

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SFL-BASED ACTIVITIES ON ESL LEARNERS' WRITING COMPETENCE

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Abstract

Writing competence is a fundamental component of second language proficiency, yet many ESL learners struggle to produce coherent, organized, and meaningful texts due to traditional grammar-focused instruction that overlooks the relationship between language, context, and purpose. Although Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a meaning-centered framework for writing instruction, its classroom application remains underexplored in Pakistani secondary-level contexts, particularly in female government schools. This study investigates the impact of SFL-based writing activities on ESL learners' overall writing competence, identifies specific aspects of writing that show improvement, and examines learners' attitudes and perceptions toward this approach. Adopting a mixed-methods design, the research was conducted in government schools in Attock city with 120 female students from grades 9 and 10, using pre- and post-instruction writing samples and a closed-ended Yes/No questionnaire administered after a 14-day SFL-based instructional intervention. Qualitative analysis revealed a clear progression from basic and fragmented writing to structured, coherent, and meaningful paragraphs, with noticeable improvements in meaning-making, audience awareness, and textual coherence, while quantitative findings indicated strong positive responses regarding writing competence, confidence, and course recommendation, though grammatical accuracy remained a challenge. Overall, the study demonstrates that SFL-based writing activities effectively enhance ESL learners' writing competence and motivation and offers valuable implications for ESL pedagogy, curriculum design, and context-sensitive writing instruction.

Keywords: *ESL Writing, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Writing Competence, Learner Attitudes, SFL-Based Activities*

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1.Introduction

English has become the most widely used second language worldwide, serving as the primary medium in business, education, science, technology, and global communication. As David Crystal (2003) notes, “English is a global language; it has become a bridge across cultures.”. This global reach of English makes it an essential skill for individuals who want to communicate across borders. As Nelson Mandela once said, “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart,” emphasizing that learning a language not only facilitates communication but also fosters deeper understanding and connection. People learn English to communicate internationally, pursue higher education abroad, or access knowledge available in this language. To achieve these goals, students must develop strong communication skills, with writing being particularly crucial.

Writing reflects learners’ understanding of vocabulary, grammar, and text structure, yet it is often challenging for English as Second Language (ESL) learners. As Stephen King (2000) said, “Writing is not life, but sometimes it can be a way back to life,” highlighting the significance of writing in human expression and learning. M.A.K. Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a framework for understanding how language creates meaning in context. As Halliday himself stated, “Language is a resource for making meaning,” underlining why understanding language choices is essential for effective communication. By linking grammar and vocabulary to purpose and situation, SFL helps learners communicate ideas effectively and organize texts meaningfully. Activities such as genre analysis and applying field, tenor, and mode allow students to see how language choices vary depending on context, making writing more purposeful and communicative. Unlike traditional writing instruction, which often focuses only on grammar, SFL offers a practical approach that connects language use to real-life communication.

Despite its potential, few studies have examined the application of SFL-based activities in ESL classrooms, particularly in Pakistani educational settings. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the impact of SFL-based exercises on the writing competence of ESL learners.

1.1. Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it investigates the overall impact of SFL-based activities on ESL learners' writing competence, providing empirical evidence for their effectiveness in language learning. It identifies specific aspects of writing, such as organization, grammar, and coherence, that can be improved through SFL-based instruction, offering actionable insights for curriculum design. By exploring learners' attitudes and perceptions, the research highlights how students respond to SFL-based tasks, which can enhance engagement and motivation. Moreover, the study contributes to the limited literature on the practical application of SFL in ESL classrooms, particularly within the Pakistani educational context. The findings can guide teachers in integrating context-based and purpose-driven writing activities, making instruction more meaningful and communicative, while supporting pedagogical strategies that link grammatical choices with real-life communication, thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice. Additionally, the study provides insights for curriculum designers and policymakers on incorporating research-backed methods to improve ESL writing proficiency. Overall, it offers a framework for fostering effective, context-aware, and student-centered writing instruction in ESL learning environments.

1.2. Background of the Study

Writing is a fundamental skill in language learning, serving as a key indicator of a learner's proficiency in vocabulary, grammar, and text organization. In ESL contexts, learners often struggle to write coherently and meaningfully because traditional writing instruction tends to focus only on grammar and vocabulary, neglecting the relationship between language, context, and purpose. This limitation has highlighted the need for approaches that integrate meaning-making with language use. As a result, educators have been exploring instructional frameworks that not only teach language rules but also guide learners to use language effectively in real-life situations. One such approach is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which emphasizes the purposeful use of language to convey meaning. **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by M.A.K. Halliday** offers a framework that links language choices to context, purpose, and audience. SFL-based activities, such as genre analysis and the application of field, tenor, and mode, guide learners to understand how different linguistic features serve different communicative purposes. Several studies have shown that using SFL in writing instruction can improve learners' organization, coherence, and ability to convey meaning effectively. However, despite its theoretical potential, there is limited research on the practical application of SFL-based activities in ESL classrooms in Pakistan. Moreover, learners' perceptions and attitudes toward these activities have been underexplored. This gap underscores the need

to examine not only how SFL-based activities influence learners' writing competence but also how learners respond to such instruction. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the impact of SFL-based classroom activities on ESL learners' writing skills and perceptions, aiming to provide evidence-based strategies for improving writing instruction in regional ESL contexts.

1.3. Research Objectives

1. To investigate the overall impact of SFL-based activities on the writing competence of ESL learners.
2. To identify which specific aspects of writing (such as organization, grammar, and coherence) are improved through SFL-based instruction.
3. To explore learners' attitudes and perceptions toward SFL-based writing activities in the ESL classroom.

1.4. Research Questions

1. How do SFL-based activities influence the overall writing competence of ESL learners?
2. Which particular aspects of writing competence show improvement through SFL-based instruction?
3. What are ESL learners' attitudes and perceptions toward SFL-based writing activities?

1.5. Statement of the Problem

Many ESL learners struggle to produce coherent and meaningful written texts because traditional writing instruction mainly focuses on grammar and vocabulary, ignoring the link between language, context, and purpose. This limitation prevents learners from developing writing competence that reflects real communication. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) offers a framework that connects grammar, meaning, and context, yet its classroom application remains limited, especially in Pakistan. Moreover, little research has examined which aspects of writing, such as organization, grammar, and coherence, improve through SFL-based activities or how learners perceive such instruction. Therefore, this study investigates the impact of SFL-based classroom activities on ESL learners' writing competence and explores their attitudes toward this approach to address the existing gap in effective writing pedagogy.

1.6. Delimitations of the Study

This study is delimited to a specific educational and demographic context to ensure focus and clarity of findings. It is conducted in government schools located in Attock city, with the target population comprising only female students of grades 9 and 10. The research follows a qualitative design, emphasizing in-depth understanding rather than statistical generalization. Data collection is restricted to students' sample writings and open-ended questionnaires administered in two phases, one before instruction and the other after the participants are taught through lectures based on the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach. The study concentrates exclusively on learners' writing competence, particularly aspects such as coherence, organization, and grammatical accuracy, without extending to other language skills like reading, speaking, or listening. Furthermore, only teachers trained to apply SFL-based instructional techniques are involved, and the instructional duration remains uniform across all participants. These delimitations were intentionally set to maintain consistency, manage scope, and achieve reliable insights within the selected context.

1.7. Limitations of the Study

Despite the careful design and execution, this study has certain limitations that may influence the generalizability and interpretation of the findings. First, the study focuses only on female students in grades 9 and 10, which limits its applicability to male students, other grade levels, or learners in different geographic regions. Second, the use of a qualitative design and a relatively small sample size restricts the ability to generalize findings to the broader population of ESL learners. Third, data collection relied on students' sample writings and self-reported questionnaires, which may be subject to personal bias, social desirability, or differences in interpretation. Additionally, the study concentrated solely on writing competence, without considering other language skills such as speaking, reading, or listening, which may interact with writing development. Finally, the study was conducted over a limited instructional period, so long-term retention or transfer of SFL-based writing skills was not examined. Acknowledging these limitations provides a transparent understanding of the study's scope and helps guide interpretations and future research.

2.Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This literature review is conducted to establish the research gap and provide the theoretical context for examining the impact of systemic functional linguistics (SFL)-based classroom activities on ESL learners' writing competence. It examines key theories, conceptual definitions, and empirical studies published from 2020 to the present, and identifies where existing research is limited. By reviewing prior work, the study is positioned to build on and extend this foundation.

2.2. Scope of the Review

The review focuses on three main areas: writing competence in ESL/EFL contexts, writing pedagogy especially the SFL-based approach, and empirical research on writing instruction published between 2020 and 2025. Geographically, it includes international studies with relevance to secondary-school contexts and gives particular attention to Pakistani contexts. It excludes studies solely focused on skills other than writing (such as speaking or listening) unless directly linked to writing instruction.

2.3. Organization of the Review

The review is structured in the following sequence. First, **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**: summarising major theories/models, defining key concepts, and illustrating relationships between concepts. Next, **Review of Empirical Literature**: organised thematically and chronologically, and includes methodological and contextual reviews. This is followed by **Critical Analysis and Synthesis**: which compares and contrasts findings, identifies gaps, and positions the current study. Finally, a **Summary and Conceptual Map** outlines key insights and visualises the model of this research, before concluding the chapter.

2.4. Theoretical & Conceptual Framework

2.4.1. Key Theories

This study is primarily grounded in the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) theory developed by M. A. K. Halliday. SFL views language as a resource for meaning-making and emphasises the interplay between grammar, context, and purpose. The three metafunctions, ideational (what is happening), interpersonal (social relations), and textual

(how it is organised), are central. Also relevant are **Genre Theory**, which asserts that understanding the structural and functional features of text types enhances writing competence, and **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**, which emphasises meaningful language use in authentic contexts.

2.4.2. Conceptual Definitions

- **Writing Competence:** The ability in ESL contexts to organise ideas coherently, use appropriate grammar and vocabulary, and match language choices to audience, purpose, and context.
- **SFL-based Classroom Activities:** Instructional practices that guide students to make informed choices in language through awareness of field, tenor, and mode, genre analysis, and textual cohesion/coherence.
- **ESL Learners:** Students learning English as an additional language in contexts where English is not the first language of society.

2.4.3. Relationship Between Concepts

In this study's conceptual model, SFL-based classroom activities (independent variable) influence ESL learners' writing competence (dependent variable) by enhancing genre awareness, register sensitivity, cohesion/coherence, and text organisation. Learners' attitudes and perceptions act as mediating factors; positive perceptions can amplify the effect of SFL-based instruction on writing competence.

2.5. Review of Empirical Literature

2.5.1. Writing Competence & Challenges in ESL Contexts

- Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners struggled with vocabulary, coherence, and cohesion in writing (**Shah, Farid, & Israr, 2024**).
- Secondary-school students' perceptions of written feedback in Pakistan revealed misalignments between learner expectations and teacher practices (**Nawaz, Hussain, & Qureshi, 2022**). These studies highlight persistent difficulties in ESL writing (vocabulary, coherence, and teacher-feedback alignment) and establish the need for innovative instructional approaches.

2.5.2. Traditional vs Functional/SFL-Based Writing Instruction

- SFL-oriented and genre-based activities were found to be under-utilized in K-12 ESL writing instruction despite their proven benefits (**Bhowmik & Kim, 2022**).
- Task-based reading was found to significantly improve writing proficiency and support functional approaches (**Aziz, 2021**).

These findings contrast traditional grammar-focused instruction with meaning-based approaches, highlighting the effectiveness of SFL or functional strategies.

2.5.3. SFL-Based Writing Instruction and Effects

- Learning styles were found to influence writing competence, revealing the complex factors shaping writing outcomes (**Taskeen & Ahmed, 2023**).
- Cohesion challenges in student writing were highlighted through the under-use of substitution and ellipsis in argumentative essays (**Raza, Sarwar, & Qasim, 2025**).

Although these studies underscore SFL's relevance, there remains a **lack of applied SFL interventions in secondary-level female government schools**, particularly in grades 9–10.

2.5.4. Methodological and Contextual Review

- Most studies relied on surveys, error analysis, or observational methods (**Shah, Farid, & Israr, 2024**), with only a few implementing experimental SFL-based interventions with pre- and post-tests.
- Contextually, research in Pakistani government schools focusing on grades 9–10 female learners is limited, indicating an **underexplored area in instructional research** that the present investigation addresses.

2.6. Critical Analysis & Synthesis

Comparing findings, while numerous studies documents writing challenges and advocate functional or genre-based approaches, they often do not implement or evaluate SFL-based classroom activities in secondary schools. The literature indicates a **research gap regarding female ESL learners in government schools and applied SFL instruction. The current investigation positions itself to build on this foundation** by assessing the effects of SFL-based lectures and classroom activities on writing competence and examining learners' attitudes and perceptions.

2.7. Summary and Conceptual Map

2.7.1. Summary

The literature reviewed highlights persistent challenges in ESL writing competence, particularly in coherence, cohesion, grammar, and vocabulary (**Ahmad Shah et al., 2024; Nawaz et al., 2022**). Traditional grammar-focused instruction has shown limited effectiveness, while functional and SFL-based approaches demonstrate potential for improving meaningful writing (**Aziz, 2021; Bhowmik & Kim, 2022**). Empirical studies reveal that genre awareness, register sensitivity, and textual cohesion are critical for ESL learners' writing development. Methodological patterns indicate a predominance of surveys and error analyses, with few experimental studies implementing SFL interventions. Contextually, research on female learners in Pakistani government schools at grades 9–10 is scarce, establishing a clear area for investigation.

2.7.2. Conceptual Map

The conceptual model for the current research illustrates the relationship between **SFL-based classroom activities (independent variable)** and **ESL learners' writing competence (dependent variable)**, mediated by learners' **attitudes and perceptions**. SFL-based activities aim to enhance **genre awareness, cohesion/coherence, and register-sensitive writing**, leading to improved overall writing competence. The conceptual map visually represents these interactions and guides the research methodology.

2.8. Conclusion of Literature Review

In conclusion, the reviewed literature establishes that ESL learners face persistent difficulties in writing, which traditional instruction often fails to address effectively. Functional and SFL-based instructional approaches show promise but are underutilized, particularly in secondary-level female government school contexts in Pakistan. Methodological gaps, including limited experimental interventions and a lack of focus on learners' perceptions, justify the need for further investigation. The present research addresses these gaps by implementing SFL-based classroom activities, assessing their impact on writing competence, and exploring learners' attitudes, thereby contributing new insights to ESL writing pedagogy.

3. Methodology

Michael Halliday created the theory of language known as Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in the 1960s. According to Halliday, language is essentially a tool for constructing meaning in social circumstances rather than merely a collection of grammatical rules. This is known as the social semiotic system. SFL focuses on the purposes of language, demonstrating how humans use it to successfully organize information, communicate with others, and express ideas. Because it enables the researcher to look at how students arrange ideas, employ language resources, and create coherence in their texts, SFL offers a theoretical basis for examining students' descriptive writing in this study. By using SFL, the study creates a coherent framework for both teaching and evaluation by connecting the theoretical knowledge of language to the empirical analysis of writing performance.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which offers a thorough framework for comprehending how language works to create meaning in context, serves as the foundation for this study. Three metafunctions are identified by SFL: Mode, which deals with the organization and structure of the text; Tenor, which deals with the interaction between writer and reader; and Field, which deals with what is being discussed. These metafunctions enable a thorough analysis of how ESL students create coherent, intentional, and contextually appropriate descriptive writing. Additionally, the instructional design is based on constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that students actively create knowledge through participation, introspection, and the application of concepts in relevant contexts. The study also makes use of the Genre-Based Approach, which promotes explicit instruction in the characteristics and organization of particular text genres, such as descriptive paragraphs, to help students produce well-structured, complex, and audience-aware writing. When taken as a whole, these theoretical frameworks directly support the goals of the study. They serve as the foundation for evaluating the overall effect of SFL-based activities on the writing proficiency of ESL students, identifying gains in areas like organization, coherence, and elaboration, and investigating students' engagement and opinions of these activities.

3.2. Research Design / Research Approach

In order to achieve the research aims, this study used a mixed method research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Creswell (2014), who claims that mixed methods allow researchers to get a deeper and more comprehensive

understanding of a research subject by connecting quantifiable outcomes with learners' experiences and perspectives, supports the use of a mixed method research design in this study. This strategy enables the researcher to comprehend students' reactions to the instructional intervention while simultaneously analyzing writing improvement through numerical findings. The results become more thorough and trustworthy as a result. Additionally, cross-checking data from various sources is made possible by mixed techniques, which increases the validity of the findings.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) provide guidance for the study's qualitative component. They clarify that the goal of qualitative research is to comprehend meaning, interpretation, and change through in-depth, contextual study of natural data. Participants' written work and replies are valued in this method. In order to determine changes in elaboration, textual coherence, and audience awareness, pre and post writing examples were examined in this study. Qualitative analysis reflects the breadth of learners' experiences and explains how and why students' writing evolves following instruction.

The quantitative component adheres to Creswell's (2014) guidelines. He highlights that quantitative research measures results objectively using structured instruments and numerical data. This method makes it easier to spot trends, compare outcomes, and quantify advancements. In order to get quantitative information on students' attitudes, engagement, and perceptions of SFL-based education, a questionnaire survey was given following the instructional intervention. The results of qualitative analysis are supported by quantitative data, which offers quantifiable proof of students' reactions.

This mixed method design, which combines qualitative and quantitative techniques, enables the study to investigate measurable gains in ESL writing proficiency while also comprehending the experiences and perspectives of the students. The quantitative analysis demonstrates quantifiable results, while the qualitative analysis describes the causes of the changes. This combination strengthens the study's overall validity and successfully supports the research aims by offering both breadth and depth.

3.3. Participants and Sampling

The study included 120 female students in grades 9 and 10 from two government schools in Attock, Punjab: Govt Girls Elementary School No. 1 Attock and Govt Girls High School Shakardaraa. Thirty students were chosen from each class. Each participant was chosen to give a representative sample of secondary-level ESL learners in the local environment, and they all possessed a basic level of English writing proficiency. Pre- and post-writing assignments that required students to compose paragraphs in response to the prompt, "Describe a place you would like to visit," were used to gather the qualitative data.

A comparative comparison of writing development over the course of teaching was made possible by these matched written examples.

A comparative comparison of writing development over the instructional period was made possible by these matched written samples. A post-survey questionnaire was used to gather learners' opinions, attitudes, and level of involvement with the SFL-based activities after the post-writing assignment. By ensuring that every student had a comparable exposure to the intervention, the sampling strategy made it possible to evaluate its efficacy consistently throughout the participant group.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

Students and school administrators provide their informed consent for all data gathering procedures. The Head of Department (HOD) granted permission to carry out the study in the schools. The confidentiality and anonymity of their answers were guaranteed to participants, and it was made very evident that all information would be utilized only for study. Students were made aware that participation was completely optional and that they could stop at any moment without facing any repercussions. Given the participation of young students in educational research, the ethical method guaranteed respect for participants' rights and offered a secure and encouraging atmosphere for data gathering.

4.Data Collection and Analysis

4.1. Data Collection

Pre- and post-writing exercises as well as a post-intervention questionnaire survey were used to gather data for this study. The purpose of the pre-writing assignment was to set a baseline for students' descriptive writing abilities, emphasizing their capacity to effectively communicate meaning, organize ideas, and elaborate information. The prompt, "Describe a place you would like to visit," was given to each participant. After completing the pre-writing assignment, students participated in a 14-day SFL-based instructional intervention that focused on descriptive writing abilities, such as audience awareness, concept organization, and content selection. Students used the same stimulus to complete the post-writing work following the intervention in order to gauge their increased writing proficiency.

Creswell (2014) supports the use of this mixed method design in data collecting, stating that by connecting quantitative outcomes with learners' experiences, mixed methods allow researchers to get a deeper and more comprehensive knowledge of a research subject. In keeping with this strategy, learners' attitudes, engagement, and views

of the SFL-based activities were recorded by a quantitative survey that was given following the instructional intervention. Although the survey's analysis has not yet been completed, its inclusion enables triangulation with qualitative data to bolster the findings' validity.

4.2. Data Analysis

4.2.1. Qualitative Data Analysis

In order to investigate how the 14-day SFL-based instructional intervention affected the descriptive writing of 120 secondary-level ESL students, the qualitative data analysis concentrated on the pre- and post-writing samples. Denzin and Lincoln (2005), who describe that qualitative research focuses on comprehending meaning, interpretation, and change through in-depth and contextual study of natural data, served as the basis for the analysis. Instead of concentrating only on grammar or numbers, their method places an emphasis on examining participants' experiences, perceptions, and responses. The three metafunctions of SFL Field (what is being described), Tenor (writer-reader relationship), and Mode (textual arrangement and cohesion) were used to organize the analysis. The objective was to determine how students' writing evolved in terms of textual coherence, audience awareness, and subject elaboration.

In the pre-writing samples, students' paragraphs were generally simple, generic, and lacked detail. Examples include: **"It is beautiful. I like it."**, **"I want to visit the beach. It is fun."**, and **"My dream is to go to Paris. It is famous."** These responses showed limited ability to expand ideas, structure writing, or engage a reader.

After the SFL-based instructional intervention, post-writing samples showed noticeable improvement in all three metafunctions. **For Field (Ideational Meaning)**, students included richer, descriptive content with personal, sensory, and cultural details. For example, **"I want to visit the mountains."** became **"I would like to visit Hunza Valley because of its snow-capped mountains, green fields, and friendly local people. I would love to try traditional foods and learn about the culture."**

For Tenor (Interpersonal Meaning), students showed a stronger sense of audience and communicative purpose, moving from simple expressions like **"I want"** to more informative or descriptive sentences: **"I want to visit London to explore its museums and historic landmarks. I hope my friends and family can join me to enjoy the experience."**

For Mode (Textual Meaning), paragraph organization improved with better sequencing, conjunctions, and coherence. For example, **"I want to visit the beach**

because the sun shines brightly and the water is clear blue. I would like to swim, build sandcastles, and enjoy a picnic with my family.”

All things considered, the qualitative analysis shows that the SFL-based educational intervention was successful in assisting students in moving from basic, disjointed writing to complex, structured, and meaningful paragraphs. This analysis demonstrates how students' meaning-making, audience awareness, and literary coherence evolved using Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) paradigm. These results also serve as a basis for the quantitative survey analysis that follows, which will investigate learners' attitudes, perceptions, and participation in SFL-based activities.

4.2.2. Quantitative Data Analysis

A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed to participants. After reviewing the responses, 3 questionnaires were found incomplete or invalid and were excluded from the analysis. Therefore, the effective sample size used for the quantitative analysis was 117. The data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages to examine participants' perceptions of SFL-based writing activities and their effectiveness in improving various aspects of writing. The results provide insight into areas such as writing competence, organization, coherence, grammatical accuracy, confidence, and overall attitude toward SFL instruction. The findings are presented in tabular form to clearly show the responses of all participants.

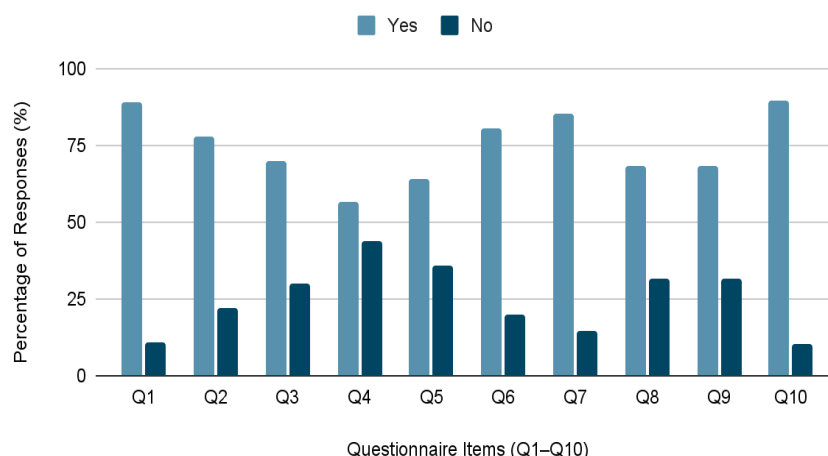
Table 1: *Participant's Responses to SFL-Based Writing Activities (N=117)*

No.	Questionnaire Item	Yes(n)	Yes(%)	No(n)	No(%)
1.	SFL-based activities improve overall writing competence	104	88.9	13	11.1
2.	SFL activities help organize writing more effectively	91	77.8	13	22.2
3.	SFL-based lessons enhance	82	70.1	35	29.9

	coherence of writing ideas				
4.	SFL activities boost grammatical accuracy in writing	66	56.4	51	43.6
5.	SFL-based instructions helps structure paragraphs more clearly	75	64.1	42	35.9
6.	SFL-based activities increase confidence as an ESL writer	94	80.3	23	19.7
7.	Attitude towards SFL-Based writing activities is positive	100	85.5	17	14.5
8.	SFL concepts help express ideas more clearly	80	68.4	37	31.6
9.	SFL activities help connect sentences and ideas smoothly	80	68.4	37	31.6
10.	SFL-based writing instructions should continue in future courses	105	89.7	12	10.3

The following graph illustrates the percentage of Yes and No responses for each questionnaire item (Q1–Q10).

Graphical Representation of Participants' Responses to SFL-Based Writing Activities



The above graph shows that most participants responded positively to SFL-based writing activities, especially in overall writing competence, writing confidence, and course recommendation. The lowest agreement was seen for grammatical accuracy, showing that students still face challenges with grammar. These results suggest that SFL-based activities effectively enhance engagement, confidence, and overall writing skills. Overall, the analysis highlights both students' strengths and areas needing further support (N = 117).

5. Discussion

5.1. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that SFL-based writing activities have a significant and positive impact on the writing competence of ESL learners. The qualitative analysis revealed that learners progressed from basic, disjointed writing to structured, coherent, and meaningful paragraphs. This transformation reflects improvement in key aspects of writing, including meaning-making, audience awareness, and textual coherence. According to Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) paradigm, these changes indicate that learners not only developed the ability to organize ideas logically but also began to consider the needs and expectations of their readers. Such improvements suggest that SFL-based

activities encourage learners to engage more deeply with the writing process, fostering cognitive and metacognitive strategies that support effective communication.

The quantitative findings complement the qualitative results by showing that most participants responded positively to SFL-based activities in terms of overall writing competence, writing confidence, and recommendation for future courses. Participants reported high levels of engagement and satisfaction with the activities, reflecting a strong sense of motivation and self-efficacy in their writing tasks. However, the analysis also revealed that grammatical accuracy was comparatively lower, highlighting an area where students still face challenges. This suggests that while SFL-based instruction effectively promotes higher-order writing skills, such as organization, coherence, and audience awareness, explicit grammar-focused support remains necessary to ensure comprehensive writing proficiency. Overall, the integration of qualitative and quantitative data provides a robust understanding of the outcomes of SFL-based interventions, confirming their effectiveness in improving both learners' skills and attitudes toward writing.

5.2. Discussion in Relation to Research Objectives

In relation to the research objectives, the study demonstrates that SFL-based writing activities successfully enhance overall writing competence among ESL learners. Learners showed marked improvements in the organization of their paragraphs, the coherence of their ideas, and the development of meaningful sentences. These improvements align with the first and second research objectives, showing that SFL-based instruction not only impacts general writing ability but also targets specific aspects of writing competence, such as textual organization, coherence, and meaning-making. Regarding the third objective, learners' attitudes and perceptions were overwhelmingly positive, with participants reporting increased confidence, engagement, and willingness to participate in future SFL-based activities. These results suggest that SFL-based instruction supports both skill development and learner motivation, providing a comprehensive framework for improving ESL writing.

5.3. Discussion in Relation to Research Questions

When considered in relation to the research questions, the findings provide clear answers. In response to the first research question, SFL-based activities were found to have a strong influence on overall writing competence, helping learners move from fragmented writing to well-structured and coherent texts. For the second research question, the data indicate that learners showed the most improvement in paragraph structure, textual coherence, audience awareness, and meaning-making. These areas reflect the higher-order skills emphasized in SFL-based instruction. However, grammatical accuracy showed less

improvement, highlighting the need for additional grammar-focused practice. Regarding the third research question, learners reported positive attitudes and perceptions toward SFL-based activities, indicating that they found the activities engaging, meaningful, and beneficial for their overall writing development. Collectively, these results answer the research questions comprehensively, showing that SFL-based activities enhance writing competence, target specific writing skills, and foster positive learner experiences.

5.4. Summary of Key Findings

Based on the integrated findings discussed above, all three research questions were addressed. SFL-based writing activities were found to improve students' overall writing competence and confidence, while grammatical accuracy remained a challenge. Participants also perceived the activities as useful and engaging, suggesting that these approaches can be effectively implemented in future writing instruction.

6. Conclusion

The present study investigated the impact of SFL-based writing activities on the writing competence, attitudes, and perceptions of ESL learners. The integrated findings from both qualitative and quantitative analyses indicate that SFL-based instruction significantly improves students' overall writing competence, particularly in paragraph organization, coherence, meaning-making, and audience awareness. Learners demonstrated a shift from fragmented and basic writing toward more structured, meaningful, and coherent texts. Additionally, participants expressed positive attitudes toward the SFL-based activities, showing increased confidence, engagement, and willingness to participate in future writing exercises. However, grammatical accuracy emerged as an area requiring further attention, suggesting that while SFL-based activities effectively enhance higher-order writing skills, targeted grammar support is still necessary for comprehensive proficiency. Overall, the study confirms the value of SFL-based writing interventions in fostering both skill development and positive learner attitudes in the ESL classroom.

6.1. Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have important implications for ESL teaching and curriculum design. First, the positive impact of SFL-based activities on learners' writing competence demonstrates that structured, meaning-centered writing activities can effectively enhance students' engagement and confidence in writing. Teachers can integrate SFL-based tasks into the curriculum to focus on paragraph organization, coherence, and meaning-making, providing learners with opportunities to develop higher-

order writing skills. Second, the identification of grammatical accuracy as a challenge highlights the need to combine SFL-based instruction with explicit grammar-focused teaching. Third, the positive learner perceptions indicate that SFL-based activities can foster motivation and encourage active participation, creating a more learner-centered and reflective writing environment. Finally, the combined use of qualitative and quantitative approaches in this study emphasizes the value of mixed-methods research in evaluating pedagogical interventions, providing educators and policymakers with evidence-based strategies for improving ESL writing instruction.

6.2. Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several recommendations can be made for future research:

1. **Focus on Grammar Instruction:** Future studies could investigate strategies for integrating explicit grammar instruction within SFL-based activities to address the identified challenges in grammatical accuracy.
2. **Larger and Diverse Samples:** Research could include a larger and more diverse sample of ESL learners across multiple institutions or regions to enhance the generalizability of the findings.
3. **Longitudinal Studies:** Future studies may adopt a longitudinal design to examine the long-term effects of SFL-based writing interventions on learners' writing competence and attitudes.
4. **Comparative Studies:** Researchers could compare SFL-based instruction with other writing pedagogies to determine relative effectiveness in improving specific aspects of writing.
5. **Technology Integration:** Future research could explore the use of digital tools and online platforms in delivering SFL-based writing activities to enhance learner engagement and feedback.

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