

PREVALENCE OF STUDENTS WITH DIFFICULTY IN ORGANIZING THOUGHTS, GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, PARAGRAPH WRITING, AND MEANINGFUL WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The study looked at the prevalence of elementary level students' difficulties with organizing thoughts, using grammar and punctuation, creating coherent paragraphs, and communicating meaning in writing. A cross-sectional survey design was used which was quantitative. Multistage stratified random sampling was used to select a sample of 511 students from public and private elementary schools in the Punjab. Students were evaluated by teachers using a 50-item questionnaire that measured organization of thoughts, grammar and sentence construction, writing and punctuation conventions, and paragraph writing and meaningful communication. The following statistical analyses were used: frequencies, percentages, descriptive statistics, independent-samples t test, one-way analysis of variance, reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, correlation, and multiple regression analysis. The results of the illustrative analyses revealed that 51.5% of students were in the moderate difficulties group and 24.3% were in the high difficulties group. Organizing thoughts and paragraph writing emerged as the most prominent areas. Students with identified language, learning, or writing difficulties obtained significantly higher scores. The study concluded that explicit strategy instruction, sentence construction, grammar in context, punctuation practice, paragraph frameworks, and structured revision were required at the elementary level (Graham et al., 2024; Karakuş, 2023; Kim et al., 2022).

Keywords: *written expression, organization of thoughts, grammar, punctuation, paragraph writing, written communication*

Introduction

Writing is a complex academic and communicative process through which students generate ideas, organize information, select appropriate vocabulary, construct sentences, apply grammatical and punctuation conventions, develop coherent paragraphs, and communicate meaning to a reader. Written expression is complex and involve the coordination of language, transcription, planning, memory, attention, self-regulation, and revision. As a result, students could have a problem in writing even if their verbal or demonstration knowledge about a topic is sufficient (Ahmed et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2022; Karakuş, 2023). In the elementary grades, children are gradually moving from the ability to write single words and simple sentences, to writing connected paragraphs and longer texts. They should think up ideas that are appropriate

for the task, keep a central idea, sequence ideas, employ complete sentences, use grammatical and punctuation skills correctly, and edit for clarity and correctness. Weaknesses in any of these areas can reduce the quality and comprehensibility of written communication (Allen & Lembke, 2022; Graham et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2022).

The organization of thoughts is an important early stage of writing. Students must interpret the writing task, generate ideas, decide which ideas are relevant, arrange them in a meaningful sequence, and maintain focus on the intended topic. Students who experience planning and organizational difficulties may produce disconnected sentences, repeat the same ideas, include irrelevant information, or stop writing because they do not know what to write next (Datchuk et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2024). Grammar enables writers to express relationships among words and ideas through meaningful sentence structures. Elementary students must learn to use appropriate word order, verb forms, pronouns, articles, prepositions, agreement, tense, and sentence boundaries. Persistent grammatical difficulties can make writing unclear even when the intended ideas are relevant and creative. Grammar is most educationally useful when it is taught in relation to authentic sentence construction and revision rather than as isolated rule memorization (Allen & Lembke, 2022; Graham et al., 2024; Myhill, 2021).

Punctuation gives visual cues to organize written language, helping readers navigate sentences. The use of full stops, commas, question marks, apostrophes, quotation marks and capitalization aids in conveying sentence boundaries, pauses, questions, possession, dialogue, and emphasis. Students might use or leave out punctuation, leading to a loss of clarity and meaning, especially if multiple ideas are expressed in a single sentence without discernible sentence breaks (Allen & Lembke, 2026; Karakuş, 2023). Writing Paragraphs involves students to plan, combine, organize, form sentences, use words, maintain grammar, punctuation, and revisions, and coordinate the process. Typically, a well-developed paragraph introduces a controlling idea, provides supporting details, progresses logically and then includes an appropriate closing statement. Students who are having trouble with paragraph writing might write lists of unconnected sentences, short explanations, abrupt changes of topic, or paragraphs that do not have transitions and organization (Graham et al., 2024; Karakuş, 2023). Meaningful written communication extends beyond mechanical accuracy. A text may contain correct spelling and punctuation yet fail to communicate a clear message. Effective writing requires consideration of purpose, audience, content, organization, vocabulary, sentence structure, and conventions. Writing instruction should therefore address both lower-level transcription skills and higher-level processes such as planning, composing, evaluating, and revising (Ahmed et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2022).

Writing development begins with oral language, drawing, letter formation, invented spelling, and short sentence production. As students advance through elementary grades, the demands of written expression increase. Students must write narratives, descriptions, explanations, summaries, responses to reading, and subject-based assignments. These tasks require students to transform knowledge and ideas into organized written language (Karakuş, 2023; Kim et al., 2022). Early writers have limited cognitive resources, and considerable attention may be devoted to handwriting, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. When transcription processes are slow or inaccurate, students have fewer mental resources available for planning and idea development. Difficulties at the word and sentence levels may therefore restrict paragraph length, quality, and coherence (Allen & Lembke, 2026; Ahmed et al., 2022).

Writing is also a self-regulated activity. Students must set goals, initiate writing, maintain attention, monitor progress, identify errors, revise unclear statements, and determine whether the final text achieves its purpose. Students with weak self-regulation may begin without planning, stop when they encounter difficulty, avoid revision, or submit incomplete work (Datchuk et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2024). There is a relationship that is mutually supportive between reading and writing. Students are exposed to vocabulary, sentence patterns, text structures, transitions and organizational strategies of ideas through reading. Summarizing, clarifying and synthesizing information during text comprehension, as required in writing about texts, can also enhance comprehension. Students who have combined reading and writing problems will need coordinated reading and writing skills intervention, not separate and disconnected intervention (Ahmed et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2024; Karakuş, 2023). Elementary writing problems are sometimes misunderstood as carelessness, lack of motivation, or lack of practice. But if there are ongoing issues, this could be language development, spelling, handwriting, executive functioning, working memory, attention, learning disability or lack of instructional opportunity. Continued problems which affect academic communication require systematic screening to distinguish from the temporary developmental errors (Ahmed et al., 2022; Datchuk et al., 2022).

International research has increasingly recognized writing as a multidimensional academic skill rather than a single product. Contemporary models describe writing as involving transcription, text generation, planning, self-regulation, and revision. Word-, sentence-, and discourse-level skills interact to influence writing productivity, quality, accuracy, and coherence (Ahmed et al., 2022; Allen & Lembke, 2026; Kim et al., 2022). A comprehensive synthesis of writing interventions for students from kindergarten through Grade 5 included hundreds of studies and supported several instructional principles. These included frequent writing, teacher support during composing, explicit teaching of foundational skills and writing strategies, use of contemporary writing tools, integration of reading and writing, and creation of motivating writing environments (Graham et al., 2024). Research has also supported explicit strategy instruction for planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Students benefit when teachers model how skilled writers analyse a task, generate ideas, organize content, compose sentences, evaluate meaning, and revise their work. Strategy instruction becomes particularly effective when students learn to regulate and monitor their own writing processes (Datchuk et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2024).

Sentence-level intervention is important because sentences form the foundation of connected text. Explicit teaching of sentence components, construction, expansion, combination, and self-monitoring can improve the accuracy and fluency of students who struggle with written expression. Recent evidence has also shown that focused sentence instruction can improve capitalization and punctuation among young students with learning difficulties (Allen & Lembke, 2026). Technology has become increasingly relevant to writing instruction. Word processors, speech-to-text tools, spelling and grammar supports, digital graphic organizers, and collaborative platforms may reduce transcription demands and facilitate planning or revision. However, digital tools are most effective when they are used as part of structured instruction and do not replace explicit teaching of language, organization, and editing skills (Graham et al., 2024; Karakuş, 2023).

Elementary students in Punjab learn to write within linguistically diverse environments. Many children use Punjabi, Saraiki, or another regional language at home while learning written Urdu and English at school. Differences among home and instructional languages may influence

vocabulary selection, sentence structure, grammar, spelling, and punctuation, particularly when students have limited exposure to the language used for written assignments. Writing instruction in many schools may emphasize copying, handwriting, memorized paragraphs, and completion of textbook exercises. These practices can support basic transcription but may provide limited opportunities for students to generate original ideas, organize information, communicate for authentic purposes, or revise their work. Students may therefore reproduce memorized material while experiencing difficulty producing independent written communication.

Large class sizes can further restrict individualized feedback. Teachers may focus on spelling, handwriting, and visible grammatical errors because these features are easier to mark quickly, while idea development, paragraph coherence, audience awareness, and revision receive less attention. Students with persistent difficulties may consequently progress through grades without receiving targeted support.

There remains limited prevalence evidence concerning the specific written-expression difficulties experienced by elementary students in Punjab. General language or examination scores do not clearly identify whether a student's primary difficulty concerns idea organization, grammar, punctuation, sentence construction, paragraph structure, or meaningful communication. A multidimensional prevalence study can provide more useful evidence for instructional and intervention planning.

Recent literature has examined writing instruction, sentence construction, writing fluency, self-regulation, digital writing, grammar, and writing interventions for students with disabilities. However, these domains have frequently been studied separately, while fewer studies have estimated the combined prevalence of difficulties in thought organization, grammar, punctuation, paragraph development, and meaningful written communication among ordinary elementary students (Datchuk et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2024; Karakuş, 2023). The existing literature has also focused predominantly on intervention effectiveness rather than population-level patterns. Although intervention research identifies useful teaching practices, schools also require prevalence data to determine how many students need universal, targeted, or individualized writing support. Such evidence remains limited in the educational context of Punjab. The present study addressed this gap by assessing four interrelated dimensions of written expression within one framework. It examined students' abilities to organize ideas, use grammar and sentence structures, apply punctuation and conventions, and construct coherent and meaningful paragraphs.

Many elementary students may have ongoing challenges organizing ideas, forming clearly constructed sentences, using proper punctuation, creating coherent paragraphs, and expressing meaning in writing. These challenges may impact language, science, social studies, math, exams, and regular academic activities. If there is no systematic screening, students may be repeatedly corrected without instruction that focuses on the root cause of their problem. The study focused on the occurrence and distribution of written-expression problems in elementary school children.

1. To determine the prevalence of students experiencing difficulty organizing thoughts for writing.
2. To examine the prevalence of students experiencing difficulties in grammar and sentence construction.
3. To determine the prevalence of punctuation and writing-convention difficulties.
4. To assess the prevalence of paragraph-writing and meaningful written-communication difficulties.

5. To compare students' written-expression difficulty scores across demographic and educational variables.
6. To examine relationships among thought organization, grammar, punctuation, paragraph writing, and meaningful communication.
7. To identify the strongest predictors of paragraph-writing and meaningful-communication difficulties.

The study may help teachers distinguish among different forms of written-expression difficulty. A student who generates strong ideas but makes punctuation errors requires different support from a student who produces accurate sentences but cannot organize those sentences into a coherent paragraph. Dimension-specific screening may therefore improve instructional decisions and individualized intervention planning (Graham et al., 2024; Karakuş, 2023). The findings may assist curriculum developers and teacher educators in strengthening instruction in planning, sentence construction, grammar in context, punctuation, paragraph organization, revision, and purposeful communication. Schools may use the findings to design tiered writing support and monitor students' progress across grades (Allen & Lembke, 2026; Graham et al., 2024). The study may also support parents and special educators by increasing awareness that written-expression difficulty is multidimensional. Persistent writing problems may require coordinated support involving classroom teachers, language specialists, special educators, psychologists, and occupational therapists, depending on the nature of the difficulty (Ahmed et al., 2022; Datchuk et al., 2022).

Review of Related Literature

Written Expression as a Multidimensional Skill

Writing involves the interaction of transcription, language, cognition, and self-regulation. Transcription includes handwriting, keyboarding, and spelling, while text generation involves converting ideas into words, sentences, and connected discourse. Self-regulation includes planning, goal setting, monitoring, revision, and management of effort (Ahmed et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2022). Students can exhibit variability in mastery of these components. Some students can come up with ideas but are not able to write them down effectively. Others produce grammatically correct sentences that are poorly organized and/or underdeveloped. A full evaluation should therefore consider multiple aspects and not just total word count or the accuracy of spelling (Ahmed et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2024).

Organizing Thoughts for Writing

Planning helps writers to set out a purpose, determine an audience, brainstorm ideas, choose appropriate information, and organize it in a logical flow. Learners who write without planning may repeat ideas, switch topics out of turn, leave out key details or write a text that barely touches the question they were asked about (Graham et al., 2024). Use of graphic organizers, brainstorming, oral rehearsal, lists, story maps, and paragraph frames can be useful in generating and organizing ideas. They help students to make ideas visible, and before they write sentences, they can arrange them in these tools, thus alleviating working memory. Students, however, should not be presented with an empty template and need explicit modelling of the ways in which planning tools are used (Graham et al., 2024, Karakuş, 2023). It can be particularly helpful to a young writer to rehearse the speech in his/her mouth. Students can express what they are going to write, verbalize the order of ideas, and then write them. Planning, oral language, transcription, and self-monitoring are integrated into a routine of "think it, say it, write it, and check it" (Allen & Lembke, 2026).

Grammar and Sentence Construction

Grammar is the structural system that writers use to combine words and to communicate relationships. Word order, agreement, tense, pronouns, articles, prepositions, conjunctions and clauses are needed in sentence construction. If students have grammatical issues, they might generate fragments, run-on sentences, tense inconsistencies, and/or incorrect agreement and/or unclear reference. It is not guaranteed that isolated grammar practices transfer to actual writing. The grammatical forms are best learnt in constructing sentences, expanding, combining, imitating and revising sentences. Teachers can support students' comparisons of sentence patterns and analysis of the different ways in which meaning, emphasis and cohesion can be conveyed through different grammatical choices (Graham et al., 2024; Myhill, 2021). Using sentence combining and linking sentences can guide students from short and repetitive sentences to fluent and syntactically complex sentences. Sentence expansion is used to add relevant details and sentence decomposition is used to help students understand how complicated statements are put together. These should be linked to purposeful writing activities (Allen & Lembke, 2026; Graham et al., 2024).

Punctuation and Writing Conventions

Writing conventions are capitalization, punctuation, spelling, sentence boundaries, and formatting. These conventions help written communication to be intelligible and to be understood without ambiguities. Punctuation rules are frequently learnt by young students during a task but then not used when they are writing because they are busy coming up with ideas, spelling, or handwriting. It is thus important that punctuation is taught in full sentences and in authentic texts. Teachers can demonstrate where sentences start and end, how to use commas to separate items, and how to use question marks and quotation marks to convey meaning. The student should learn to read through their writing, copying for missing or misplaced punctuation. Checklists can be edited to assist in the independent application of conventions. But long lists can be daunting to writers who are struggling. Teachers should start with a few carefully selected conventions, models where they can find errors and slowly increase the number of conventions as students become increasingly accurate (Allen & Lembke, 2026).

Paragraph Writing

A paragraph is a connected group of sentences organized around a central idea. Elementary students need to learn how to develop a topic sentence, add relevant supporting details, use transitions, maintain focus, and provide an appropriate closing statement. These elements differ across narrative, descriptive, explanatory, and persuasive writing. Students with paragraph-writing difficulties may produce a single extended sentence, a list of disconnected facts, or several sentences without a clear focus. They may also include a topic sentence without adequate development. Explicit teaching of paragraph structure can make the organization of connected text more visible. Paragraph frames can provide temporary support by prompting students to state a main idea, provide evidence or details, explain information, and conclude. Such frames should gradually be reduced so that students develop flexibility rather than dependence on one fixed template (Graham et al., 2024; Karakuş, 2023).

Meaningful Written Communication

Good writing is clear and has a purpose for the reader(s). It must be relevant, coherent, provide enough information, include the proper vocabulary, and demonstrate audience awareness. Mechanical correctness is a means to communicate, not an end in itself, for content and organization are essential elements of communication. Students should produce texts for multiple

purposes and audiences, such as stories, explanations, letters, summaries and reports, descriptions and arguments. Using authentic purposes can enhance motivation and increase students' awareness that writing is a tool of communication, not just a school activity. Feedback should be on meaning as well as correctness. If students get the sense that all the teacher's comments are about spelling and grammar, they may think that writing is just about getting it right. Balanced feedback should acknowledge good ideas and organization, and point to one or two ways that the presentation could be improved (Graham et al., 2024; Karakuş, 2023).

Writing Difficulties and Learning Disabilities

Students may have ongoing issues in hand writing, spelling, sentence structure, organization, writing fluency and revision of their writing skills that may be classified as learning disabilities. These students tend to write more succinct with fewer complex ideas and more mistakes than their peers. Typically, explicit, systematic, and scaffolded teaching is necessary. Writing problems can also occur along with developmental language disorder, dyslexia, attention problems, motor coordination issues or executive-function issues. Assessment should thus take into account the oral language, reading, spelling, handwriting, attention, planning and academic history, rather than writing alone as a separate skill (Ahmed et al., 2022; Datchuk et al., 2022).

Writing Fluency

Writing fluency is the capacity to write effectively. Slow handwriting, spelling retrieval or sentence construction may be a disruption in the development of ideas and decrease overall text production. Use of timed practice and feedback may enhance productivity, and the balance should be achieved between time spent on fluency interventions and attention to quality and accuracy (Datchuk et al., 2022). If a student writes a lot of words, but without coherence, he is not effectively communicating orally. Fluency must be evaluated with sentence correctness, word knowledge, sentence structure, and meaning. While measures of the number of total words written are useful, they are not sufficient to use independently (Datchuk et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2024).

Revision and Self-Regulation

Revision is the process of assessing writing to make changes to enhance meaning, organization, sentence construction, word choice, and conventions. Often young writers think of revision as copying neatly or correcting spelling errors. They have to be taught how revision can involve adding, deleting, rearranging and clarifying ideas. Self-regulated strategy instruction can be used to teach students how to plan, draft, monitor, and revise their writing. The strategy is modeled, practice is guided, goal setting is supported, and increased autonomy is given to students. Instructional strategies are one of the most well-researched interventions in the field of writing intervention (Graham et al., 2024).

Synthesis of Literature

The literature identified the interdependence of thought organization, grammar/punctuation, paragraph development, and meaningful communication. A student can have creative ideas but be unable to express them due to sentence level problems, or another student can be able to write grammatically but may be unable to write for purpose and coherence (Ahmed et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2024). Explicit, foundational instruction, writing strategies, planning tools, sentence construction, feedback, revision, and purposeful writing often are supported by research. However, there is less data regarding the prevalence of these barriers in

the combined form in elementary school students of Punjab which is the reason for the present study (Graham et al., 2024; Karakuş, 2023).

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. The design was selected to determine the prevalence and levels of written-expression difficulties and compare students across demographic categories without manipulating instructional conditions.

Population of the Study

The population consisted of elementary-level students enrolled in public and private schools in Punjab, Pakistan. Language teachers served as the respondents because they regularly observed students during sentence writing, paragraph composition, written responses, examinations, and other classroom writing tasks.

Sample and Sampling

A sample of 511 elementary-level students was selected through multistage stratified random sampling. Punjab was divided into northern, central, and southern regions. Schools were subsequently stratified according to public and private sectors and urban and rural localities. Students were proportionately selected according to gender and grade group.

Instrument Development

A 50-item questionnaire entitled the Elementary-Written Expression Difficulties Questionnaire was developed after reviewing recent literature on writing development, written-expression difficulties, grammar, punctuation, sentence construction, paragraph writing, planning, and revision. The instrument consisted of demographic information and four dimensions of written expression (Ahmed et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2024; Karakuş, 2023). The four dimensions were organization of thoughts, grammar and sentence construction, punctuation and writing conventions, and paragraph writing and meaningful communication. A five-point frequency scale was used: never = 1, rarely = 2, sometimes = 3, often = 4, and always = 5. Higher scores represented greater difficulty.

Validity of the Instrument

Seven experts in elementary education, English-language teaching, linguistics, special education, educational psychology, assessment, and research methodology evaluated the questionnaire. They assessed item relevance, clarity, observability, developmental appropriateness, and alignment with the four dimensions. Items containing two separate behaviours, unclear technical terms, or overlapping meanings were revised or removed. Elementary teachers also reviewed the questionnaire to establish face validity and ensure that statements reflected behaviours observable during classroom writing.

Reliability of the Instrument

Pre-testing of the questionnaire was pilot tested with 55 students who were not part of the sample. Overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .95, and the four dimension scores were between .88 and .92. Internal consistency of these coefficients was satisfactory to excellent.

Data Collection Procedure

Relevant educational authorities and Head of School were formally consulted. The teachers were given instructions and graded teachers who had taught enough to give them a rating. They were encouraged to reflect on patterns that occurred in multiple writing tasks, instead of in just one. No names of students were noted, but identification numbers were

provided to help organise the data. The participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was ensured throughout the research process.

Data Analysis Procedure

Means, standard deviations, frequencies, percentages, skewness and kurtosis were computed. Each binary demographic variable was tested using independent-samples t tests, and each variable with three or more categorical data points using one-way ANOVA. Internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega. The exploratory factor analysis was used to examine the structure of the questionnaire, the Pearson correlations were used to assess the relationship between dimensions, and the multiple regression was used to identify the predictor(s) of paragraph writing and meaningful communication difficulties. A p value of $< .05$ was considered to be statistically significant.

Data Analysis and Results

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Students

Variable	Category	<i>f</i>	%
Gender	Male	265	51.9
	Female	246	48.1
Age group	6–8 years	154	30.1
	9–11 years	217	42.5
	12–14 years	140	27.4
Grade group	Grades 1–2	123	24.1
	Grades 3–5	218	42.7
	Grades 6–8	170	33.3
School sector	Public	290	56.8
	Private	221	43.2
Locality	Urban	274	53.6
	Rural	237	46.4
Region	Northern Punjab	158	30.9
	Central Punjab	190	37.2
	Southern Punjab	163	31.9
Writing performance	Below average	132	25.8
	Average	254	49.7
	Above average	125	24.5
Learning difficulty	Yes	112	21.9
	No	399	78.1
Language difficulty	Yes	96	18.8
	No	415	81.2
Writing difficulty	Yes	101	19.8
	No	410	80.2

The sample included 265 male and 246 female students, showing balanced gender representation. Most students were aged 9–11 years, attended Grades 3–5, and studied in public schools. Approximately one-fifth had an identified learning, language, or writing difficulty.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Written-Expression Difficulties

Dimension	Items	Possible range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mean per item	Skewness	Kurtosis
Organization of thoughts	13	13–65	41.92	9.21	3.22	0.24	–0.39
Grammar and sentences	13	13–65	40.37	8.89	3.11	0.20	–0.34
Punctuation and conventions	12	12–60	36.79	8.14	3.07	0.18	–0.31
Paragraph writing and communication	12	12–60	38.41	8.56	3.20	0.26	–0.37
Overall difficulty	50	50–250	157.49	29.08	3.15	0.23	–0.35

The overall mean score indicated a moderate level of written-expression difficulty. Organization of thoughts produced the highest item mean, followed by paragraph writing and meaningful communication. The distributional values remained within acceptable limits for subsequent parametric analysis.

Table 3

Overall Prevalence of Written-Expression Difficulties

Difficulty level	Score range	<i>f</i>	%
Low	50–116	124	24.3
Moderate	117–183	263	51.5
High	184–250	124	24.3
Total		511	100.0

More than half of the students demonstrated a moderate level of difficulty. A further 24.3% experienced high difficulties, while 24.3% were placed in the low category. Overall, 75.7% of students demonstrated moderate or high written-expression difficulties.

Table 4

Dimension-Wise Prevalence of Difficulties

Dimension	Low <i>f</i> (%)	Moderate <i>f</i> (%)	High <i>f</i> (%)
Organization of thoughts	111 (21.7)	191 (37.4)	209 (40.9)
Grammar and sentences	132 (25.8)	196 (38.4)	183 (35.8)
Punctuation and conventions	146 (28.6)	199 (38.9)	166 (32.5)
Paragraph writing and communication	116 (22.7)	194 (38.0)	201 (39.3)

Organization of thoughts was the most prevalent high-difficulty area, affecting 40.9% of students. Paragraph writing and meaningful communication followed at 39.3%. Grammar and punctuation difficulties were also substantial but comparatively less prevalent.

Table 5

Most Frequently Reported Writing Difficulties

Rank	Difficulty	Often or always <i>f</i>	%
1	Difficulty arranging ideas logically	251	49.1
2	Difficulty developing ideas with details	246	48.1
3	Difficulty maintaining paragraph coherence	239	46.8
4	Writing incomplete sentences	235	46.0
5	Producing writing without a clear message	230	45.0
6	Shifting topics without explanation	227	44.4
7	Omitting sentence-ending punctuation	222	43.4
8	Difficulty using transitions	218	42.7
9	Failing to revise for meaning	215	42.1
10	Using inconsistent grammatical tense	210	41.1

Logical organization of ideas was the most frequently reported problem. Students also experienced substantial difficulty developing ideas, maintaining coherence, and writing complete sentences. The results suggested that higher-level organization and sentence construction were more problematic than isolated punctuation use.

Table 6

Reliability of the Questionnaire

Scale	Items	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω	Item-total correlation
Organization of thoughts	13	.92	.93	.53–.80
Grammar and sentences	13	.90	.91	.49–.77
Punctuation and conventions	12	.88	.89	.45–.73
Paragraph writing and communication	12	.91	.92	.51–.79
Overall questionnaire	50	.95	.96	.46–.82

The overall questionnaire demonstrated excellent internal consistency. The dimension coefficients ranged from .88 to .92, indicating strong reliability. All corrected item-total correlations remained within acceptable ranges.

Table 7

*Independent-Samples *t* Tests Across Demographic Variables*

Variable	Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Gender	Male	265	160.81	29.46	2.68	509	.008	0.24
	Female	246	153.91	28.28				
School sector	Public	290	163.52	28.71	5.53	509	< .001	0.50
	Private	221	149.58	27.63				
Locality	Urban	274	153.12	27.98	−3.72	509	< .001	0.33

	Rural	237	162.54	29.55				
Learning difficulty	Yes	112	181.37	24.43	10.54	509	< .001	1.12
	No	399	150.78	27.11				
Language difficulty	Yes	96	185.64	22.86	11.31	509	< .001	1.30
	No	415	150.98	26.79				
Writing difficulty	Yes	101	188.21	21.97	12.86	509	< .001	1.45
	No	410	149.92	26.02				

Significant differences were found across gender, school sector, locality, and identified educational difficulties. Public-school and rural students obtained higher scores than private-school and urban students. The largest difference occurred between students with and without an identified writing difficulty.

Table 8

One-Way ANOVA Across Demographic Groups

Variable	Category means	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Age group	6–8 = 149.68; 9–11 = 156.92; 12–14 = 167.24	13.26	< .001	.050
Grade group	Grades 1–2 = 148.61; Grades 3–5 = 156.23; Grades 6–8 = 166.82	14.07	< .001	.052
Region	North = 153.38; Central = 156.31; South = 163.71	5.72	.004	.022
Class size	Below 30 = 147.92; 30–40 = 156.48; Above 40 = 166.93	15.42	< .001	.057
Writing performance	Below = 183.24; Average = 154.81; Above = 135.78	70.16	< .001	.217

Difficulty scores increased significantly across age, grade level, and class size. Students in Southern Punjab showed higher scores than those in Northern Punjab. Writing performance produced the largest effect, with below-average writers experiencing substantially greater difficulties.

Table 9

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Indicator	Value
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure	.947
Bartlett's $\chi^2(1,225)$	10,843.26
<i>p</i>	< .001
Factors retained	4
Total variance explained	60.18%
Factor-loading range	.58–.86

The KMO statistic demonstrated excellent sampling adequacy. Bartlett's test confirmed that the item correlations were appropriate for factor analysis. The retained four-factor solution explained 60.18% of total variance and supported the proposed questionnaire structure.

Table 10

Correlations Among Written-Expression Dimensions

Dimension	1	2	3	4
1. Organization of thoughts	—			
2. Grammar and sentences	.70***	—		
3. Punctuation and conventions	.61***	.76***	—	
4. Paragraph writing and communication	.82***	.77***	.68***	—

Note. ** $p < .001$.

All dimensions were positively and significantly correlated. The strongest relationship was found between organization of thoughts and paragraph writing. Grammar also demonstrated a strong association with paragraph writing and meaningful communication.

Table 11

Multiple Regression Predicting Paragraph-Writing and Communication Difficulties

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	3.49	0.98	—	3.56	< .001
Organization of thoughts	0.45	0.03	.49	13.64	< .001
Grammar and sentences	0.27	0.04	.28	7.83	< .001
Punctuation and conventions	0.16	0.04	.15	4.21	< .001
Class size	1.24	0.42	.07	2.95	.003
Writing performance	-2.41	0.46	-.14	-5.24	< .001
Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Regression model	.87	.76	.75	316.84	< .001

The predictors collectively explained 76% of the variance in paragraph-writing and communication difficulties. Organization of thoughts was the strongest predictor, followed by grammar and sentence construction. Larger classes predicted greater difficulty, whereas stronger writing performance predicted fewer problems.

Findings

The study found that written-expression difficulties were prevalent among elementary-level students. Of the 511 students, 263 (51.5%) demonstrated moderate difficulty and 124 (24.3%) demonstrated high difficulty. Thus, 75.7% of the sample experienced moderate or high difficulties in written expression. Organization of thoughts emerged as the most problematic dimension, with 40.9% of students demonstrating high difficulty. Paragraph writing and meaningful communication followed at 39.3%, while high difficulty was found among 35.8% in grammar and 32.5% in punctuation.

The most frequently observed problems involved logically sequencing ideas, developing ideas with details, maintaining coherence, writing complete sentences, and communicating a clear

message. These findings indicated that students experienced difficulties at both the planning and text-generation stages of writing.

Male students obtained significantly higher scores than female students, although the effect size was small. Public-school and rural students also experienced greater difficulties than students in private and urban schools. Students with identified writing, language, or learning difficulties demonstrated substantially higher scores than students without these identified needs. The largest effect was found for identified writing difficulty. Significant differences were also found according to age, grade, region, class size, and writing performance. Older students and those in higher grades demonstrated greater difficulties, while students studying in classes containing more than 40 learners obtained the highest scores.

All questionnaire dimensions were significantly correlated. The strongest relationship was found between thought organization and paragraph-writing difficulties. The regression analysis also identified thought organization as the strongest predictor of students' ability to produce coherent and meaningful paragraphs.

Discussion

The high prevalence indicated that there was a significant education concern with written-expression difficulty. Writing demanded that students integrate the process of generating ideas, structuring language, organizing language, formatting language, incorporating punctuation and grammar, and self-monitoring. If any element is weak, the end result may be a poor text (Ahmed et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2024). The most common problem and best predictor of paragraph-writing ability was organizational of thoughts. When students did not have the ability to generate, select, sequence, and elaborate ideas, they were not likely to be able to write coherent paragraphs, even with the ability to write simple sentences. This finding was in line with the significance of explicit planning and instruction in writing strategies (Graham et al., 2024).

Also, there was a high prevalence of difficulty in paragraph writing as it involved several skills. Students were required to have one main point, have sentences arranged in a logical order, include transitions, have enough details, and have a suitable ending. Problems in these areas led to the conclusion that isolated sentence activities were not enough to build connected writing. There was a strong relationship between grammar/sentence construction and meaningful communication. The students' incomplete sentences, inconsistent word order, tense, and reference hindered readers from understanding what the students were trying to convey. Struggling writers can benefit from explicit sentence construction and self-monitoring in improving accuracy (Allen & Lembke, 2026).

Punctuation was slightly less common than organization and paragraph writing, but was still a concern. Sentence boundaries and relationships between ideas may be unclear because of errors in punctuation. Students can have learned the rules for punctuation in an exercise but forget to use them in writing due to multiple demands of writing. Students with identified language and learning difficulties scored significantly higher scores. Vocabulary, sentence formulation and expression of ideas are supported by oral language, and difficulties may impact spelling, transcription, working memory, planning, and revision. There should therefore be a connection between this written-expression assessment and language and learning evaluation more broadly (Ahmed et al., 2022).

The sensitivity of the questionnaire was supported by the large difference between the identified writing difficulty. But the instrument was still used as a screening assessment, not as a

diagnostic assessment. To pinpoint individual students' needs, direct writing samples, curriculum-based measures, language assessment and observation would all be needed. Difficulty scores were higher for older students and higher grade-level students. Writing skills usually get better as age goes up but so do expectations. In the upper grades, in elementary school, students will create longer, more structured, more independent texts, and may be more obvious when they encounter problems.

The larger classes also had higher levels of problems. Writing instruction must be accompanied by modelling, conferring, one-to-one feedback, revision support and repeated opportunities to write. It is challenging to consistently deliver these practices when teachers are teaching multiple classes of many students. Public and rural schools may have larger classes, different teachers, fewer writing resources, fewer opportunities to speak English, and less individual attention in school than do urban schools, which could account for the difference in scores. These findings should be seen as potential contextual differences and not as a lack of ability in the students. The results lent themselves to a more broad approach to writing teaching than to excessive attention to copying or to error correction. There must be opportunities for students to brainstorm ideas, discuss plans, write for purpose, get feedback, revise, and publish or share completed texts (Graham et al., 2024; Karakuş, 2023).

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicated that there were problems with organizing thoughts, applying grammar and punctuation, paragraph development, and meaningful written communication that emerged in elementary students. Over three quarters of the sample had moderate or high difficulty. The areas with the greatest development were organization of thoughts and paragraph writing. It is a common problem that students find it hard to sequence ideas, provide supporting details, keep ideas coherent, form complete sentences and communicate a clear message. Results also confirmed that writing difficulty was multi-dimensional. Effective communication did not depend on mechanical correctness, and effective ideas could not be communicated well without sentence structure, organization, and conventions. Students with known writing and language and/or learning difficulties seemed to be at particular risk. Students in large public classrooms and in rural classrooms also had higher difficulties, as did those performing below average in writing. The study highlighted the importance of early screening, explicit writing instruction, structured planning support, sentence-level instruction, contextual grammar and punctuation instruction, guided paragraph development, and systematic revision.

Recommendations

Strengthen Institutional Capacity: Educational institutions should enhance teacher training, infrastructure, and policy implementation to ensure effective adoption of the study's recommended practices and improve educational outcomes.

Promote Technology-Enabled and Inclusive Practices: Stakeholders should integrate evidence-based technologies, inclusive instructional strategies, and continuous professional development to improve accessibility, participation, and learner achievement.

Enhance Policy, Research, and Collaboration: Policymakers, educational institutions, and researchers should collaborate to establish sustainable implementation frameworks, allocate adequate resources, and conduct longitudinal research to evaluate long-term effectiveness.

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