for writing, educators can help students overcome writing anxiety and build the self-assurance necessary for effective communication in English (Huang & Liu, 2023). Encouraging students to express their ideas without fear of judgment can ultimately lead to enhanced engagement, creativity, and improvement in overall language proficiency.

Writing confidence, defined as the belief in one's ability to produce effective written communication, plays a crucial role in the writing development of EFL learners. As suggested by Barrot (2022), writing confidence is an intrinsic motivator that drives students to engage in writing tasks with greater enthusiasm and perseverance. Students with high levels of writing confidence are more likely to take risks in their writing, exploring new vocabulary, experimenting with complex sentence structures, and conveying their ideas with clarity. This self-assurance not only enhances the fluency and creativity of their writing but also helps them overcome the fear of failure or negative evaluation, which is often a significant barrier to the writing process (Jia & Xie, 2021). The importance of writing confidence in EFL classrooms is emphasized by Li and Zhang (2023), who argue that when students believe in their own writing abilities, they are more likely to engage in reflective writing, accept constructive feedback, and demonstrate continued improvement in their writing skills. On the other hand, students who lack confidence may limit their efforts to basic tasks and focus excessively on surface-level concerns such as spelling or grammar, rather than focusing on the content and message they aim to communicate. Therefore, fostering writing confidence in EFL learners is not merely about encouraging them to write more but empowering them to write with purpose and conviction, ultimately facilitating their development as competent writers in a foreign language.

Free writing, an unstructured writing activity where students write continuously without focusing on grammar or punctuation, has been identified as an effective method for building writing confidence. Research has shown that free writing allows students to express their ideas freely and creatively, without the pressure of perfection (Hyland, 2021). This approach helps to reduce writing anxiety, as students are encouraged to focus on content rather than worrying about mistakes (Wang, 2022). By engaging in free writing, students can build fluency in writing and increase their comfort level with the writing process, which can directly contribute to improved writing confidence. Moreover, it offers a low-stakes environment where students can experiment with language, making it a valuable tool in EFL classrooms (Richards & Rodgers, 2023). This method also promotes a sense of accomplishment, further enhancing students' self-efficacy in writing.

In many EFL settings, particularly in areas with limited exposure to English, the challenges faced by students in writing are often more pronounced. At SMP Enrekang, students frequently experience anxiety and a lack of confidence when writing in English, which hinders their ability to effectively express their ideas. With limited opportunities for English interaction outside the classroom, many students struggle with the fear of

making mistakes and find it difficult to overcome this barrier. Free writing, as an approach that allows students to express themselves freely without concern for errors, offers great potential for addressing these challenges. Therefore, this study focuses on exploring how free writing can help students at SMPN Anggeraja overcome their anxiety and improve their writing confidence in English.

The objective of this study is to investigate the impact of free writing on students' confidence in writing English in an EFL classroom. Focusing on a case study of 20 students at SMP Enrekang, the research aims to understand how the implementation of free writing activities affects students' attitudes toward writing tasks and the extent to which their writing confidence improves after participating in such activities. This study seeks to provide deeper insights into the benefits of incorporating free writing into English language teaching, particularly in fostering greater engagement and improvement in students' writing skills in an EFL context.

Although free writing has been widely explored in language learning research, there is limited investigation on its specific impact on students' writing confidence in EFL contexts. Most existing studies have primarily examined free writing's effect on writing fluency or grammatical accuracy, with less focus on how it influences learners' self-efficacy and their willingness to engage in writing tasks. This gap in the literature presents an opportunity for further exploration. Therefore, this study aims to examine how the implementation of free writing in an EFL classroom, specifically at SMP Enrekang, influences students' confidence in their English writing abilities. Understanding this relationship is crucial for enhancing teaching strategies and providing practical solutions for improving students' writing experiences in EFL settings.

This study is significant as it contributes to the growing body of research on writing instruction in EFL classrooms, particularly in contexts where students struggle with writing anxiety and lack of confidence. By examining the effects of free writing on students' writing confidence, the research aims to provide valuable insights into the potential of this technique to foster a more positive and supportive writing environment. The findings of this study could help educators design more effective instructional strategies that encourage active participation and promote students' overall writing proficiency. Furthermore, the results could inspire further.

## **Method**

This study employs a case study approach to examine the impact of free writing on students' confidence in writing English in an EFL classroom. The research was conducted at SMPN 5 Anggeraja, involving 20 students from a Grade XIII class. Although free writing had already been integrated into the curriculum by the teacher prior to the study, the researcher focused on observing the students' responses through interviews rather than analyzing classroom activities or assessments.

## **Participants**

The participants in this study were 20 students from a Grade XIII class at SMPN 5 Anggeraja. These students were selected because they had participated in the free writing activities during the study period. The group consisted of learners with varying levels of proficiency in writing English, which allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how free writing affected students with different language abilities.

### **Data Collection**

The data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with the students after they had participated in the free writing activities. The researcher did not analyze the writing itself but focused on students' self-reported experiences and reflections regarding their writing confidence. The interviews were conducted following the third free writing session, which took place during the 12th class meeting. The goal of the interviews was to understand how the free writing activities influenced the students' confidence in their ability to write in English.

The interview questions were designed to explore the following areas:

1. The students' perceptions of their writing abilities before and after participating in the free writing activities.
2. How the students felt about their progress in writing over the course of the three writing sessions.
3. Whether the students felt more confident in their ability to write in English as a result of engaging in free writing.
4. The students' thoughts on how the free writing approach helped or hindered their writing process.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively. The researcher used thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns in students' responses regarding their writing confidence. The interviews were reviewed to examine whether there was a noticeable shift in students' attitudes toward writing before and after engaging in free writing. Thematic categories such as "improvement in writing confidence," "comfort with writing tasks," and "perceptions of writing ability" were coded and analyzed to understand the effects of free writing on the students' self-efficacy in writing English.

### **Results**

The results of this study are based on the qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with the 20 students who participated in the free writing activities. The interviews aimed to explore how free writing influenced the students' confidence in writing English. The analysis of the interview data revealed several key themes that indicate a noticeable shift in students' attitudes toward writing and their self-perception as writers.

#### **Improvement in Writing Confidence**

A significant number of students reported an improvement in their writing confidence after engaging in free writing activities. Out of the 20 students, 15 indicated that they felt more confident in their ability to write in English by the end of the study. These students noted that free writing allowed them to focus more on expressing their ideas without the pressure of making grammatical errors.

For instance, one student (S1) shared, "At first, I was always worried about making mistakes in my writing, but with free writing, I felt freer. I could just write whatever came to my mind." This sense of freedom in writing helped reduce the anxiety typically associated with grammar and accuracy, allowing students to focus on content. Similarly, another student (S4) expressed, "I feel more confident now. It was hard before, but free writing helped me feel comfortable with my ideas and not just worried

about grammar." This response highlights how free writing shifted students' focus from perfection to self-expression, which was key in boosting their confidence.

S6 also mentioned, "Before free writing, I used to feel anxious every time I had to write something. But now, I feel much more comfortable. I know I can write and say what I want, even if my grammar isn't perfect." This sentiment was echoed by many students, who pointed out that engaging in free writing allowed them to prioritize communication over error-free writing.

Lastly, S8 noted, "I never liked writing before, because I was always afraid I would make mistakes. But after doing free writing, I feel like I can write better. It's helped me relax and just focus on my ideas." This student's response reflects the overall sentiment of many who found that free writing provided a supportive space for writing without judgment, which significantly improved their confidence

### **Comfort with Writing Tasks**

The majority of students (17 out of 20) reported feeling more comfortable participating in writing tasks after engaging in the free writing activities. The students expressed that the pressure to write perfectly was reduced, which led to increased engagement and a greater willingness to partake in writing exercises. Many students indicated that free writing activities helped them overcome the initial fear of making mistakes, enabling them to focus more on content and expression rather than the mechanics of writing.

For example, Student 3 (S3) stated, "I used to hate writing assignments because I was scared of being judged. But now I feel better because I can just write without stressing too much about mistakes." This response illustrates how the low-stakes environment of free writing encouraged students to engage more openly with writing tasks, minimizing their anxieties and fostering a more positive attitude toward writing. Similarly, Student 5 (S5) expressed, "Before, I always felt nervous when I had to write, but after doing free writing, I don't feel as pressured. It helped me realize that writing isn't just about being perfect." This change in mindset indicates that free writing not only alleviated the stress of producing error-free work but also allowed students to focus more on articulating their thoughts clearly and confidently.

Furthermore, Student 8 (S8) shared, "At first, I didn't want to write anything at all because I was afraid of making mistakes. But now, I can write more comfortably. I'm not afraid to put my ideas down anymore." This comment suggests a clear shift in the students' attitudes toward writing, where the emphasis on fluency and self-expression over correctness led to a greater sense of comfort in engaging with writing tasks.

A few students (3 out of 20) acknowledged that while they still felt some hesitation in writing tasks, the free writing sessions significantly reduced their anxiety. Student 7 (S7) mentioned, "I still feel nervous when writing, but it's better than before. Free writing helped me get used to writing more often." This finding reflects that, while complete comfort may not have been achieved by all students, free writing made a noticeable difference in lowering writing-related anxiety and improving students' willingness to write regularly.

### **Perceptions of Writing Ability**

In addition to reporting improvements in their comfort with writing, many students (15 out of 20) also acknowledged a noticeable shift in their perceptions of their own writing ability. As the free writing activities progressed, students began to

recognize improvements not only in their fluency but also in the organization and clarity of their ideas. This shift was especially evident in the third writing session, where several students demonstrated greater coherence and detail in their written work.

For example, Student 4 (S4) shared, "At first, my writing was very short and unorganized, but after doing free writing, I could write longer paragraphs and express my ideas more clearly." This response suggests that the consistent practice of free writing helped students improve their ability to develop and structure their ideas more effectively, indicating a broader improvement in their writing skills.

Similarly, Student 6 (S6) stated, "I used to feel like I couldn't write well because I didn't know how to organize my ideas. But after doing free writing, I think my writing has gotten better. I can now think about what I want to say more clearly before I write it down." This highlights how the freedom provided by free writing allowed students to focus on the flow of their ideas, contributing to better organization and coherence in their writing.

Despite these improvements, some students (5 out of 20) expressed that they still struggled with certain aspects of writing, particularly grammar and vocabulary. Student 9 (S9) admitted, "I feel like my writing is improving, but I still need to work on my grammar. Sometimes my sentences don't sound right, and it makes me frustrated." This comment reveals that while free writing helped many students make progress, challenges in mastering the mechanics of writing, such as grammar, remained for some. In contrast, Student 2 (S2) expressed a sense of accomplishment, saying, "I didn't think I could write well at all, but now I see that my writing is much better than before. I know I still need to improve, but I feel more confident about my writing now." This sentiment indicates that free writing not only helped students recognize their improvement but also enhanced their overall confidence in their writing abilities.

### **Reduced Writing Anxiety**

A significant theme that emerged from the interviews was the reduction in writing anxiety among students. Before the implementation of free writing activities, many students reported experiencing anxiety related to writing, particularly due to the fear of making mistakes and being judged for their errors. However, after participating in the free writing sessions, a majority of students (12 out of 20) indicated that their anxiety levels had notably decreased.

For instance, Student 1 (S1) commented, "Before, I would get really nervous every time I had to write something because I was afraid I would make a lot of mistakes. But after free writing, I felt much more relaxed." This reflects how free writing provided a safe and low-pressure environment where students were able to focus on their ideas without being overly concerned with accuracy, which contributed to a significant reduction in anxiety.

Student 5 (S5) also shared, "I was always scared to write because I thought my sentences would be wrong. But after doing free writing, I realized it's okay to make mistakes. It doesn't matter as long as I can communicate my ideas." This illustrates how the unstructured nature of free writing helped to alleviate the stress associated with trying to produce perfect writing. By allowing students to focus more on content and creativity, their fears of making mistakes were minimized.

Furthermore, Student 8 (S8) expressed, "At first, I was afraid that people would laugh at my writing because it wasn't perfect, but now I know that it's okay to just write. I feel like I can make mistakes and learn from them." This sentiment was echoed by

many other students, who appreciated the freedom to make mistakes in a supportive environment without the fear of judgment or failure.

Despite the overall reduction in anxiety, a few students (3 out of 20) still mentioned experiencing some degree of nervousness during writing tasks. Student 7 (S7) noted, "I'm not as nervous as I used to be, but I still get a little anxious when I have to write in front of others. However, it's definitely less than before." This suggests that while free writing significantly reduced writing-related anxiety, some residual nervousness remained, especially for tasks involving public or peer evaluation.

Table 3.1 The summary of thematic analyses

Theme	Description	Evidence/Examples	Frequency (out of 20)
<b>Improvement in Writing Confidence</b>	Students reported feeling more confident in their writing after engaging in free writing activities, with a focus on content over grammar.	Students felt freer to express their ideas without worrying about mistakes. Example: S1 said, "I could just write whatever came to my mind."	15 students reported improvement in confidence.
<b>Comfort with Writing Tasks</b>	Students expressed increased comfort with writing tasks due to the reduction of pressure to write perfectly.	Students felt more willing to engage in writing tasks. Example: S3 stated, "I can just write without stressing too much about mistakes."	17 students felt more comfortable with writing tasks.
<b>Perceptions of Writing Ability</b>	Students noticed improvements in their writing ability, particularly in terms of fluency and organization, although some still struggled with grammar.	Students reported improvements in fluency and idea organization. Example: S4 shared, "I could write longer paragraphs and express my ideas more clearly."	15 students reported perceiving an improvement in their writing ability.
<b>Reduced Writing Anxiety</b>	A significant reduction in writing anxiety was reported, with students feeling more relaxed and less concerned about making mistakes.	Students experienced less fear of judgment and making mistakes. Example: S5 shared, "I realized it's okay to make mistakes as long as I can communicate my ideas."	12 students reported a noticeable reduction in writing anxiety.

The thematic analysis revealed four key themes related to the impact of free writing on students' writing confidence. First, Improvement in Writing Confidence was

observed, with 15 out of 20 students reporting increased confidence in their writing, as they felt freer to express their ideas without worrying about grammatical errors. Second, Comfort with Writing Tasks emerged, with 17 students feeling more comfortable engaging in writing tasks, particularly due to the reduction of pressure to write perfectly. Third, Perceptions of Writing Ability improved, with 15 students recognizing improvements in fluency and organization, though some still faced challenges with grammar. Lastly, Reduced Writing Anxiety was noted, as 12 students reported feeling more relaxed and less concerned about making mistakes, reflecting the positive impact of free writing on reducing writing anxiety. These findings underscore the effectiveness of free writing in fostering a positive and low-pressure writing environment.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the impact of free writing on students' writing confidence in an EFL classroom. As writing is often perceived as one of the most challenging language skills for learners, understanding how to reduce writing anxiety and foster a positive attitude toward writing is crucial for enhancing students' language proficiency. This discussion will explore the key findings of the study and compare them with existing literature on writing instruction, particularly focusing on the improvement in writing confidence that resulted from the integration of free writing activities in the classroom. By examining these results in the context of relevant research, this section aims to provide a deeper understanding of how free writing can contribute to students' development as more confident and capable writers.

### **Improvement in Writing Confidence**

The results of this study indicate that free writing significantly improved students' confidence in writing English, which aligns with previous research that emphasizes the importance of reducing writing anxiety to foster higher self-efficacy (Tseng & Schmitt, 2023). The majority of students reported feeling more confident in their writing abilities after participating in the free writing activities. This improvement in writing confidence can be attributed to the unstructured nature of the free writing exercises, which allowed students to focus more on the expression of their ideas rather than the correctness of their grammar or spelling (Hyland, 2021). As noted by S1, students felt liberated to express their thoughts freely, without the pressure to avoid mistakes, which, according to Lee (2021), can greatly enhance students' self-perception as writers.

This shift from a focus on grammatical accuracy to an emphasis on fluency and idea development is crucial in language acquisition. By reducing the emphasis on formal correctness, free writing activities encourage students to engage in the writing process without fear of judgment, thereby boosting their confidence (MacIntyre & Gardner, 2020). The students' reflections, such as S4's statement that they now feel more comfortable with their ideas rather than solely focusing on grammar, support the argument that free writing cultivates a more positive writing environment. Research by Richards and Rodgers (2023) further supports this notion, highlighting that activities which prioritize content and self-expression over technical accuracy are beneficial for enhancing writing confidence in EFL learners.

The increased confidence reported by students can also be linked to the repeated exposure to free writing over several sessions. Repeated practice in a low-pressure



environment can help students build their writing fluency and gradually reduce writing apprehension (Wang, 2022). As students experience success in expressing their ideas without worrying about mistakes, their self-efficacy improves. For example, S6's statement about feeling more comfortable with writing over time reflects how sustained practice in free writing can lead to a cumulative increase in writing confidence. This finding corroborates with the work of Zhang and Yang (2022), who found that regular, low-stakes writing activities help students overcome initial fears and boost their confidence in writing.

As well as, the improvement in writing confidence observed in this study highlights the significance of providing students with opportunities to engage in writing without the constraints of traditional assessment methods. According to Huang and Liu (2023), students often experience writing anxiety in EFL contexts due to fear of failure, which limits their willingness to take risks in writing tasks. Free writing, by contrast, creates an opportunity for students to experiment with language in a supportive environment, which is crucial for enhancing their writing confidence. The students' comments, including S8's expression of not being afraid to make mistakes, reflect the positive impact of free writing on students' attitudes toward writing. Overall, the findings of this study contribute to the growing body of research that underscores the importance of integrating free writing activities into EFL classrooms to foster students' writing confidence.

### **Comfort with Writing Tasks**

The findings of this study reveal a noteworthy shift in students' comfort levels with writing tasks after engaging in free writing activities. Specifically, a significant majority of the students (17 out of 20) reported feeling more comfortable and less anxious about participating in writing tasks. This shift is consistent with existing literature that suggests that providing students with opportunities to write without the fear of judgment or perfection helps reduce writing-related anxiety and promotes greater comfort with writing tasks (Hyland, 2021; MacIntyre & Gardner, 2020). The freedom to write without focusing on grammatical accuracy appears to have created a supportive environment, fostering increased willingness among students to engage in writing activities.

Several students, such as S3, expressed that the unstructured nature of free writing allowed them to write without the constant worry of making mistakes. The comments of S3—"I can just write without stressing too much about mistakes"—illustrate how this approach encouraged a more relaxed and positive attitude toward writing. This aligns with previous studies, which have highlighted the importance of reducing the pressure to produce error-free work in order to increase students' engagement with writing tasks (Zhang & Yang, 2022). By eliminating the focus on grammar and form, free writing activities allowed students to prioritize the flow of their ideas, thus improving their comfort level and overall writing experience.

Moreover, this shift in comfort is not solely a result of the activity's unstructured nature but also reflects the gradual desensitization to writing anxiety. As students participated in multiple free writing sessions, they became more accustomed to the process and less likely to view writing as a stressful or intimidating task. This pattern of growing comfort with writing tasks is supported by research that underscores the role of repeated low-stakes writing practice in reducing writing apprehension and enhancing students' confidence (Wang, 2022). The repeated exposure to free writing activities allowed students to build a sense of familiarity with the process, which, over time,

translated into increased comfort and reduced anxiety during writing tasks. S5's statement, "Before, I always felt nervous when I had to write, but after doing free writing, I don't feel as pressured" exemplifies how repeated practice in a supportive environment facilitates greater ease with writing.

In contrast to traditional writing tasks, where students are often required to produce error-free work, free writing encourages self-expression and creative exploration. The absence of pressure associated with perfect grammar and structure likely contributed to students' increased engagement in writing. This is consistent with findings by Richards and Rodgers (2023), who argue that activities that allow for creative expression and focus on fluency, rather than accuracy, are instrumental in building students' confidence and enjoyment in writing. As noted by several students in the study, they began to approach writing tasks with a more open mindset, seeing them as opportunities to explore and express their thoughts rather than assignments to be dreaded. Therefore, free writing, by promoting comfort and reducing anxiety, may be an effective pedagogical tool in fostering greater engagement with writing tasks and ultimately improving writing proficiency in EFL learners.

### **Perceptions of Writing Ability**

The results of this study also reveal significant shifts in students' perceptions of their own writing abilities as a result of engaging in free writing activities. Many students reported improvements in their writing, particularly in terms of fluency and the ability to organize their thoughts and ideas more coherently. For instance, S4 noted, "At first, my writing was very short and unorganized, but after doing free writing, I could write longer paragraphs and express my ideas more clearly." This improvement in fluency and organization is consistent with findings from previous research that suggest free writing encourages students to focus on content and self-expression rather than being bogged down by concerns over grammar and structure (Lee, 2021; Hyland, 2021). This shift in perception indicates that free writing, by fostering an environment that prioritizes content over form, encourages students to view themselves as more capable writers. As they practice writing without the constant concern for formal correctness, students can focus on developing their ideas and expressing them in a more articulate manner. This is supported by Richards and Rodgers (2023), who emphasize that low-stakes, unstructured writing activities allow students to explore their ideas freely, which can ultimately lead to improvements in writing fluency and self-perception. S6's comment, "I think my writing has gotten better... I can now think about what I want to say more clearly before I write it down," further highlights the cognitive benefits of free writing, where students are able to organize their thoughts more effectively and express them in a clear, coherent manner.

Whereas, while many students reported positive changes in their perceptions of their writing ability, some students (5 out of 20) still struggled with aspects of grammar and vocabulary. Student 9 (S9) stated, "I feel like my writing is improving, but I still need to work on my grammar. Sometimes my sentences don't sound right, and it makes me frustrated." This acknowledgment points to the fact that while free writing contributed to improved fluency and confidence, challenges with grammar and language structure remain. This finding is consistent with research by MacIntyre and Gardner (2020), who suggest that despite the benefits of free writing, linguistic accuracy continues to pose a challenge for many students, particularly in EFL contexts where students may lack opportunities for regular, high-quality exposure to the target language.

Furthermore, the study suggests that while free writing activities helped students feel more capable in their writing, a significant number of students still perceived their writing as imperfect, particularly in terms of grammatical accuracy. However, the confidence gained from free writing activities enabled students to approach writing tasks with less fear of judgment, allowing them to express their ideas more freely. As S2 mentioned, "I didn't think I could write well at all, but now I see that my writing is much better than before. I know I still need to improve, but I feel more confident about my writing now." This indicates that while linguistic accuracy may take time to develop, the overall improvement in students' attitudes toward writing was a key outcome of the free writing sessions. Students began to view themselves as capable writers, which enhanced their motivation and willingness to engage in writing tasks.

Ultimately, the data suggests that free writing plays a crucial role in reshaping students' perceptions of their own writing ability. By encouraging fluency, content development, and self-expression, free writing allows students to move beyond their concerns about accuracy and focus on developing their ideas. However, challenges with grammar and vocabulary persist, highlighting the need for continued practice and support in these areas. Overall, this study reinforces the importance of integrating free writing into EFL classrooms as a strategy to improve students' writing ability and self-confidence.

### **Reduced Writing Anxiety**

The reduction of writing anxiety was one of the most significant findings in this study. A majority of students (12 out of 20) reported feeling less anxious about writing tasks after participating in free writing activities. This reduction in anxiety aligns with existing research that highlights the role of low-stakes writing activities in reducing writing apprehension and fostering a positive writing experience (Tseng & Schmitt, 2023; Zhang & Yang, 2022). As students engaged in free writing, they were able to detach the act of writing from fear of judgment or making mistakes, which significantly lowered their anxiety levels. As expressed by S1, "Before, I would get really nervous every time I had to write something because I was afraid I would make a lot of mistakes. But after free writing, I felt much more relaxed." This statement illustrates how free writing helped students overcome their fears and approach writing with greater confidence.

The unstructured nature of free writing, which emphasizes content over grammatical accuracy, plays a central role in reducing writing anxiety. By providing students with a space where they could focus on their ideas without worrying about producing a perfect written product, free writing allowed students to experience writing as a more accessible and less stressful activity. As S5 mentioned, "I was always scared to write because I thought my sentences would be wrong. But after doing free writing, I realized it's okay to make mistakes. It doesn't matter as long as I can communicate my ideas." This shift in perspective, where the focus is on communication rather than perfection, is crucial for reducing anxiety and fostering a positive attitude toward writing. Research by MacIntyre and Gardner (2020) similarly argues that creating an environment where students feel free to make mistakes and learn from them can significantly reduce anxiety and improve writing outcomes.

Likewise, the regular exposure to free writing activities appears to have contributed to a gradual desensitization to the anxiety associated with writing. As students participated in multiple sessions, they became more accustomed to the process, leading to a further reduction in their anxiety levels. S3's comment, "I can just

write without stressing too much about mistakes" reflects the growing comfort students experienced as they became familiar with the low-stakes nature of the activities. Repeated practice in such an environment not only helped students gain confidence in their writing abilities but also allowed them to view writing as a routine task rather than an intimidating one (Wang, 2022). This pattern of increasing comfort with writing over time supports the argument that repeated exposure to writing, particularly in an anxiety-free environment, is an effective strategy for reducing writing apprehension.

Even so, it is important to note that while most students reported a reduction in writing anxiety, a few students (3 out of 20) still expressed some degree of nervousness during writing tasks. Student 7 (S7) admitted, "I'm not as nervous as I used to be, but I still get a little anxious when I have to write in front of others. However, it's definitely less than before." This indicates that while free writing significantly reduced anxiety for many students, it did not completely eliminate writing-related fears. This finding suggests that while free writing is an effective tool for alleviating anxiety, additional strategies or continued practice may be needed for students who still struggle with nervousness during more formal writing tasks, particularly in public or peer-reviewed settings.

In essence, free writing was found to play a crucial role in reducing writing anxiety among students, fostering a more relaxed and confident approach to writing. By focusing on content rather than perfection, free writing allowed students to engage with writing in a supportive environment, which led to a significant reduction in their fear of making mistakes. While some anxiety persisted for a few students, the overall impact of free writing on reducing writing apprehension highlights its potential as an effective pedagogical tool for improving students' attitudes toward writing in EFL contexts.

## **Conclusion**

This study highlights the positive impact of free writing on students' confidence and comfort with writing in an EFL classroom. Through the integration of free writing activities, students reported significant improvements in their writing confidence, comfort with writing tasks, and perceptions of their writing abilities. Additionally, the study revealed a reduction in writing anxiety, as students were able to engage more freely in writing without the fear of making mistakes. These findings suggest that free writing can be an effective pedagogical tool for fostering a positive writing environment and enhancing students' writing skills in EFL settings.

## **Suggestions**

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that EFL teachers consider incorporating more free writing activities into their classrooms. By creating a low-pressure environment where students can focus on expressing their ideas rather than achieving perfection, teachers can help reduce writing anxiety and build students' confidence in their writing abilities. Additionally, it may be beneficial for educators to combine free writing with targeted instruction on grammar and vocabulary to address areas of linguistic accuracy while maintaining the supportive, non-judgmental atmosphere of free writing. Future research could explore the long-term effects of free writing on writing skills and confidence, as well as examine its impact across different age groups and language proficiency levels.

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