THE IMPACT OF AUTHENTIC WRITING TASKS ON EFL STUDENTS' WRITING PERFORMANCE

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Abstract:

This study investigates the impact of authentic writing tasks on the writing performance of EFL students. Employing a quantitative, experimental design, it adopts a two-group pretest-posttest format, where the implementation of authentic writing tasks serves as the independent variable and students' writing performance as the dependent variable. Sixty pre-intermediate learners at an English language center were randomly assigned to either a control or an experimental group. Writing performance was assessed through pretest and posttest writing tasks, evaluated using a standardized writing assessment scale. The findings revealed a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group's writing performance compared to the control group, with content being the most notably enhanced aspect. These results suggest that incorporating authentic writing tasks can effectively enhance EFL learners' writing skills in the local educational context.

Keywords: authentic writing tasks, writing performance, EFL learners, experimental study, language assessment

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1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale

Writing is considered a significant way of communicating, which occurs in and outside of school on a daily basis. Teaching writing to learners of English as a foreign language is one of the most challenging and difficult tasks for language teachers. Writing imposes huge cognitive, linguistic, and social demands on both native speakers of English and EFL learners, but the demands are truly higher for the latter group (Brown, 2004; Kern, 2000; Nunan, 1999). Many English language learners do not like to write, nor do they enjoy the writing process. Teachers are sensitive to the diverse backgrounds that define their students; however, students often do not feel comfortable expressing themselves in writing and especially in a second language, which often complicates the teaching process. As EFL teachers, it is crucial to answer the raised question of how to provide more engaging and meaningful writing opportunities for students so that they can feel confident in their writing performance.

One of the factors lies within the practical conditions in which teaching takes place. There is a fact that EFL learners live in an environment where the use of the target language is limited to the use in the classrooms, and "*even the best face-to-face learning environment outside the target language country can only produce simulation since the setting can only be as authentic as its native speaker teacher*" (Felix, 2002, p.7). Educators and reformers worry that today's students spend too much time simply absorbing and then reproducing information transmitted to them. They are afraid that students are not learning how to make sense of what they are told. Also, reformers often see little connection between activities in the classroom and the world beyond school.

In fact, writing activities in a classroom setting usually take place under artificial conditions (Brunning & Horn, 2000). EFL students often have to fulfill writing tasks assigned by teachers, which may not arouse students' interest or a sense of relevance. The difficulties inherent in developing writing ability are that the writing tasks do not reach the goal of serving students' needs and purposes. Leki (2006) suggested that students could make progress in writing performance if they recognized the connection between writing goals and their real lives. Several educators stress that authentic tasks, which are significant, worthwhile and meaningful, can enhance achievement and accomplishments (Marks, Gamoran & Newmann, 1996).

Nevertheless, many teaching practices in EFL writing have failed to provide the features of authenticity in their classrooms. Most often, teachers assign the topic, purpose, and a hypothetical audience. Prompts such as this one are common in textbooks and writing courses: Imagine you are a customer at a hotel and there is a problem in your room; write a two-paragraph complaint letter. Such a task resembles a situation that the learner might or might not have to perform in the real world (situational authenticity); but in the immediate situation of the learner, it may not mean much. To begin with, learners are given a pre-packaged purpose that does not correspond with their needs or motivations at the time of the task.

Besides, the intended audience, a hotel manager, is imaginary. Some students might already have schemata on what hotel managers are like and about complaints in hotels, but many might have never been in such a situation. Actually, the audience for that piece of writing is usually just the teacher and maybe some learners' peers if peer review is encouraged. In many cases, learners are aware of this, and thus, they write for these "real" readers. As a general rule, most learners think (and even expect) that teachers focus exclusively on syntax, vocabulary, and spelling and give priority to these aspects over the message. This belief usually results in learners producing an artificial and inauthentic text.

In brief, the authenticity of the task and setting plays an important role in the language teaching-learning process. Researchers who study "real" writing affirm that students given "real" purposes for reading and writing beyond classroom assignments, and for "real" audiences beyond a teacher, made significant progress in writing (Meier, 2010). Nevertheless, there has been very little research on the correlation between authentic writing tasks and students' writing performance. In addition, it is obvious that the impact of authentic writing tasks on students' writing has been inconsistent in different contexts. Thus, it would be of interest to carry out the present study to identify the nature of authentic writing and its impact on students' writing performance in the local context. This research study not only provides a pedagogical rationale for the use of authentic writing in the current context but also helps to gain insight into the effects of authentic writing tasks on different aspects of writing performance.

1.2 Research Aims and Questions

The research aimed to investigate the impacts of authentic writing tasks on EFL students' writing performance and to find out which aspects of writing performance are most affected. With these research aims, two research questions have been formulated:

1) To what extent do authentic writing tasks affect EFL students' writing performance?
2) Which aspects of writing performance are affected most by authentic writing tasks?

1.3 Significance of the Study

It can be seen that authentic writing has been examined in different contexts by many researchers. However, a lot of previous studies concentrate on the effects of authentic tasks on students' attitude or motivation, while the issue of writing performance has been scarcely investigated. Consequently, it is suggested that more research on authentic writing should be carried out to obtain more empirical evidence for the impact of authentic writing tasks on students' writing performance. The present study contributes more insights into the effects of authentic writing tasks in the local context. Furthermore, this study aims not only to investigate the impact of authentic writing tasks on students' writing performance but also to clarify the aspects of writing that are most influenced by authentic writing tasks. Therefore, the findings obtained from this study could help teachers have an overview of authentic writing tasks as well as the extent to which

different writing aspects are affected. Thanks to these valuable data, teachers could apply authentic writing tasks in their teaching in a more effective way, which is appropriate for their own teaching contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 EFL Students' Common Difficulties in Writing

Many EFL students consider writing to be one of the most difficult skills, and they are not enthusiastic about writing. In fact, it has been found that Vietnamese students prefer learning other skills rather than writing (Ellis, 1996, Le, 2000, Tran, 2001, all cited in Tran, 2007). Many students find it boring to sit in one place writing for a considerable amount of time. Many others even think writing is a passive and tiring class to attend.

Experience of writing and learning writing may create negative thinking in learners about writing. The majority of EFL students prove to be frustrated when thinking about what to write. Unrelated and repeated ideas are jotted down, and the confusing organization of ideas is also a concern. Many others suppose that they can write better if they are provided with enough vocabulary by the teacher. More seriously, they are not really aware of what they are writing about and of who their readers are.

There are many reasons for the above problems. Tran's study (2007) revealed major factors influencing EFL students' writing, including external elements, linguistic needs, audience, teacher's enthusiasm, teaching techniques, learning activities, topics for writing, passion and inspiration. Problems resulting from students' loss of interest, confidence and poor quality of writing have been highlighted. Raymer (2010) states that EFL students fear writing, fear getting started, fear not doing a good job or not finishing a task on time. They simply think writing is to fill in the blank page with words. He also points out that what a writer needs is to focus.

Grabe and Kaplan (1997) claimed that language is produced in contexts of use, and writing does not escape this constraint. For example, the student's writing style in a letter to his close friend will differ from that of the letter to his lecturer. It is, therefore, essential to help students develop writing styles appropriate for specific contexts and make them aware of how contexts of language use can influence their writing. In general, this can be done by providing a real context for students to write with a real audience and the purpose for writing is made clear right in the instruction.

2.2 Authentic Writing Tasks
2.2.1 Authenticity

Authenticity is a popular word these days. Many authors and speakers on human development, psychology, spirituality, and motivation have referred to being authentic, living authentically, and expressing oneself from a place of authenticity. It has been interpreted at the level of input as the use of samples of written or spoken language that were produced in real and meaningful purposes (Nunan, 1999). Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines authentic as genuine and real. Lebow (1993) described authentic activity as "*experiences of personal relevance that permit learners to practice skills in*

environments similar to those in which the skills will be used." Collins and Brown (1989) described authentic activities as the "*ordinary practices of the culture.*" According to Newmann and Wehlage (1993), authentic activities are real-world tasks that a person can expect to encounter at work, at home, or in other social contexts.

An important implication of these definitions is that authentic activities have the potential to foster meaningful intellectual accomplishment and learning, since authentic learning activities are directly related to students' real-life experiences. Students at every level commonly complain that they do not perceive the relevance of the academic learning tasks assigned. If the learning tasks are authentic, then students can make direct connections between their new knowledge and prior experience. They can also apply the new learning to their current practice and future activities.

2.2.2 Characteristics of an Authentic Writing Task

These views of authenticity provide a framework for defining authentic writing. Writing that is produced by learners in the classroom should be done under conditions faced by writers in the real world and include a meaningful level of involvement among the learner-writer, the message (text), and the intended audience. It can be inferred that the most general definition of authentic writing is writing that is real. Real writing includes a variety of writing styles, purposes, audiences, contexts, and products. Authentic writing instruction in schools attempts to model writing found in everyday life and what real writers do within the writing process.

In general, authentic writing tasks are defined as tasks that have an authentic purpose (i.e., the reason for writing matches what the students have encountered or may encounter in real life) and the teacher is not the only specific audience. In other words, it is stated that students write for real reasons and for real people (Heinitz, 2012).

In describing the characteristics of authentic tasks, different scholars have delineated them in different ways. In a 1993 article in Educational Leadership, Newmann and Wehlage offered five criteria, each based on a five-point scale, which can be used to evaluate the extent to which a lesson is authentic. The first criterion is that students are able to employ higher-order thinking skills to solve problems, to synthesize or to explain an issue. The second criterion is depth of knowledge, which requires an understanding of particular concepts or topics. Thirdly, the problems or topics should be ones which occur in society. Another criterion refers to substantive conversation with the requirement of two-way meaningful teacher-student interaction. Finally, social support for students' achievement should be taken into consideration.

Accordingly, an authentic lesson plan must give students an opportunity to learn with hands-on and personal experiences (Duke & Hall, 2006). This method of teaching takes the lesson from the textbook, into the classroom, sometimes out of the classroom and into the hands of the students. Through real-life situations and first-hand experiences, students will gain a better understanding of the lessons, which may possibly help them enjoy learning. Based on that viewpoint, Herrington, Oliver, and Reeves (2000) developed some more rigorous criteria in order to identify ten key characteristics of an

authentic task. They especially emphasized two main characteristics, real-world relevance and opportunities for students to examine the task from different perspectives.

Real-world relevance creates favorable conditions for students to create their products without the feeling of doing something impractical as an obligation of the course. Problems inherent in the tasks should be open to multiple interpretations so that students feel free to express their viewpoints and thinking about the issues that are realistic and meaningful to their real lives. Furthermore, the tasks can be integrated and applied across different subject areas in real life. Correspondingly, authentic tasks can allow competing solutions and diversity of outcomes rather than a single correct response or assessment obtained by the teacher. In the case of writing to a specific audience, learners will be enabled to reflect on their learning both individually and socially. Moreover, authentic tasks should include activities that facilitate group work and collaboration so that students have the opportunity to interact with others in response to text. The instructor in this case will act as a coach and facilitator to support students. These ten criteria are selected as the foundation to compose the lesson plans in the current study.

2.3 Writing Performance

2.3.1 Performance Criteria

Advocates of performance assessments maintain that every task must have performance criteria because well-written performance criteria will allow the teacher to be consistent in scoring over time. Stiggins (1991) notes that if a teacher fails to have a clear sense of the full dimensions of performance, ranging from poor or unacceptable to exemplary, he or she will not be able to teach students to perform at the highest levels or help students to evaluate their own performance. In developing performance criteria, Stiggins (1991) maintains that the teachers must both define the attributes being evaluated and also develop a performance continuum. For example, one attribute in the evaluation of writing might be writing mechanics, defined as the extent to which the student correctly uses proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling. As for the performance dimension, it can range from high quality (well-organised, good transitions with few errors) to low quality (so many errors that the paper is difficult to read and understand). The key to developing performance criteria is to place oneself in the hypothetical situation of having to give feedback to a student who has performed poorly on a task. Stiggins (1991) insists that a teacher should tell the student exactly what must be done to receive a higher score. On the whole, if performance criteria are well defined, students will then have a better understanding of what they must do to improve their writing performance.

2.3.2 Scoring Methods for Assessing Writing Performance

For several years, great effort has been devoted to the study of assessing writing performance, and the use of holistic scoring and analytic scoring has been well-known for decades. While holistic scoring aims at assessing a writing product as a whole, the analytic scoring approach evaluates specific components of writing. In comparison with holistic scoring, analytic scoring has been shown to be a more reliable method. This

viewpoint has been advocated by many researchers (e.g., Anderson, 1991; Claham and Wall, 1995; Hamp-Lyons, 1990; Huot, 1996; Weir, 1990).

Bachman and Palmer (1996, cited in Weigle, 2002) constructed a framework comparing these two scoring methods, considering six qualities of test usefulness: reliability, construct validity, practicality, impact, authenticity and interactiveness. They note the same superior aspects of the analytic over the holistic. Although both strategies were favored at an equal level in terms of interactiveness, analytic scoring is more efficient when raters need diagnostic information on writing performance.

Support for this interpretation also comes from Weigle (2002), who reiterates the other major strengths of this scoring method over holistic scoring since it can provide more diagnostic information on writing performance. Moreover, the analytic scoring can be easier to understand and apply to raters. The discrete-point test in an analytic scale helps raters give more accurate scores and facilitates distinguishing levels of achievement for each writing component. Many other researchers agreed upon the strengths of the analytic scoring method in assessing specific components of writing performance (Kroll, 1999; Nahla Bacha, 2000; Weigle, 2002; Ute Knoch, 2007).

In terms of the authenticity of rating, White (1995) claims a holistic scale is more authentic than an analytic one because, in reality, we usually do not read for evaluation or rating, but to get information. Nevertheless, in a classroom setting, it is essential for teachers to evaluate students' compositions under discrete items such as "content" and "organization". Analytic scoring can be more reliable than holistic scoring since reliability increases when additional items are added to such a discrete-point test. A further advantage of analytic scoring is that raters are required to focus on each of the various assigned aspects of a writing sample, so that they all evaluate the same features of the student's performance.

For these reasons, an analytic rating scale by Jacobs et al. (1981) was chosen for assessing writing work in this study. Over decades, this Composition Scoring Profile has been best known and considered as the most widely used analytic scales in ESL, thanks to its success in assessing writing's integral components with clearly specific descriptors (Weigh, 2002). A more detailed description of this scale will be presented in the next section

2.4 The Significance of Authentic Writing Tasks in EFL Classrooms

There have been several studies exploring the significance and benefits of authentic writing tasks in diverse contexts. In 1989, Nunan made the important distinction between everyday or real-world tasks and pedagogical tasks (i.e. tasks performed in the classroom for instructional purposes). The world of work provides many contexts for authenticity, but real-world connections can also be daily activities such as buying a house, determining nutritious meals for a family, or hosting a family celebration. At the rise of task-based instruction, Nunan (1989) emphasized the role of real-world relevance by stating that the effectiveness of English language learning depended largely on the extent to which the tasks reflect reality.

This point is relevant to John Dewey's viewpoint in 1933. This educator and philosopher has advocated the use of authentic tasks to help students deepen subject matter knowledge as well as enhance their logical reasoning and self-regulation skills. Central to Dewey's view was that learners learn best through purposeful activity, and real-world tasks are ideal for developing useful skills and knowledge. In subsequent decades, education researchers and learning theorists elaborated further on the notion of authenticity. Their work sought to explain how authentic tasks support thinking and to gain insight into the classroom conditions under which authentic tasks are most effective. They have found that one of the key benefits of authentic tasks is that they introduce students to ways of reasoning and problem-solving that represent the work of professionals in practice, which helps facilitate building real-world expertise in students. As students engage in authentic tasks, they create products that showcase the skills and knowledge they have acquired.

This kind of task requires students to demonstrate proficiency by applying existing knowledge to solve a real-world problem. Moreover, they kept students involved and gave them a purpose for writing. Actually, students will take great ownership of their writing when it is based on personal experiences. The authentic, or real-world, nature of the task frames enables students to work in a more relevant and interesting way. With a concrete audience and specific purpose in the prompt, students are able to write without trying to figure out what they imagine the teacher wants them to say, which often happens in the use of non-authentic analysis prompts. The major point is that students are clear about how to proceed in developing their pieces and free to write in their own voices rather than trying to emulate some imagined academic tone.

In general, it can be inferred that authentic tasks are important because they provide students with opportunities to approach real-world situations, make connections to their own interests, foster motivation for learning and engage deeply with the subject matter.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Aims
The research aimed to investigate the impacts of authentic writing tasks on FL students' writing performance and to find out which aspects of writing performance are most affected.

3.2 Research Questions
This research was carried out to answer two questions:
1) To what extent do authentic writing tasks affect EFL students' writing performance?
2) Which aspects of writing performance are affected most by authentic writing tasks?

3.3 Hypotheses

Based on the related literature and the research questions, the following hypotheses were established:

Hypothesis 1: Authentic writing tasks would improve EFL students' writing performance in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics.

Hypothesis 2: Authentic writing tasks employed in the current study would affect different aspects of writing performance at different levels, and content would be the aspect that is affected most.

3.4 Research Design

This research was conducted following an experimental and quantitative design. The treatment program, extended over six weeks, was designed to test the effects of authentic writing tasks on different aspects of EFL students' writing performance. In the study, EFL students' writing performance was investigated. It was based on the pretest and post-test in which an authentic writing task was the independent variable and students' writing performance was the dependent variable. The results from the post-test were also the basis for clarifying the impact of authentic writing on different aspects of writing performance.

3.5 Participants

The participants in this study were sixty EFL students at an English language center in Can Tho City, in the Mekong Delta, south of Vietnam. Among them, there were twenty-eight male students and thirty-two female students. However, the precondition for collecting the data was that the participants had to finish both the pretest and post-test.

The average age of the participants was 19.5, ranging from 18 to 21 years old. Most of them were students at local universities and colleges. The participants in both groups have obtained a certain level of English proficiency, pre-intermediate level, as a requirement of the language center before they started the current English course. They were randomly arranged into two classes during the training course, which lasted 8 weeks. One was assigned to be the experimental group and the other, the control group. Participants' writing ability of the two groups before attending the study was the same (M=58.1 for the experimental group and M=57.8 for the control group). These groups - experimental (EG) and controlled (CG) groups - were taught by the same teacher. The allotted time for writing meetings these participants took part in every week was 135 minutes. Besides, the participants were willing to participate in the research and the research work with the aim of improving their writing performance. Thanks to this motivation, they were more cooperative with the instructor to fulfill the writing course.

Table 3.1: Description of the number of participants

Group	Total		Invalid		Valid	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
EG	12	18	2	3	10	15
CG	16	14	3	2	13	12

3.3 Materials

First, six authentic writing topics were generated based on the prerequisite that these topics should be ones which are meaningful and relevant to students' real life or occur in society. Based on the selected topics, the tasks were designed relying on the criteria for the design of an authentic task suggested by Herrington, Reeves and Oliver (2010). Each writing task included the essential features of authenticity, such as real-world relevance and opportunities for students to examine the task from different perspectives. All these elements were used to motivate students to start writing and facilitate the writing process. After that, six lesson plans covering authentic writing tasks were designed following the process approach with the stages of setting goals, generating ideas, organizing information, selecting appropriate language, drafting, revising and editing. These lesson plans have been examined by three experienced English teachers in the English language center where the study was conducted.

In the pre-writing stage, the teacher elicited from the students the main writing topic. Then, the teacher offered the participants opportunities to explore ideas and activate prior knowledge about the topic so that they could better understand new written material when they connected it to the content. Students were allowed to tap into what they already knew, and stir a curiosity or interest for more knowledge.

Thanks to this stage, students will have a deeper knowledge of the issues mentioned in the topics. This stage also created a foundation for the writing activity. In each lesson, students are able to employ higher-order thinking skills to solve particular problems or issues. They were also involved in several activities that promote interaction in pair work, small group work for real-world use of language and then they finished the writing tasks in the next stage. During the teaching process, in addition to maintaining two-way meaningful teacher-student interaction, the teacher remained the role of a facilitator to encourage students' multiple interpretations from their viewpoints. In the end, all participants submitted the final draft to the teacher for evaluation.

Table 3.2: Writing topics

Session	Writing topics
1	The next Sunday is Mother's Day. Write a paragraph about what you are going to do to make your mother happy on that special day.
2	In some periods of the year, many roads in Can Tho City are flooded, which causes a lot of difficulties in travelling. Write a letter to the management of the drainage system of the city about that problem.
3	Our English language center is going to organize a weekly event called "Coffee Time" offers learners an opportunity of learning English outside the classroom. Write a letter to the event coordinator of the center to suggest what activities you expect to experience at that event.
4	Do you think that the action of destroying some factories of the workers in Binh Duong Province is a good way to express love for our country in the current situation? Write to *Thanh Nien* newspaper to state your views about this.
5	CGV, the biggest cinema in Can Tho City, offers a special promotional program this month. Write to the management about the films you expect to be shown in that program.

6	Our English language center has just opened a mailbox to collect learners' comments about the quality of teaching and service. Write to express your opinions and suggestions in order to receive better learning conditions and support from the center.

3.7 Research Instruments

The instruments used in this study include a pretest and a posttest, which are used to measure the participants' writing performance before and after the intervention program. Designing the tests

The pre-test and post-test are similar in terms of the test format, length, level of difficulty, task types and time allotted. Both of them require students to write a descriptive paragraph about a person, a test type that all participants have been instructed in the previous course of the English language center. However, there is a difference in the content of the two tests. The pre-test asks students to describe a best friend, and the post-test asks them to describe a family member that they love or admire most. This difference aims to ensure the validity and reliability of the tests. The time allotted for each test is sixty minutes, and the participants are not allowed to use any reference materials.

3.8 Piloting the Tests

After designing the pre-test and post-test, the two tests were piloted to ensure the validity of the instruments. Twenty-five students of another class at the English language center got involved in the pilot test. These participants were at the same level of English proficiency as the two groups in the treatment program. The result of the piloted tests was analyzed with SPSS to make timely and proper changes if necessary. The reliability of the piloted pre-test was .83, and of the post-test was 0.81. The results show that the two tests were reliable and could be used to collect data in the study.

3.8.1 Scoring the Pre-test and Post-test

The two-writing test was graded separately by two English teachers to ensure inter-rater reliability. The scores given by two raters are averaged to determine the overall score of a writing. One of the best-known and most widely used analytic scales created by Jacob *et al.* (1981) was applied for scoring in the present study. This ESL Composition Profile consists of five aspects, including content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics, with four scoring levels each. The four levels, ranging from the lowest to the highest proficiency labeled "very poor", "fair to poor", "good to average" and "excellent to very good". The five aspects are differentially weighted to emphasize different levels of importance (Content: 30 points; Organization: 20 points; Grammar: 25 points; Vocabulary: 20 points; and Mechanics: 5 points).

3.9 Procedure

Procedure		
Week 1	Pre-test	2 groups, the control group and the experimental group
Week 2-7	The experimental group is taught with authentic writing tasks	
	The control group is taught without authentic writing tasks	
Week 8	Post-test	2 groups

The study, which covered eight weeks, was conducted from the middle of April to the beginning of June. The participants were divided into two groups, including an experimental group and a control group. One week before the treatment, the pre-test was given to the participants so as to find out the participants' writing performance at the beginning of the treatment. One week after the pre-test, the experiment was carried out. Within the six-week period, the two groups worked with the same instructor; however, participants in the experimental group were taught with authentic writing tasks while the control group was taught without the intervention of authentic writing. In the last week, the two groups' writing performance was evaluated again with the post-test. Then all the data were analyzed and evaluated.

3.10 Data Analysis
The Statistic Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 16.0, was used. The raw data were statistically analyzed with the following analytical methods.

3.10.1 Descriptive Statistics Test
Descriptive statistics test was computed to measure the overall writing scores of participants of two groups in the pre-test and post-test.

3.10.2 One-Sample T-Test
A One-Sample T-Test was conducted to evaluate whether the participants' writing scores in the tests were significantly different from 50, the average points for writing performance.

3.10.3 Paired-Samples T-Test
A Pair-Samples T-Test was run to check whether there was a significant difference in writing performance of the control group and experimental group before and after the study. The test was also conducted to investigate which writing aspect was improved most among the three writing aspects through authentic writing tasks.

3.10.4 Independent-Samples T-Test
An Independent-Sample T-Test was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in writing performance between the control group and experimental group before and after the intervention. An Independent-Samples T-Test was also used to compare mean scores of the control and experimental groups for each

of the writing aspects, including content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The results of Participants' Overall Writing Performance between Two Groups

The results of the subjects' writing performance before and after the study between the two groups are presented. To measure participants' ability in writing before the intervention, the Descriptive Statistic Test was conducted on participants' writing scores of the two groups in the pretest.

Table 4.1: Descriptive statistics of two groups in the pretest

Conditions	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
CG	25	45	72	57.8	8.4
EG	25	45	72	58.1	8.1

As illustrated in Table 4.1, the mean score for writing performance of participants in the control group is 57.8 (SD=8.4). This average mean is nearly similar to that of participants in the experimental group (M=58.1, SD=8.1). In addition, a One-Sample T-Test was conducted to evaluate whether the participants' writing scores in the pretest were significantly different from 50, the average point for writing. The sample mean of the control group (M=57.8, SD=8.4) was different from 50 (t=4.63, df=24, p=0.00). Similarly, the sample mean of the experimental group (M=58.1, SD=8.1) was found to be significantly different from 50 (t=5.01, df=24, p=0.00). The results support the conclusion that the writing ability of the control group and the experimental group in the pretest was the same and at an above-average level.

To ensure that these two mean scores are the same, an Independent-Samples T-Test was conducted on the overall mean of the two groups. The result presented that there was no significant difference in the two mean scores (t=-0.13, df=47.92, p=0.89>0.05). It can be concluded that the writing ability of the experimental group was equal to that of the control group before the intervention program.

More specifically, an Independent-Samples T-Test was utilized again to compare the mean scores of the control and experimental group for each of the writing aspects, including content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. The results of the test are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Comparisons of means for different writing aspects of two groups in the pretest

No.	Aspects of writing	Control group's mean	Experimental group's mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1	Content	16.52	16.52	0.00	48.00	1.00
2	Organization	11.76	11.92	-0.29	47.61	0.77
3	Vocabulary	12.32	12.32	0.00	48.00	1.00
4	Grammar	14.32	14.48	-0.23	47.59	0.82
5	Mechanics	2.88	2.88	0.00	48.00	1.00

From Table 4.2, it is obvious that in the pretest, there were no significant differences between the control group and experimental group in their mean scores for five aspects of writing (p> 0.05). Consequently, it could be concluded that the control group and the experimental group were equal in all aspects of writing.

The Descriptive Statistic Test was again conducted on the writing scores of the control and experimental groups in the posttest. Its results are displayed in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Descriptive statistics of two groups in the posttest

Conditions	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
CG	25	56	86	71.7	7.5
EG	25	72	86	77.7	3.8

As indicated in Table 4.3, it can be seen that participants in the control group scored an overall mean of 71.7 (SD=7.5) in their posttest. The experimental group outscored the control group with a mean of 77.7 (SD=3.8). These mean scores demonstrated that the writing ability of both groups was above an average level, 50 (p=0.00<0.05).

An Independent-Samples T-Test was performed to check whether the sample mean of the experiment group (M=77.7) was significantly different from that of the control group. It is indicated that the writing ability of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group after the treatment (t=-3.59, df=48, p=0.001<0.05). In other words, with Sig.=.001, it supports the conclusion that the experimental group outperformed in their overall writing performance under the impact of authentic writing tasks.

Similarly, an Independent-Samples T-test was run to check the differences in the mean score of the experimental group and the control group for every writing aspect. The results are demonstrated in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Comparisons of means for different writing aspects of two groups in the posttest

No.	Aspects of writing	Control group's mean	Experimental group's mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1	Content	20.72	23.24	-3.88	48.00	0.00
2	Organization	15.20	16.48	-3.91	34.70	0.00
3	Vocabulary	14.92	16.12	-3.20	35.10	0.03
4	Grammar	17.48	18.36	-1.50	39.07	0.14
5	Mechanics	3.36	3.52	-1.13	48.00	0.26

From Table 4.4, it can be seen that the experimental group's scores in grammar and mechanics were not significantly different from those in the control group (p > 0.05). This means that the performance of the two groups in two aspects of grammar and mechanics was the same after the experiment.

Nevertheless, the experimental group's score in content (t=-3.88, df=48.00, p=0.00), organization (t=-3.91, df=34.70, p=0.00) and vocabulary (t=-3.20, df=35.10, p=0.03) were significantly different from that in the control group. The results indicated that the experimental group was better than the control group in content, organization, and

vocabulary aspects. Additionally, the sample means of content and organization (23.24, 16.48, alternatively) in the experimental group were statistically different from those of the control group (20.72, 15.2, respectively), (p=.000<.05), indicating that the content aspect was most affected, and organization was affected second after the study. In contrast, as seen in Table 4.5, it is revealed that vocabulary was the least affected aspect (p=0.03<0.05). Before the treatment, the experimental group's scores for content, organization and vocabulary aspects were equal to the control group's scores. However, after the treatment, the experimental group scored higher than the control group, demonstrating that the intervention program helped to improve three aspects of participants' writing (i.e., content, organization, vocabulary). Specifically, authentic writing tasks affect most on the aspects of content, organization and vocabulary respectively. On the other hand, the finding reveals that the two groups' writing performance aspects of grammar and mechanics are not significantly different after the study. The results obtained are presented in Figure 4.1.
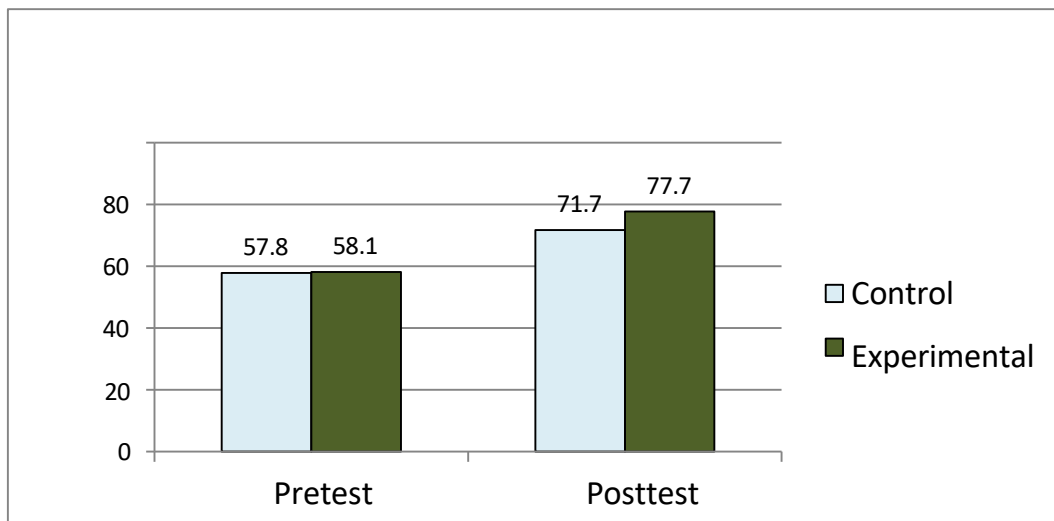
Figure 4.1: The participants' overall writing performance at the two points of the measurement

4.1.1 The Results of Participants' Overall Writing Performance within Each Group
Two Paired Sample T-Tests were run on the results of pre- and post-tests taken by each group to measure the progress of each group during the current study. The results were displayed in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: The results of Paired Samples T-Test of two groups

Paired Samples Test								
Paired Differences								
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre -CG Post- CG	-1.38	5.81	1.16	-16.27	-11.48	-11.94	24	.000
Pre-EG Post-EG	-1.96	7.30	1.46	-22.61	-16.58	-13.40	24	.000

As Table 4.5 illustrates, it is indicated that both the control and experimental groups made progress on their writing performance since their posttest results were significantly higher than their pretests with p=.000<.05. Nevertheless, although the writing performance of the control group was high, it was not as high as that of the experimental group. This means that authentic tasks used in the current study had a positive effect on students' writing performance.

4.2. Experimental group's different aspects of writing performance under the effect of authentic writing tasks

To investigate what aspects of writing performance were affected most in the experimental group and answer the second research question in the present study, a Descriptive Statistics Test was run to measure participants' aspects of writing performance, comprising content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics in the experimental group before and after the study.

Table 4.6: Participants' aspects of writing performance
in the experimental group before and after the study

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PreContent	25	10.00	22.00	**16.52**	3.07
PostContent	25	20.00	26.00	**23.24**	1.714
PreOrganization	25	9.00	15.00	**11.92**	1.86
PostOrganization	25	15.00	18.00	**16.48**	.71
PreVocabulary	25	10.00	16.00	**12.32**	1.86
PostVocabulary	25	14.00	17.00	**16.12**	.83
PreGrammar	25	10.00	17.00	**14.48**	2.34
PostGrammar	25	15.00	21.00	**18.36**	1.49
PreMechanics	25	2.00	3.00	**2.88**	.33
PostMechanics	25	3.00	4.00	**3.52**	.50

As shown in Table 4.6 and Figure 4.2, participants' writing performance in each aspect involving content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics in the experimental group increased after the intervention. The mean scores of each aspect after the treatment (*M post content*=23.24, *M post organization*=16.48, M *post vocabulary*=16.12, *M post grammar*=18.36, *M post mechanics*=3.52) were higher than that of each one before the intervention (*M pre content*=16.52, *M pre organization*=11.92, *M pre vocabulary*=13.32, *M grammar*=14.48, and *M pre mechanics*=2.88, respectively). From the data analysis, it is seen that the participants' aspects of writing performance were improved greatly after the study.
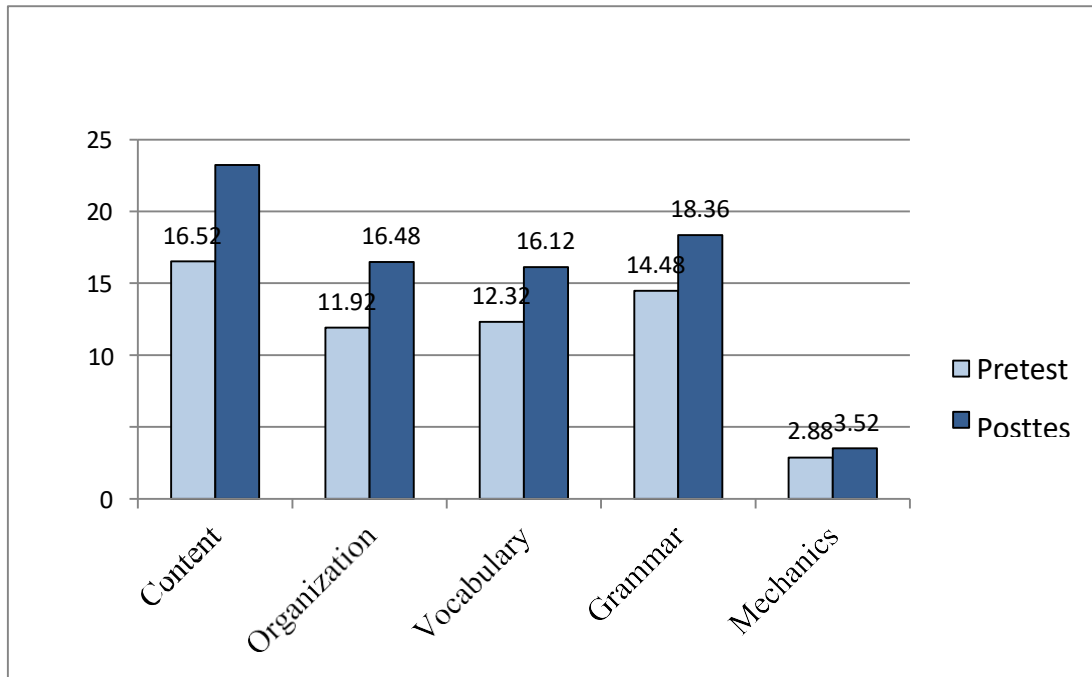
Figure 4.2: The participants' five aspects of writing
performance at two points of the measurement

The Paired Samples T-Test was run on the results of pre- and post-test within each aspect to explore the progress of writing performance within the experimental group. The results of the test were illustrated in Table 4.6.

As Table 4.7 illustrates, aspects of writing performance including content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics considerably achieved the progress on writing performance since the posttest results were significantly higher than their pretests' with content ($p=.000<.05$), organization ($p=.000<.05$), vocabulary ($p=.000<.05$), grammar ($p=.000<.05$), and mechanics ($p=.000<.05$).

Table 4.7: The results of the Paired Samples T-Test of
aspects of writing performance in the experimental group

Paired Differences									
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	PreContent PostContent	-6.72	2.79	.55	-7.87	-5.56	-12.03	24	.000
Pair 2	PreOrganization PostOrganization	-4.56	1.63	.32	-5.23	-3.88	-13.94	24	.000
Pair 3	PreVocabulary PostVocabulary	-3.80	1.95	.39	-4.6	-2.99	-9.70	24	.000
Pair 4	PreGrammar PostGrammar	-3.88	2.31	.46	-4.83	-2.92	-8.38	24	.000
Pair 5	PreMechanics PostMechanics	-.64	.70	.14	-.92	-.351	-4.571	24	.000

In general, it is obvious that five aspects of writing performance within the experimental group were improved significantly after the treatment. Additionally, it is indicated that among aspects of writing performance, content (*M*=23.24) was found to be affected most (*p*=.000, *SD*=1.71), and organization (*M*=16.48), and vocabulary (*M*=16.12) were affected second.

4.3 Discussion

In general, participants' writing performance in the two groups increased significantly after the treatment. Nevertheless, although the writing performance of the control group was high, it was not as high as that of the experimental group. This result did not reject the first hypothesis, which means that employing authentic writing tasks would enhance participants' writing performance. In other words, the first research question has been answered, i.e., EFL students' writing performance is positively affected by the impact of authentic writing tasks.

The results obtained are broadly consistent with the major findings of previous related studies. For instance, Duke and Purcell-Gates (2004) illustrated that students experienced greater growth in the ability to write and comprehend new genres under the effects of authentic writing tasks. The same result was stated in the study of Marks, Gamoran and Newmann (1993). These researchers found that authentic pedagogy made a significant improvement in students' performance regardless of gender, race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Similarly, Meier (2010) and Saye (2013) have also concluded that higher levels of authentic tasks were generally associated with higher student achievement as well as higher success rates.

Additionally, three aspects of writing performance improved significantly after the treatment: content, organization and vocabulary, respectively. It was not different from one of the findings of Newmann, Marks, and Gamoran (1993), which proved that students could make significant progress in organization of writing after studying with authentic tasks. This viewpoint was also referred to in Cone's study (1989), which indicated that students experienced a change in terms of organization. Besides concerning themselves with a more exact form of writing, students wrote as little as possible and as neatly as they could.

Among the five aspects of writing performance, content was the aspect affected most. This finding was compatible with the second hypothesis and in good agreement with the conclusion in Cone's study (1989). Cone has clearly pointed out that authentic tasks could facilitate students' development of ideas in writing, making the writing longer and livelier with more details. The reason given was that students felt more comfortable expressing their personal voice without the pressure of doing an obligatory, unrealistic assignment.

The results of the study can be explained by the following reasons. The first reason is that authentic tasks are closely connected to different fields in real life. Thus, students' background knowledge or their experience will be a useful tool for them to handle this kind of task. Furthermore, dealing with the tasks that may be encountered in real life can easily stimulate students' thinking. Besides, it can also be implied that authentic tasks

with abundant real issues in daily life and society are able to reach different learning styles of students (McCarthy, 1997). In short, real-world relevance is not only the most characteristic of authentic tasks but also the major factor that fosters students' performance, especially the content writing aspect.

The second reason is related to intrinsic motivation. Several theories have demonstrated that authentic writing tasks can increase students' intrinsic motivation (Bliss, 2010; Curtis, 2002; Lepper, 1988). Real-world tasks are considered a bridge between the content learned in the classroom and why this knowledge is important in the world outside (Wright, 2000). When students realize their writing is realistic and meaningful instead of a product of imagination, they may find that the tasks are more engaging to work with. They are free to create their products without the boredom of doing something impractical. Moreover, during the teaching and learning process, authentic tasks are applied with the teacher's role as a facilitator, hence students will feel more confident to express their voices to contribute to the lessons. Accordingly, the more students enjoy the tasks, the more successful they are in their writing performance.

In addition, authentic tasks have another important characteristic: facilitating group work, collaboration, and interaction. Students do not have to work individually all the time during the lessons; they discuss and analyze real-world issues with the support of authentic materials such as photos, online resources and diverse group work activities. Thanks to this interaction, they can develop deeper knowledge as well as a wider outlook and perspectives on the topics concerned. This is also a possible explanation for the improvement of the content and vocabulary aspects in students' writing.

5. Conclusions and Implications

5.1. Conclusions of Major Findings

The purpose of the current study was to identify the effect of authentic writing tasks on EFL students' writing ability. Thus, the results of this research aim to find out the answers to the two research questions: "To what extent do authentic writing tasks affect EFL students' writing performance?" and "Which aspects of writing performance do authentic writing tasks affect most? The data obtained from the writing pretest signified that before the experiment time, the participants' writing performance in the two groups was equal and at an above-average level. However, after the treatment, the writing performance of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group. From the outcome of the investigation, it is evident that authentic writing tasks positively affect participants' writing performance.

In terms of different aspects of writing performance, before the treatment, the experimental group's scores of five writing aspects (i.e., content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics) were equal to the control group's scores. After the treatment, whereas grammar and mechanics aspects of the two groups remained unchanged, three other aspects, including content, organization, and vocabulary of the experimental group, scored higher than those of the control group, demonstrating that the intervention program helped to improve three aspects of participants' writing. In addition, the results

also indicated that authentic tasks have the strongest effect on the aspect of content within the experimental group. This was similar to the second research hypothesis, i.e., the content aspect would be affected most by authentic writing tasks.

5.2 Implications for Pedagogical Practice

Based on the key findings in the present study, the implications for teaching can be drawn out. As far as the effects of authentic writing tasks are concerned, it is possible to conclude that authentic writing tasks are really useful in writing teaching of EFL classrooms thanks to their positive effects on students' writing performance. The tasks can be integrated and applied across different subject areas in real life. Furthermore, it is also seen that this kind of task may arouse students' background effectively as well as draw students' interest in the topics. Correspondingly, TESOL teachers should implement authentic tasks into their classrooms to improve students' writing performance and stimulate their motivation for writing. Besides, as mentioned previously, authentic tasks have a strong effect on content, organization and vocabulary; accordingly, it is expected that with more regular practice of authentic lessons, these aspects of students' writing performance can be improved efficiently as seen in the study. Additionally, it is implied that teachers should create more opportunities for students to practice other writing aspects, including grammar and mechanics, so that students' overall writing performance can be improved. Briefly, the study has been successful in reaching the proposed aims and made a contribution to the literature for authentic pedagogy, especially in the local context.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

As with any research design, there are still certain unavoidable limitations. Firstly, the small sample size (N=60) of this study does not permit the researcher to make strong generalizations about the impact of authentic writing tasks on EFL students' writing performance. Moreover, the scope of the current study is limited to an English language center; therefore, the results of the study can hardly be generalized for EFL students. If larger samples and broader study scopes are obtained, a higher degree of generalization will be allowed. Besides, the results may be affected by the age difference among participants. An additional limitation is the time constraint for the experiment. Within a short period of time, only one session for students each week was conducted. It is likely that the impact of authentic writing tasks will be more obvious if more sessions are carried out.

5.4 Recommendations for Further Research

The current study has highlighted the significance of authentic writing tasks on the improvement of students' writing performance; hence, a key issue for future research will be how to implement authentic writing successfully in EFL classrooms. Additionally, based on the limitations of the study, several suggestions for further research were drawn out. Firstly, further research should cover a wide range of authentic writing topics, students' majors and ages with a more sufficient sample size. Simultaneously, the study should be conducted in a larger scope, i.e., outside an English language center, so that

high generalization can be achieved. More sessions of authentic writing tasks should be carried out to increase the validity of the influence of authentic writing tasks.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

Both authors strongly agreed on the publication of this paper, and there was no contention or rivalry during the finishing of the work. In other words, the authors declare no conflicts of interest in this article. Both authors are fully and equally responsible for the benefits and harms after this article is published. The authors, moreover, declare that the material presented by us in this paper is our original work and does not contain any materials taken from other copyrighted sources. Wherever such materials have been included, they have been clearly indented or/and identified by quotation marks, and due and proper acknowledgements have been given by citing the source at appropriate places.

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