ENGAGEMENT TO EXCELLENCE: EXPLORING THE CORRELATION BETWEEN STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND WRITING PROFICIENCY

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the correlation between student engagement and writing proficiency among college students at the Sharia Faculty of UIN Raden Intan Lampung during the 2023/2024 academic year. The study employed a quantitative approach to assess the relationship between these two variables, with student engagement as the independent variable and writing proficiency as the dependent variable. The population for this study consisted of 450 students, from which a purposive sample of 40 students was selected. Data collection was conducted using a questionnaire to measure student engagement and a writing test to assess writing proficiency. The validity and reliability of the engagement data were analyzed using Pearson's bivariate correlation, and the writing test was validated by experts. Data analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between student engagement and writing skills, indicating that higher engagement levels contribute to better writing outcomes. These findings suggest that fostering student engagement can play a crucial role in improving writing proficiency. The study highlights the importance of incorporating engaging instructional strategies in the classroom to enhance students' writing abilities. However, the study's findings are limited by the sample size and scope, suggesting the need for further research across diverse educational contexts and writing genres.

Keywords: *correlation research; engagement; writing*

INTRODUCTION

Students who are genuinely eager to learn something new, especially in the realm of language acquisition like learning English, often find that they absorb the material more effectively. The decision to learn a new language, such as English, stems from the numerous advantages it offers (Istiara & Hastomo, 2023). The process of learning a foreign language mirrors that of acquiring one's native language, beginning with listening, followed by speaking, reading, and writing. Language skills are categorized into two groups: language input and language output. Language input consists of "listening and reading," while language output involves "speaking and writing" (Murcia, 2001). Students need to develop the four essential skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Oktarin & Hastomo, 2024). To achieve proficiency in English, students must master these competencies. Teachers implement a range of instructional strategies to enhance students' English skills. Among these skills, writing is crucial for daily communication, enabling students to understand and interact with one another (Baron & Baron, 2020). Writing is particularly important for communication because it involves an interactive process where

information is created, received, and interpreted. For instance, conversations between teachers and students ensure mutual understanding (Andewi et al., 2023).

Teachers play a pivotal role in guiding students to develop effective writing skills, which are essential for fluency in English and for creating conducive learning environments. For many learners of a second or foreign language, the ability to communicate effectively in English is a key objective. Moreover, students often evaluate their progress and the value of their English courses based on improvements in their language skills. A successful lesson depends on the combined efforts of teachers, students, and the learning materials (Shchipitsina, 2022). With strong writing skills, students can communicate globally and access information from various sources.

Student engagement is an assessment of how actively students participate in class activities, interacting with both teachers and peers (Hastomo & Septiyana, 2022). In educational contexts, student engagement refers to the level of curiosity, enthusiasm, motivation, and interest students exhibit during the learning process, as well as the progress they make (Soffer & Cohen, 2019). Generally, research into student engagement aims to enhance learning by fostering curiosity and motivation (Murillo-Zamorano et al., 2019). High levels of engagement are believed to contribute to better learning outcomes.

According to Al-Obaydi et al. (2023), student engagement encompasses three dimensions: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Behavioral engagement involves students' participation in both academic and extracurricular activities, focusing on educational, social, and extracurricular endeavors. Cognitive engagement reflects students' attention and motivation to master complex skills, emphasizing their involvement in learning. Emotional engagement pertains to the feelings students experience and express during the learning process, which can range from confusion and anxiety to excitement and anticipation.

There are various reasons why EFL students may struggle with English communication. Factors such as the student's personal background, teaching methods, curriculum, and previous experiences can influence learning outcomes (Istiara et al., 2023). Student engagement in academic and classroom activities is a key predictor of successful learning. To achieve academic success, students must actively participate in learning activities, focusing on emotional, behavioral, and cognitive aspects. Engaging students involves investing time and effort in activities that align with the school's goals, encouraging them to participate (Hastomo et al., 2024).

Student engagement behavior is critical for learning, as it helps students focus on the teacher (Vaughan, 2014). Research indicates that students with high engagement levels tend to be active and diligent in both classroom and extracurricular activities (Soffer & Cohen, 2019). Active participation in teaching and learning activities can significantly enhance students' English proficiency. Teachers can foster student engagement by designing appropriate learning activities.

Furthermore, previous studies have explored the relationship between student engagement and learning outcomes. For instance, a correlation has been identified between cognitive engagement and learning outcomes (Chi & Wylie, 2014). Another study highlighted that student engagement is crucial for the success of blended learning (Qiao et al., 2023). Nkomo et al. 2021) examined the relationship between student engagement and the use of digital technologies in learning environments. However, these studies did not specifically address the correlation between student engagement and writing ability. Consequently, this research aims to investigate the correlation between student engagement and writing skills among college students from UIN Bandar Lampung during the 2023/2024 academic year.

METHOD

In this research, researchers utilized a quantitative approach to assess the connection between two variables. The objective of the study was to analyze the correlation between student engagement, which served as the dependent variable (X), and writing proficiency, which was considered the independent variable (Y).

In this study, the total number of respondents included 450 college students from Sharia Faculty, UIN Raden Intan Lampung. From this population, 40 students were selected as the research sample using a purposive sampling method. Data on student engagement was gathered through a questionnaire adapted from Istiara et al. (2023). Additionally, a writing test was administered to assess the students' writing abilities. The validity and reliability of the student engagement data were analyzed using Pearson's bivariate correlation formula and SPSS version 25 software. The writing test was validated by experts, resulting in 35 items that were deemed useful for analysis.

An item was considered valid and reliable if the r count exceeded the r table value at a significance level of 5%. The findings revealed that the majority of the items had an r value greater than the r table value of 0.294, indicating validity. Additionally, the reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed, as the Cronbach's alpha (α) value was 0.870, which is higher than the r table value of 0.294. After calculations, it was determined that the rxy value for questionnaire items 1-35 was 0.870, with an r table value of 5% at 0.294.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research explored the relationship between student engagement (independent variable X) and writing skills (dependent variable Y). The data analysis involved examining the frequency, percentage, mean, and categorization of correlation levels. The descriptive statistical data for the correlation between student engagement (X) and writing skills (Y) was obtained as follows:

Table 1. The Correlation Data of Students' Engagement (X) and Writing Skill (Y)

Students	X (Student Engagement)	Y (Writing Skill)	X²	Y²	X.Y
N: 40	2784	2490	193.852	155.098	173.395

According to the revised table, the cumulative student engagement scores amounted to 2784, while the total writing test scores reached 2490. As a result, X², representing the squared values of the student engagement scores, was calculated to be 193.852. In a similar fashion, Y², which denotes the squared values of the writing test scores, equaled 155.098. Furthermore, X.Y, the product of the student engagement and writing test scores, was determined to be 173.395.

Table 2. The Distribution of the Frequency and Percentage of Students' Writing Ability

Score	Classification	Frequencies	Percentage
90-100	Very good	3	7.5%
80-89	Good	10	25%
60-79	Fairly Good	23	57.5%
≤59	Very poor	4	10%
Total	Total	40	100%

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of students' writing abilities among 40 respondents. The scores are categorized into four classifications: Very Good, Good, Fairly Good, and Very Poor. According to the data, 7.5% of the students, equivalent to 3 respondents, are classified as having a Very Good writing ability, scoring between 90-100. A more significant portion, 25% or 10 students, fall into the Good category with scores ranging from 80-89. The majority of students, 57.5% or 23 respondents, are classified as Fairly Good, with scores between 60-79. Lastly, 10% of the students, represented by 4 respondents, are classified as having a Very Poor writing ability, scoring 59 or below. This distribution indicates that while a considerable portion of students have fairly good writing skills, there is still a noticeable percentage who struggle significantly, with a few excelling in their writing abilities.

Table 3. The Mean Score of Data

Statistic	Students' engagement	Writing skill
Mean	72.31	74.21

Table 3 presented shows the mean scores for students' engagement and writing skills. According to the data, the average score for students' engagement is 72.31, indicating a relatively high level of involvement among the students. The writing skill score is slightly higher, with a mean of 74.21, suggesting that the students, on average, possess a commendable proficiency in writing. These scores reflect a generally positive level of both engagement and writing abilities among the students in the study.

Table 4. Distribution of Students' Engagement

Score	Classification	Frequencies	Percentage
76-100	Very High	8	20%
51-75	High	31	77.5%
26-50	Low	0	0%
1-25	Very Low	1	2.5%
Total	Total	40	100%

Table 4 presents the distribution of students' engagement scores among 40 respondents, categorized into four classifications: Very High, High, Low, and Very Low. The majority of students, 31 out of 40 (77.5%), are classified as having High engagement, with scores ranging from 51 to 75. A smaller group, 8 students (20%), falls into the Very High category, scoring between 76 and 100. Only one student (2.5%) is classified as having Very Low engagement, with a score between 1 and 25. Notably, no students scored in the Low engagement category (26-50). This distribution indicates that most students exhibit a relatively high level of engagement, with a small proportion showing very low engagement. Based on the results of the Pearson Product-Moment analysis, the calculated correlation between students' engagement and their writing skills was 0.720. In summary, this indicates that there is a correlation between students' engagement and writing skills, according to the classification of correlation levels.

Writing is the process of putting thoughts, ideas, and requests into words through written communication (Marzuki et al., 2023). The ability to write well is known as writing proficiency. For students to effectively learn and teach English, they need to develop a range of essential skills. Writing in English can be particularly challenging, so regular practice is crucial. Consistent writing practice helps students improve their skills over time.

Student engagement is widely recognized as a strong indicator of both learning and personal development. It is often viewed as one of the most reliable predictors of academic success and overall growth. In their study, researchers examined how weekly activities and resources influenced active learning behaviors and performance (Shah & Barkas, 2018). The study also investigated whether students who were more engaged responded differently to their writing assignments compared to those with lower engagement levels. The results showed that highly engaged students tended to have better writing skills. They were more capable of expressing their thoughts clearly and effectively in writing, likely because they regularly practiced and refined their writing both in and out of the classroom.

Metaria and Cahyono (2024) found that students who are highly engaged are more likely to follow behavioral, cognitive, and emotional expectations, such as attending class regularly and participating actively. These students are less prone to disruptive or negative behaviors. When engaged in learning activities, they actively participate in discussions with their peers and teachers, work to overcome challenges related to their assignments, and ask relevant questions.

Engaged students are particularly attentive during writing tasks, as they are used to participating confidently and actively in writing exercises. On the other hand, students who are less engaged often become passive, withdrawn, and insecure, which hinders the development of their writing skills.

Moreover, teachers are encouraged to discuss time management and motivational strategies with both students and their parents, particularly during difficult times in the semester. By addressing potential issues and obstacles proactively, teachers can help students stay engaged and successfully complete their assignments (Sari et al., 2023).

Students who are highly engaged are more likely to adhere to expectations like participation and attendance, and they are less likely to engage in disruptive behaviors. They tend to take part in meaningful discussions with classmates and teachers, seek out solutions to challenges related to their tasks, and ask relevant questions. Conversely, students who lack engagement are often less confident, more withdrawn, and inactive. This lack of engagement makes it difficult for them to improve their writing skills because they are not accustomed to participating in writing exercises with their peers and teachers (Yu et al., 2020).

Based on the above discussion and research findings, there is a clear correlation between student engagement and writing skills among college students in Sharia Faculty of UIN Raden Intan Lampung. The majority of students who were highly engaged also had strong writing proficiency. Thus, it is evident that high engagement plays a significant role in helping students develop their writing abilities. In conclusion, student engagement is a key factor in writing success; when students are highly engaged, their writing skills tend to improve.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has demonstrated a significant correlation between student engagement and writing proficiency, as evidenced by the improvement in students' descriptive writing skills when picture series were employed as a teaching tool. The findings suggest that higher levels of engagement can lead to better writing outcomes, highlighting the importance of fostering active participation in the classroom. This has important implications for educators, as it emphasizes the need to integrate engaging instructional methods that can enhance students' writing abilities.

However, this research has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. The study was conducted with a relatively small sample size and within a specific educational context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the focus was solely on descriptive writing, leaving other forms of writing unexplored. Future research could benefit from expanding the sample size, including a more diverse range of writing genres, and exploring long-term impacts of engagement on writing proficiency.

Based on these limitations, it is suggested that further studies should investigate the relationship between student engagement and writing skills across different educational levels and writing styles. Moreover, exploring the use of various engagement strategies beyond picture series could provide a broader understanding of how to effectively enhance students' writing competencies.

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