FROM CONSTRAINT TO AGENCY: THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF EFL WRITING DEVELOPMENT IN PROCESS-ORIENTED PEDAGOGY

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Abstract

Writing remains one of the most demanding skills for EFL learners, who often face difficulties in generating ideas, organizing content, and producing coherent and accurate texts. This study aimed to explore EFL students' writing practices through a qualitative thematic analysis of their engagement in the writing process identify recurring patterns in students' writing behaviors and perceptions.The participants were third-semester university students enrolled in an Intermediate Writing course. Data were collected through classroom observations, student reflections, questionnaires, and teacher journals, and analyzed thematically. Findings revealed three major themes: (1) the evolving awareness of writing as a recursive process, (2) the development of self-regulated strategies during revising and editing, and (3) the emergence of more positive attitudes toward writing. The thematic analysis suggests that implementing the writing process supports learners' writing development not only in terms of textual quality but also in their metacognitive engagement and confidence as writers. The study highlights the pedagogical value of process-oriented instruction in fostering meaningful writing practices in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: EFL writing, writing process, writing practices, learners' writing development, writting pattern

Introduction

Writing is widely recognized as one of the most complex and demanding skills for EFL learners to master (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Unlike receptive skills such as listening and reading, writing requires the simultaneous integration of multiple language components—vocabulary, grammar, organization, and mechanics, while also engaging cognitive and affective processes (Kellogg, 2008). Many EFL students struggle to generate ideas, structure their thoughts into coherent paragraphs, and refine their drafts into clear and polished texts. Consequently, their writing often lacks clarity, logical flow, and linguistic accuracy (Putri & Cahyono, 2020).

In the researchers' teaching context, many EFL students tend to view writing as a one-step activity, bypassing critical stages such as revising and editing. While process-writing theorists emphasize the recursive nature of writing (planning, translation, reviewing) (Flower & Hayes, 1981), our observations suggest that students often skip the "reviewing" phase altogether. This tendency aligns with earlier findings that student writers focus disproportionately on surface-level edits rather than global issues of coherence or idea development (Sommers, 1980; Zamel, 1983; Ferris, 2003). As a result, the texts they produce are frequently short and fragmented: local corrections dominate, but

they rarely restructure or expand their drafts in meaningful ways (Siekmann, 2022; Cheng et al., 2023). Moreover, many students show reluctance to revisit their work, perceiving revision as unnecessary, overly time-consuming, or emotionally taxing, especially when asked to engage in deeper content-focused revision (Ke, 2024). These patterns highlight a critical need to explore how students actually engage with (or disengage from) the multiple stages of the writing process in real classroom settings, rather than assuming they naturally internalize process-based approaches.

As such writing should be viewed not merely as a final product but as a dynamic and recursive process (Hyland, 2003; Richards & Renandya, 2002). The process-oriented approach encourages learners to engage in several stages: idea generation, drafting, revising, and editing, before producing their final work (Harmer, 2014). This approach promotes reflection, reduces writing anxiety, and fosters a deeper understanding of writing as an evolving act of meaning-making. Implementing the process-oriented approach in the students' learning process have resulted in significant improvements to the students' writing performance (Samsudin, 2016). Faraj (2015) found out that students that used to have troubles with writing becomes more confident int their writing performance after they became aware of the writing stages proposed. From this research the idea generation process, in particular, showed significant improvement between pre-test and post-test. Similar result was also shown in Alhosani (2008) in which students' writing improved after teacher implemented prewriting in the classroom's learning process.

Similarly, Kadmiry (2021) stated that the group of students that were given process-oriented writing instruction show higher performance than the group that received product-oriented approach. This showed that process in writing have more of a significant contribution to the students' writing performance. Abas, Hermilinda, and Aziz (2018) also concluded in their research that the students with better writing performance, were more familiar with the writing stages than others. The students used different stages to help them with writing and deliberately go back and forth between stages. The students also used different strategies for different stages to help them complete their writing.

Although the writing-process approach has been widely promoted in EFL pedagogy, its actual implementation and learners' responses remain underexplored in many local contexts, where empirical evidence about classroom enactment and student uptake is still patchy. Recent reviews and syntheses note that, despite widespread endorsement of process principles, studies documenting how teachers adopt (or adapt) the approach and how students experience its stages are limited in scope and uneven across regions. Understanding how students perceive and experience the four stages commonly associated with the process approach, inventing (idea generation), drafting, revising, and editing, is therefore important because the model's assumed benefits (e.g., recursive attention to content and organization as well as form) depend on those stages being meaningfully enacted in the classroom (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Recent classroom studies from Indonesian EFL settings and neighbouring contexts illustrate the point: some investigations report positive student engagement with process activities, while others show limited uptake (students remain focused on surface accuracy or skip deeper revision), suggesting a complex, context-bound picture that calls for more fine-grained classroom research. Moreover, new technological interventions (e.g., automated writing evaluation and AI-assisted feedback) are reshaping how revision and editing are practiced, which both opens opportunities for supporting process stages and raises new questions about learners' perceptions and behaviours during revision. Taken together, these findings underscore the need for empirical, classroom-based studies that investigate how students actually engage with inventing, drafting, revising, and editing in their local EFL classrooms, not only whether teachers claim to adopt a process approach, but how its stages are lived and experienced by learners.

This study addresses this gap by investigating EFL students' writing development through a qualitative lens that captures both what students do (observable behaviors) and how they understand what they do (their interpretations and perceptions). Specifically, this research tried to find out how EFL students experience and make sense of the writing process in a process-oriented writing course by examining students' engagement with writing stages through classroom observations and exploring their interpretations through interviews, this study aims to provide a nuanced, evidence-based understanding of how process-based instruction shapes students' writing behaviors, attitudes, and identities as writers in an Indonesian EFL context. The findings offer both theoretical contributions to understanding L2 writing development and practical insights for implementing effective process-based writing pedagogy in similar contexts.

Literature Review

The following section presents key concepts and previous studies relevant to this research. The section begins with discussion on the nature of writing in EFL learning, followed by major approaches to writing instruction, specifically the process-oriented approach. It then reviews the four stages commonly used for writing process: inventing, drafting, revising, and editing. These topics are essential because they clarify how writing skills develop, how instructional approaches shape students' writing behaviours, and what is already known about learners' engagement with process-based pedagogy. Together, this review establishes the theoretical and empirical foundation for examining how EFL students experience and navigate the writing process in their classroom context.

The nature of writing in EFL learning

Writing holds a central position in EFL learning because it functions both as a means of communication and as a process of constructing knowledge. From a theoretical perspective, Harmer (2004) explains that writing enables learners to articulate ideas clearly while also participating in academic discourse. Similarly, Kellogg (2008) argues that writing engages higher-order cognitive processes, which support the development of linguistic accuracy and organization. In practice, writing requires learners to process language more deeply than in receptive activities, leading to greater consolidation of vocabulary, grammar, and discourse structures. Empirical studies support these claims: Graham and Perin (2007) found that writing tasks promote measurable gains in students' linguistic and cognitive skills, while Maolida (2015) reported that EFL students who engage regularly in academic writing activities demonstrate improved comprehension and language awareness. Taken together, these theories and findings underscore that writing is not merely a classroom requirement but a critical component of language development, shaping learners' communicative competence and academic literacy in significant ways.

Despite its importance, writing is widely recognized as one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners. From a theoretical perspective, Hyland (2003) explains that students often struggle with limited vocabulary, grammatical control, and the ability to organize ideas logically, all of which can hinder the production of coherent texts. Richards and Renandya (2002) similarly argue that writing becomes even more difficult when learners perceive it as a rigid, product-oriented task rather than a reflective and exploratory process. In actual classroom settings, these theoretical challenges manifest in various ways: many students experience low confidence, fear of making mistakes, and writing anxiety, which further impede their performance. Empirical studies confirm these patterns. For

example, Cheng (2023) found that writing anxiety significantly reduces EFL learners' willingness to take risks and revise their drafts, while Abdel Latif (2015) reported that cognitive and linguistic difficulties often coexist with affective barriers, resulting in incomplete or poorly structured compositions. Collectively, these theories and findings demonstrate that EFL writing difficulties stem not only from linguistic limitations but also from psychological and instructional factors, highlighting the need for supportive pedagogical approaches that address both dimensions.

Given these challenges, scholars have emphasized the need for pedagogical models that view writing as a recursive and developmental process rather than a single-step performance. Theoretically, Hyland (2003) argues that a process-oriented approach helps learners move through stages such as planning, drafting, revising, and editing, allowing them to gradually shape and refine their ideas. Harmer (2014) similarly explains that these stages support reflection, idea generation, and ongoing revision, thereby encouraging students to engage more consciously with both content and form. In practice, such an approach promotes not only linguistic competence but also metacognitive awareness, as learners learn to monitor their thinking, evaluate their drafts, and make purposeful improvements. Empirical studies reinforce the value of this model: Samsudin (2016) for instance reported improvements in students' ability to revise meaningfully when guided through stage-based instruction. Collectively, these theories and findings suggest that process-oriented writing instruction offers a more supportive pathway for EFL learners, enabling them to navigate writing challenges while developing stronger writing habits and self-regulation skills.

Writing approaches in language teaching

Different pedagogical orientations to writing reflect distinct assumptions about how writing competence develops. Theoretically, the product-oriented approach—long influential in traditional EFL instruction—places primary emphasis on the final written product rather than the process leading to it. Tribble (1996) explains that this approach encourages learners to imitate model texts, focusing on accuracy, grammatical form, and adherence to established rhetorical conventions. Likewise, Richards and Renandya (2002) note that product-based instruction typically positions writing as a linear task in which correctness and conformity are prioritized. In practice, this orientation often results in classroom activities centered on text reproduction, error correction, and controlled composition, which may raise students' awareness of linguistic accuracy but provide limited opportunities for idea development or reflective engagement. Empirical studies illustrate these limitations: Tangpermpoon (2008) found that students taught predominantly through product-oriented methods were less likely to revise their work beyond surface-level edits, while Hasan and Akhand (2010) reported that such instruction constrained students' creativity and reduced their motivation to explore content. Taken together, these theoretical perspectives and research findings suggest that although the product approach contributes to grammatical precision, it fails to fully support the cognitive, creative, and reflective dimensions necessary for comprehensive writing development.

In contrast to product-based instruction, the process-oriented approach conceptualizes writing as a recursive, exploratory act rather than a linear task. Theoretically, Badger and White (2000) emphasize that writing develops through stages of idea generation, drafting, revising, and editing, where learners continually revisit and refine their texts. Brown (2007) further explains that breaking writing into manageable stages can reduce anxiety and increase learner engagement, as students are not pressured to produce a perfect text in a single attempt. In practice, this perspective encourages

the production of multiple drafts, fosters reflection on writing choices, and promotes learner-centered strategies such as peer review and self-assessment. Empirical studies provide strong support for these theoretical claims: Faraj (2015) reported that students became more confident and willing to revise once they understood the purpose of each writing stage. Similarly, Alhosani (2008) demonstrated that structured prewriting activities significantly improved learners' ability to generate and expand ideas. Collectively, these findings indicate that the process-oriented approach not only enhances linguistic and rhetorical development but also nurtures autonomy, collaboration, and reflective writing habits in EFL learners.

Overall, the product-oriented and process-oriented approaches differ in what they prioritize, with accuracy and structure emphasized in the former and reflection, creativity, and development emphasized in the latter. Theoretically, Hyland (2003) notes that process-oriented instruction allows learners to engage more deeply with idea generation and revision, whereas the product approach focuses more narrowly on form and correctness. Brown (2007) similarly argues that process-based pedagogy supports learner confidence and creativity by breaking writing into manageable stages that reduce cognitive pressure. In many EFL contexts, practical challenges such as writing anxiety, limited strategy awareness, and insufficient instructional support make these theoretical distinctions particularly relevant. Empirical research supports this view: Samsudin (2016) found that students taught through process-based activities demonstrated higher engagement and greater willingness to revise, while Kadmiry (2021) reported that learners receiving process-oriented instruction outperformed those taught through product-based methods in overall writing quality. These findings suggest that although both approaches contribute valuable insights into writing development, the process-oriented model offers distinct advantages for fostering deeper engagement, self-efficacy, and sustained improvement among EFL learners.

The writing process

The writing process is widely conceptualized as a recursive series of activities through which writers generate, organize, and refine ideas to produce coherent texts. Theoretically, Flower and Hayes (1981) describe writing as a complex problem-solving activity involving planning, translating, and reviewing, emphasizing that writers continually move back and forth among these components rather than follow a fixed linear sequence. This framework underscores how writers draw on goals, audience awareness, and emerging text to make ongoing decisions during composition. In practice, these recursive movements can be observed in how students pause to reconsider content, reorganize their ideas, or revise wording as their understanding evolves. Empirical studies support these theoretical claims: Zamel (1983) found that skilled L2 writers frequently revisited earlier stages of planning and drafting while composing, and Roca de Larios, Murphy, and Manchón (1999) reported that learners engaged in repeated cycles of idea exploration and text reworking as they refined their writing. Together, these theories and findings highlight that effective writing development depends on understanding writing as a fluid, iterative process in which ideas and texts evolve through continuous reflection and revision.

In EFL contexts, process-based writing instruction supports learners in shifting their attention from surface-level accuracy toward deeper aspects of meaning and textual organization. Theoretically, Hyland (2003) explains that guided movement through stages such as prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing enables learners to engage with writing as a meaning-making activity rather than merely a linguistic task. Harmer (2014) similarly emphasizes that these stages encourage students to explore

ideas freely, reorganize meaningfully, and refine their language use through deliberate revision. In classroom practice, engaging in such recursive activities helps students build both linguistic control and metacognitive awareness as they monitor, evaluate, and adjust their writing decisions across drafts. Empirical studies further support this view: Abas, Hermilinda, and Aziz (2018) reported that learners with stronger writing performance tended to move flexibly between stages and apply different strategies purposefully. Taken together, these theories and findings indicate that process-based instruction not only enhances students' linguistic accuracy but also fosters their growth as reflective and strategic writers.

Process-based writing instruction in EFL contexts supports learners in shifting their focus from surface-level accuracy toward deeper concerns of meaning and text organization. Theoretically, Hyland (2003) explains that structured stages such as prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing guide learners to develop ideas more deliberately and to reflect on their choices throughout the writing process. Harmer (2014) also notes that this staged approach promotes both linguistic development and metacognitive awareness, enabling learners to better monitor and regulate their writing. In classroom practice, these stages help students expand ideas, refine coherence, and improve accuracy through multiple revisions. Taken together, these perspectives highlight that a process-based approach does more than guide students through sequential writing stages, it cultivates the habits of reflection, strategic thinking, and purposeful revision that characterize effective writers. By integrating structured stages with opportunities for feedback and self-assessment, EFL writing classrooms can foster sustained growth in both skill and confidence, ultimately empowering learners to take greater ownership of their writing development.

Writing behavior

Writing behavior has been widely examined in second language (L2) writing research, particularly within the shift from product-oriented to process-oriented instruction. Early product approaches tended to view writing as the production of a final text, emphasizing accuracy and structural features rather than the behaviors writers engage in while composing (Tribble, 1996; Silva, 1990). In contrast, the process approach conceptualizes writing behavior as a series of recursive actions, including planning, drafting, revising, editing, and reflecting (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hyland, 2003). Research consistently shows that when learners are guided through these stages, they develop more effective composing behaviors, such as increased time spent organizing ideas, greater willingness to revise, and more strategic use of feedback (Zamel, 1983; Raimes, 1985). For instance, Graham and Perin (2007) highlight that structured process-writing activities, especially multiple drafting and revision cycles, improve students' self-regulation and help them approach writing as a manageable, iterative task.

Another strand of literature emphasizes the social and metacognitive dimensions of writing behavior. Collaborative activities, such as peer review and peer discussion, have been found to support the development of critical reading behaviors and facilitate deeper engagement with content and organization rather than surface-level features (Hu & Lam, 2010; Min, 2006). Similarly, reflective practices, including journals and self-assessment, enhance metacognitive awareness by encouraging learners to evaluate their strategies, identify weaknesses, and monitor progress (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994; Nunan, 1999). These studies collectively show that writing behavior is not merely mechanical but is shaped by cognitive, affective, and social processes. When students actively plan,

revise, collaborate, and reflect, they become more autonomous and strategic writers, supporting the core principles of process-based pedagogy in EFL settings.

Methodology

Research design and approach of the study

This study employed a qualitative research design using thematic analysis to investigate how EFL students experience and make sense of the writing process. A qualitative design was selected because the aim was to explore students' behaviors and perceptions regarding process-based writing, which requires close examination of lived experiences rather than quantification of outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, which provides a systematic yet flexible method for identifying and interpreting patterns within participants' narratives and observed behaviors.

To achieve this aim, the study was carried out in a natural instructional environment where students were guided through process-based writing activities. The qualitative orientation enabled the researcher to observe and document how students engaged with each stage: inventing, drafting, revising, and editing, and how they articulated their thoughts and difficulties throughout the process. This contextualized approach is essential for revealing the meanings students assign to their writing practices and the factors that shape their engagement. Informal assessments and instructor records from previous cohorts indicate that students at this stage often struggle with idea generation, text organization, and grammatical accuracy. These shared challenges provide rich grounds for examining how learners negotiate the stages of brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing.

The study adopted a thematic analysis framework because it provides a systematic yet flexible method for identifying, interpreting, and organizing patterns within participants' narratives. Through iterative coding and theme development, thematic analysis offers a structured pathway for linking individual accounts to broader conceptual insights. This approach aligns with the study's purpose of uncovering recurring themes in learners' writing experiences, rather than evaluating the effectiveness of a specific instructional treatment. By focusing on participants' interpretations and reflections, thematic analysis ensures that the findings remain grounded in students' authentic voices and classroom realities. The research was carried out in the participants' regular classroom environment during their weekly two credit hour (100 minute) meetings. Over eight sessions, students engaged in structured process-based writing tasks. Throughout these meetings, observational field notes, student artifacts, and reflective responses were collected to capture students' engagement, difficulties, and evolving writing practices.

Research site and participant

The study was conducted at Universitas Riau in the Intermediate Writing course, taken by third-semester students in the 2025/2026 academic year. This course, offered under the newly implemented *Kurikulum MBKM 2025*, emphasizes learner autonomy and process-oriented writing instruction, making it a suitable context for investigating students' experiences with the writing process.

The participants were purposefully selected using criterion sampling, in which students were included based on two predetermined criteria: (1) they were officially enrolled in the Intermediate Writing course, and (2) they demonstrated intermediate English proficiency, as indicated by their

performance in previous writing courses and departmental placement records. Thirty-two students met these criteria and agreed to participate. As English Education majors, these students typically share similar academic backgrounds but vary in individual writing abilities, motivation levels, and prior exposure to process-based writing.

Data collection and analysis

To address the study's aim of understanding students' experiences with the writing process, classroom observations served as the primary data source. Observations were conducted across eight writing sessions using a structured observation guide that focused on students' behaviors during brainstorming, drafting, revising, and responding to feedback. Student reflective questionnaires, writing samples, and a teacher's journal were collected to analyse the students' perception when it comes to the writing process.

All data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. The researcher first familiarized with observation notes, interview transcripts, writing samples, and journal entries, then generated 187 initial codes capturing students' challenges, strategies, behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions. These codes were systematically reviewed and grouped into 12 preliminary sub-themes based on conceptual similarity and recurring patterns. The sub-themes were then organized into 3 overarching themes that addressed the research aim. Through iterative refinement, the final thematic structure consisted of 3 themes, 12 sub-themes, and 72 codes (see Table 1), with 6 representative codes per sub-theme systematically distributed across the structure.

In the final stage, each theme was defined and interpreted to show how it addressed the research aim. The analysis moved beyond describing classroom behaviors, explaining how students made sense of the writing process and how their experiences evolved over time. This thematic approach provided clear, evidence-based insights into students' engagement, difficulties, and developing awareness as writers in a process-oriented classroom.

Results

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of EFL students' writing practices and experiences with the writing process approach. While initial writing assessments indicated measurable improvement in students' overall performance, the qualitative data offered deeper insights into *how* and *why* these changes occurred. Thematic analysis of the qualitative dataset, comprising classroom observations, student reflections, writing samples, and the teacher's journal, generated three major themes that directly addressed the study's aim of understanding students' behaviors and perceptions toward the writing process. These themes were: (1) developing awareness of writing as a process, (2) growing confidence and ownership in writing, and (3) collaborative learning and reflective engagement as can be seen in the table below:

Table 1. *Students' behavior and perceptions towards writing process: Thematic structure*

Theme	Sub-theme	Sample Codes
Awareness of writing as process	Understanding writing as multi-step process	Recognizing brainstorming as essential; Moving between stages flexibly; Viewing writing as non-linear activity
	Recognizing revision is important	Valuing revision for clarity; Willingness to revise beyond requirements
	Shifting from product to process	Moving from single-draft mentality; Accepting imperfect first drafts
	Improving organization of ideas	Using outlining strategies; Restructuring paragraphs for clarity
Confidence and ownership	Reducing anxiety	Feeling less stressed; Perceiving writing as manageable
	Developing autonomy	Voluntary revisions; Less dependent on teacher correction
	Viewing errors as learning	Accepting mistakes; Willingness to experiment despite errors
Collaborative and reflective engagement	Increasing confidence	Trying new vocabulary; Increased self-efficacy in writing
	Constructive peer feedback	Moving beyond grammar-only feedback; Discussing content and organization
	Mutual support	Collaborating actively; Sharing writing strategies
	Growth in reflective thinking	Evaluating own progress; Monitoring strategy effectiveness
	Enhanced engagement	Active participation; Greater interest in learning process

The results are presented in two parts: (1) the result of the observation conducted on students' behavior towards the writing process, and (2) students' perceptions towards the writing process.

Observations on writing behavior

The first theme, developing awareness of writing as a process, highlighted a shift in how students perceived and enacted writing behaviors. Early observations showed that students approached writing as a single-step activity focused mainly on grammar.As they engaged with structured stages (brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing) they became more deliberate in generating ideas and organizing content. Teacher journal entries and reflections indicated that students who were initially reluctant to revise began to value revision as a necessary step for improving clarity and coherence. This change suggested a developing understanding of writing as a recursive and meaning-making process. Interview data illuminated how students made sense of this behavioral change. When asked to describe their current writing process, one student (S12) explained: "*Before this class, I thought writing was just sitting down and writing everything at once. Now I understand that there are steps: brainstorming, drafting, revising. It makes writing less scary.*" This illustrates how explicit instruction in the writing process helped students reframe writing from an overwhelming single act into a manageable series of connected activities. Another student (S08) elaborated during interview: "*I used to think brainstorming was a waste of time. But now I see that it actually helps me organize my thoughts before I start writing. My ideas are clearer now.*" The consistency between observed behaviors (increased prewriting engagement) and interview accounts (articulated value of planning) demonstrates internalization of process principles.

Observations also showed students becoming less dependent on teacher correction and more willing to take risks, such as trying new vocabulary or restructuring paragraphs. Several students voluntarily revised drafts beyond what was required, signaling increased autonomy and a sense of ownership over their texts. This development is further reflected in theme 2, which focuses on rising confidence and ownership. Students' affective responses changed noticeably as they progressed through writing stages. This growth in confidence aligned with improvements seen in the writing test, supporting the qualitative interpretation of increased writer agency.

In Weeks 1-2, students consistently looked to the teacher for confirmation before proceeding— "*Is this good?*", "*Should I write more?*", "*Did I do this right?*" Field notes indicated an average of 8-12 teacher consultations per student during early drafting sessions. By Week 6, this decreased to 2-3 consultations per student, with questions becoming more specific and strategic rather than seeking general approval. Student S23 articulated a particularly striking demonstration of intrinsic motivation during interview: *"I revised my essay twice more after the teacher said it was good enough. I wanted to make it even better for myself, not just for the grade. I could see ways to improve it, so I did."* This voluntary engagement beyond external requirements signals genuine ownership rather than mere compliance. The teacher's journal from Week 6 noted: *"S16 declined peer feedback today, saying 'I know what needs to be fixed. I can do this myself.' While initially concerned this was avoidance, I observed her making substantive revisions independently, reorganizing arguments, adding supporting details, refining transitions. This is real autonomy."*

The third theme, *collaborative and reflective engagement*, emerged from recurring observations of students' peer interaction and self-evaluation behaviors. Peer review sessions evolved from focusing only on grammar to engaging in deeper discussions about organization, clarity, and idea development. Student S22 reflected on her own development as a feedback provider: *"I learned to give better feedback to my friends. Instead of just saying 'this is good,' I now point out what works well and suggest specific ways to improve the content. Like I'll say, 'Your introduction is strong because you give clear background, but paragraph three needs more supporting evidence for your claim.'"*. Student S16 described the impact of receiving substantive feedback: *"Peer feedback helps me see things I missed. My partner asked questions about my ideas that made me think deeper and add more details to my essay. When someone asks, 'What do you mean by this?' or 'Can you give an example?' it shows me where my writing is unclear. Grammar feedback doesn't do that."*

Students also became more articulate about what makes a text coherent and meaningful. Reflection activities, recorded in questionnaires and teacher journals, reinforced these behaviors by encouraging students to evaluate their progress and identify areas for improvement. Student S15 explained: *"Reflecting on my writing process helps me understand what works for me and what doesn't. I can see my progress from the first essay to now. I used to just revise once quickly. Now I revise multiple times and each time I make it better. Seeing that progress makes me more confident."* This awareness of personal progress demonstrates metacognitive monitoring, the ability to assess one's own development over time.

Together, these observations provide a clearer picture of how students' behaviors evolved across the writing stages. The tables highlight how the sub-themes and codes support the broader themes, showing that students not only improved in their writing performance but also developed deeper awareness, confidence, autonomy, and collaborative engagement throughout the writing process.

Students' perceptions towards the writing process

Based on the questionnaire, students' perceptions aligned closely with the three major themes identified in this study. Together, these perceptions illustrate how students view the writing process

as not only a learning procedure that they have to do but as a meaningful framework shaping how they understood and approached writing.

Students perceived the writing process as a multi-steps process with flexibility to go back and forth between steps in order to achieve a good writing. Many agreed that brainstorming helped them "think more clearly", drafting allowed them to "put ideas in order", and the revision stage help make their writing "more detailed and logical". These insights reinforced observational findings that students become more strategic and intentional in their writing process. Student (S08) elaborated during interview: *"I used to think brainstorming was a waste of time. But now I see that it actually helps me organize my thoughts before I start writing. My ideas are clearer now."* The consistency between observed behaviors (increased prewriting engagement) and interview accounts (articulated value of planning) demonstrates internalization of process principles.

The second theme, growing confidence and ownership in writing, reflected changes in students' perceptions of their writing abilities. Questionnaire responses revealed that students felt writing became "less stressful" and "more manageable" when broken into stages. Many expressed that drafting and revising helped them refine their ideas without the pressure of producing a perfect text on the first try. Student S17 explained: *"I never revised my writing before. I thought if I wrote it once, that was enough. But now I see that revision is where the real improvement happens. My writing becomes much better."* When probed about what changed her perspective, she continued: *"When the teacher showed me my first draft next to my revised draft, I couldn't believe the difference. The revised one was so much clearer. That's when I understood why revision matters."* This comparison-based realization was echoed by S03, who stated during interview: *"At first I was annoyed that we had to revise. But when I compared my first draft with my revised one, I was surprised. The revised version is so much clearer and more organized. Now I actually want to revise because I know it will make my writing better."*

Students expressed feeling more in control of their ideas, more capable of expressing themselves, and less afraid of making mistakes indicating a shift toward autonomy and self-efficacy. Student S19 articulated*: "Before, I was always worried about making my first draft perfect. Now I know it's okay if my first draft is messy. I can fix it later during revision."* Student S10 explained: *"I used to feel embarrassed about my mistakes. Now I see them as a chance to learn. Every mistake teaches me something about writing. Like, if I keep making the same grammar mistake, that shows me what I need to study. Mistakes aren't bad anymore, they're information."* This transformation from shame to pragmatic learning orientation is particularly significant in EFL contexts.

The third theme, collaborative learning and reflective engagement, showed how peer interaction and guided reflection shaped students' writing behaviors. Peer review activities encouraged students to exchange feedback that gradually shifted from focusing only on grammar to addressing organization and content quality. Student S07 explained: *"At first, my classmates and I only corrected grammar errors. Now we talk about ideas, organization, and how to make arguments stronger. This is much more helpful. Before, my partner would say, 'You forgot a comma here.' Now she says, 'I don't understand how this paragraph connects to your thesis. Can you explain?' That makes me think deeper about my writing."*

This evolution demonstrated growing metacognitive awareness and deeper understanding of effective writing. Reflection activities also helped students recognize their strengths and weaknesses, and teacher journal entries confirmed that these reflective practices fostered a supportive and engaged classroom environment. Student S09 stated*: "Working with my classmates makes writing less lonely. We help each other and share strategies. If I'm stuck, I can ask my partner for ideas. Before, writing felt isolating—just me and the blank page. Now it feels like we're all learning together."* Student S32 elaborated: *"I learned a lot from seeing*

how my classmates approach writing. Everyone has different strategies, and I can try the ones that work for them. Like S15 always makes a detailed outline, and I learned that from watching her. It works for me too." Together, these behaviors indicated that collaboration and reflection played a significant role in developing students' writing skills and their understanding of writing as a process.

Overall, the thematic analysis revealed that the writing-process approach not only enhanced students' writing performance but also reshaped their behaviors and perceptions as writers. Students began to view writing as a multi-step, recursive activity, became more confident and autonomous, and engaged more deeply through collaboration and reflection. These findings directly align with the study's aim of understanding how EFL students experience, interpret, and respond to process-based writing instruction. Given the substantial growth observed in both skills and attitudes during the first cycle, the study determined that a second cycle was not required.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that implementing the writing-process approach in an EFL classroom meaningfully shapes how students experience and make sense of writing. Consistent with the study's aim to understand students' writing practices by examining their experiences and perceptions of the writing process the thematic analysis revealed three interconnected dimensions of students' development: (1) growing awareness of writing as a recursive process, (2) increased confidence and ownership as writers, and (3) the influence of collaborative and reflective engagement on their writing behaviors. Together, these themes provide insight into how students navigate each stage of writing and how these experiences contribute to changes in their skills, attitudes, and identities as writers.

Observations on writing behavior

The observation data demonstrated that the writing-process approach meaningfully shaped how students enacted and understood writing in classroom practice. The first key theme, developing awareness of writing as a process, showed that students gradually shifted from a product-oriented mindset to an understanding of writing as a multi-stage activity. At the beginning of the course, learners tended to write in a single attempt with little revision, reflecting the limitations of traditional product-focused instruction described by Tribble (1996). However, guided engagement in brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing helped them recognize writing as recursive and flexible. This shift mirrors the process-writing principles highlighted by Hyland (2003) and Brown (2007), who argue that explicit attention to writing stages enhances both idea development and metacognitive awareness. In this study, students' behaviors, such as increased time spent organizing ideas and willingness to revise, indicate not only improved cognitive strategies but also a more sophisticated understanding of how writing develops across stages.

Not only that, observations also revealed affective and behavioral changes reflected in the second themes. Initially, students displayed when it comes to writing. They also heavily relying on teacher's summative feedback and grades at the end of the learning process (Richards & Renandya, 2002). However, repeated engagement with drafting and revising reduced fear of error-making and encouraged risk-taking, such as experimenting with vocabulary and reorganizing their paragraphs. Voluntary revisions beyond required tasks indicated emerging autonomy on their writing. These behaviors support Graham and Perin's (2007) argument about process-based instruction

strengthening self-efficacy by breaking writing into manageable steps. This means that students' willingness to take action in revising ad refining their text shows students' behavior reflecting the core goal of the writing process-oriented approach.

Finally, the third theme, collaborative and reflective engagement, highlights the social and reflective dimensions of writing development. Peer-review sessions gradually evolved from surface-level grammar checks to substantive discussions about organization, clarity, and argument development. This change reflects Vygotskian perspectives on learning as socially mediated (as cited in Hyland, 2003). Reflection activities documented in journals and questionnaires further deepened this engagement by prompting students to evaluate their strengths, weaknesses, and progress. Together, these observational findings depict writing as an active, interactive, and self-regulated process, consistent with the principles of socially mediated instruction.

Overall, the observations demonstrate that the writing-process approach enabled students not only to improve their written output but also to transform their writing behaviors, becoming more strategic, autonomous, and collaborative. These changes directly address the study's aim by showing how students navigate and internalize each stage of writing in authentic classroom practice.

Students' perceptions towards the writing process

Students' perceptions reinforced and expanded the behavorial patterns seen in the observations, providing insight into the way learners interpret the writing process. From the first theme, students described writing as a multi-step, flexible activity in which stages could be revisited to improve content, clarity, and organization. Their reflections that brainstorming "*helps me think clearly*" and revision "*makes my writing more logical*" confirm that students internalized the purpose and value of each stage. This perception aligns closely with Hyland's (2003) theoretical framing of writing as a recursive activity that develops through continuous shaping and reshaping of ideas. This means that students' no longer see writing as one done affair but a continuous cycle that can be repeated accordingly in order to achieve the desired result.

The second theme, growing confidence and ownership in writing, highlights the affective and motivational impact of the process approach. students described writing as a multi-step, flexible activity in which stages could be revisited to improve content, clarity, and organization. Their reflections that brainstorming "*helps me think clearly*" and revision "*makes my writing more logical*" confirm that students internalized the purpose and value of each stage. This perception aligns closely with Hyland's (2003) theoretical framing of writing as a recursive activity that develops through continuous shaping and reshaping of ideas. In this study, students' voluntary revisions and initiative to refine their texts beyond the assignment requirements indicate emerging autonomy—a core goal of process-based writing pedagogy.

The third theme, collaborative learning and reflective engagement, emphasizes the social and reflective dimensions of writing that shaped students' behaviors and perceptions. They explained that peer discussion helped them "*see other ways to organize ideas*," while receiving and giving feedback helped them better understand what makes writing effective. This shift from grammar-focused comments to content- and organization-oriented feedback reflects growing metacognitive awareness. Students also noted that reflective activities helped them monitor their progress, identify weaknesses, and set goals for revision. These insights align with sociocultural and reflective learning theories, including Vygotsky's (1978) view of learning through interaction and Nunan's (1999) emphasis on reflective engagement. This demonstrate that collaboration and reflection not only enhanced students'

understanding of the writing process but also supported their development as more independent, socially engaged, and strategically aware writers directly contributing to the study's aim of uncovering how EFL learners experience and make sense of each stage of process-based writing.

Overall, the discussion illustrates that the writing-process approach did more than improve students' written products, it reshaped how they engaged, felt, and thought about writing. Students reported and demonstrated deeper awareness of writing stages, increased confidence in expressing ideas, and more active engagement through collaboration and reflection. These behavioral and perceptual changes directly address the research aim by revealing how EFL students experience and interpret each stage of the writing process in a real classroom setting. The findings affirm that process-based instruction not only enhances writing skills but also develops students into more reflective, autonomous, and socially engaged writers.

Conclusion and Recommendations/Implications

This qualitative study examined EFL students' writing behaviors and perceptions as they engaged with process-oriented writing instruction over eight weeks. Students gradually shifted from treating writing as a one-step product to understanding it as a recursive, multi-stage process involving planning, drafting, revising, and editing. This shift was visible in their increased time spent organizing ideas, their willingness to revise, and their growing autonomy in taking initiative beyond required tasks. Students also demonstrated greater confidence and risk-taking as they became less dependent on summative teacher feedback. Finally, collaboration and reflection emerged as key elements that strengthened students' engagement, as peer review evolved into more substantive discussions on content and coherence, and reflective activities helped students monitor their progress. Overall, the observations highlight how the writing-process approach reshaped students' writing behaviors, making them more strategic, autonomous, and collaboratively engaged writers.

Students' perceptions further reinforced these behavioral changes by revealing how learners made sense of the writing process. They described writing as a flexible, cyclical activity that allowed them to improve clarity and organization through repeated revision. Students also reported increased confidence and a greater sense of ownership as they became more comfortable taking risks and refining their ideas. Collaborative activities helped them understand writing from multiple perspectives, and reflective tasks strengthened their ability to identify strengths, weaknesses, and goals for improvement. Together, these perceptions demonstrate that the process approach not only enhanced students' writing skills but also deepened their metacognitive awareness and supported the development of more independent and socially engaged writers.

Recommendations and Implications for Future Research

Teachers should systematically introduce brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing as distinct stages with specific purposes, providing explicit instruction in strategies appropriate to each stage. Future research could expand these findings by examining how students' writing behaviors and perceptions develop over longer periods or across multiple writing genres. Mixed-method studies could be employed to triangulate observational and perceptual data with quantitative measures of writing quality or self-efficacy. Research that compares learners across proficiency levels or investigates how digital platforms support collaborative drafting and feedback would also offer valuable insights. Additionally, further studies could explore how specific instructional components—

such as different feedback strategies, peer interaction structures, or reflective tools—uniquely contribute to writing development. Such extensions would deepen understanding of how process-based instruction shapes learners' skills, engagement, and identities as writers in diverse EFL contexts.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declares that there is no potential conflict of interest in this study. All data and information presented in this research are the original work of the author and do not involve any third parties with financial or non-financial interests. This study was conducted with a high level of academic integrity and in full compliance with all applicable research ethics guidelines.

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