

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Literature Review

1. Writing in EFL Students

Writing is a critical skill for vocational students, as it allows them to express ideas, facts, and opinions clearly in both academic and professional contexts. In vocational education, writing serves as a means to communicate technical knowledge and practical skills, which are essential for students' future careers. However, mastering writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) presents unique challenges due to differences in grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure.

In EFL contexts, learners frequently face challenges such as limited lexical resources, weak grammatical control, and difficulty in developing ideas in a foreign language. According to Silalahi (2020), inadequate vocabulary and poor grammar mastery significantly hinder students' ability to produce clear and coherent written texts. Furthermore, writing is often considered the most difficult language skill by students due to its demand for accuracy in structure, vocabulary, and punctuation, which causes anxiety and reduces confidence Abbas & Syaifullah (2023). These challenges are even more pronounced in vocational education, where students must bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and practical application by Zummaroh, (2020). These obstacles highlight the need for instructional strategies tailored to improve writing confidence and competence among

vocational students to ensure that their communication skills align with industry and workplace expectations.

The difficulties are further amplified in vocational high school settings, where students may prioritize practical job oriented skills over academic literacy. Many vocational students are unfamiliar with academic writing conventions and require contextualized tasks that align with their vocational interests, such as business reports, emails, or proposals. These learners benefit more from writing activities that are integrated into real-world problem-solving tasks.

To address these issues, the teaching of writing must be both supportive and meaningful. As Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory suggests, learning is most effective when mediated through social interaction and scaffolding. In writing instruction, this means students should be guided through collaborative planning, receive constructive feedback, and be provided with authentic writing contexts. As Shooshtari and Mir (2014) explain, scaffolding through peer and tutor mediation significantly enhances students' ability to apply effective writing strategies, allowing learners to progress from reliance on group support toward self-regulated writing. They emphasize that "learning possesses a 'transactional' nature, namely, it primarily occurs through interaction with more experienced guides who can support the actions of the novice learner," and that language is a symbolic tool that mediates this learning process within the Zone of Proximal Development. Given the many linguistic, cognitive, and motivational

problems of EFL learners especially in the vocational education setting it is evident that writing cannot remain with conventional methods. Models of learning are desperately required that not only address learners' linguistic deficits but also foster engagement, cooperation, and critical reflection. Problem-Based Learning (PBL) offers a potential answer, since it situates writing within the framework of authentic and significant tasks that mirror true vocational demands. By integrating PBL into writing pedagogy, instructors can cultivate both the technical accuracy and communicative capacity that students need in order to write effectively in their future careers. Furthermore, this study adopts PBL as a strategic pedagogical framework to build the writing skill of vocational high school students to bridge the gap between academic and workplace writing.

To conclude that, writing in EFL contexts, particularly for vocational students, demands not only linguistic competence, but also pedagogical strategies aligned with students' practical needs and real-world applications. The unique challenges these learners face, such as limited vocabulary, weak grammar, and low self-confidence, are compounded by their focus on work-related skills rather than academic literacy. Therefore, writing instruction should be based on supportive, interactive and meaningful contexts. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory underscores the value of scaffolding and social interaction in promoting writing development, especially when students are guided within their Zone of Proximal Development. With its emphasis on collaboration, real-world problem solving, and purposeful

writing, Problem-Based Learning (PBL) emerges as an appropriate approach to improve writing skills and student engagement. For this reason, adopting PBL offers a theoretically sound and practically relevant solution to improve vocational EFL students' writing ability.

2. Teaching Writing of EFL Students

Teaching writing to EFL students requires educators to address both linguistic and cognitive challenges. Effective instruction involves strategies that accommodate diverse student needs and promote active engagement in the writing process. Explicit instruction is essential in guiding learners to understand writing expectations and build foundational skills. Prakoso, et al., (2021), demonstrated that the implementation of the Genre-Based Approach (GBA), which includes explicit modeling and scaffolding, significantly improved students' writing performance by providing structured exposure to textual conventions. Similarly, Gintings (2020), emphasized that GBA effectively supports students in understanding the purpose, organization, and features of different text types, thereby helping them compose more targeted and coherent writing products.

In a comparable approach emphasizing student-centered learning, Khairiyah et al.,(2023), employed Problem-Based Learning (PBL) to enhance descriptive writing skills among junior high school students. Their qualitative findings revealed that PBL not only fostered students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities but also significantly improved writing outcomes, with an average score of 88.7%, indicating a high level

of effectiveness. Furthermore, collaborative strategies such as peer review and joint construction core elements in both GBA and PBL facilitated critical analysis and mutual feedback among students, enhancing their ability to reflect on and improve their work. The iterative nature of process writing, involving multiple drafts and revisions, was also found to build learner autonomy and confidence. These findings highlight the importance of structured, socially situated writing instruction whether through GBA or PBL in supporting the development of EFL learners' writing competence.

The comparative insights drawn from the implementation of Genre-Based Approach (GBA) and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) underscore the critical importance of employing student-centered, structured, and interactive methodologies in teaching writing to EFL learners. Both approaches have demonstrated measurable success in enhancing students' writing competence by integrating explicit instruction, scaffolded support, collaborative learning, and real-world contextualization. While GBA emphasizes the mastery of textual conventions and genre awareness, PBL cultivates students' critical thinking and engagement through problem-solving tasks. The convergence of these strategies points to a shared pedagogical foundation that values process-oriented learning and learner autonomy. These findings reinforce the need for innovative and responsive instructional models that align with the cognitive and linguistic demands of EFL writing, particularly within the vocational education context.

3. Teaching Writing by Using Problem-Based Learning (PBL) for Vocational High School Students

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) offers a dynamic and student-centered approach to teaching writing, particularly for vocational high school students. PBL integrates real-world challenges into the learning process, encouraging students to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative skills while improving their writing proficiency.

In vocational education, PBL aligns writing tasks with professional contexts, such as drafting reports, creating project proposals, or writing technical manuals. Haryani (2024) demonstrated that applying a problem-based learning model in vocational settings significantly enhanced students' writing outcomes in her study on personal letter writing, students' average score increased to 90.26%, indicating strong effectiveness. Through PBL, students actively confront real problems and generate written solutions, fostering deeper content comprehension and communicative competence.

To ensure the successful application of PBL in the classroom, the learning process must follow systematic and structured stages that guide both teachers and students through each phase. According to Atmaningsih & Dyah., (2019), the steps in implementing PBL consist of: (1) orienting students to the problem, where the teacher explains the learning objectives, the required materials, and presents phenomena or stories that can raise a problem; (2) organizing students to learn by forming groups and clarifying their roles and tasks; (3) guiding individual and group investigations to

encourage students to gather relevant information; (4) developing and presenting students' work, where students prepare their written solutions to be shared or presented to the class; and (5) analyzing and evaluating the problem-solving process through reflection guided by the teacher .

Implement Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in teaching writing, based on the study by Dastgeer and Afzal (2014), In applying Problem-Based Learning (PBL) to the teaching of writing, particularly essay writing, students are first divided into small groups consisting of four to five members. The teacher introduces an authentic and relatable real-world problem that serves as the foundation for the writing task. This problem is designed to engage students and reflect situations they may encounter in everyday life, making the writing activity more meaningful.

The PBL process typically unfolds across three classroom meetings. In the first session, students work collaboratively within their groups to understand the nature of the problem. They discuss what information is needed and determine how they will explore it. Much of this investigative work is carried out outside the classroom, encouraging self-directed learning and independent study.

In the second meeting, students return with their findings and continue to refine their understanding of the problem. Through further discussion, they narrow down their focus, clarify ideas, and begin drafting possible solutions in the form of written texts. This stage also involves more at-home work, where students begin writing their essays based on the information

they have gathered.

By the third meeting, students share their drafts within their groups. They evaluate each other's work, discuss alternative ideas, and decide on the most effective solutions or structures for their essays. Eventually, they present their final written work to the whole class for broader feedback and discussion.

Throughout the entire process, the teacher plays a crucial role—not as a lecturer, but as a facilitator. The teacher provides guidance, monitors group progress, and supports students in their learning journey. Writing outcomes are then assessed using a clear rubric that focuses on elements such as structure, coherence, vocabulary, grammar, and the relevance of the content to the problem presented.

This PBL approach not only improves students' writing skills but also promotes critical thinking, collaboration, and independent learning. By situating writing tasks in real-life contexts, students become more engaged and better prepared for communication challenges beyond the classroom.

Improving students' writing skills requires teaching approaches that not only focus on language form but also promote critical thinking and meaningful learning experiences. Dastgeer and Afzal (2014), found that PBL significantly improved students' essay-writing skills compared to traditional methods. The study highlighted that engaging in real-world tasks and receiving continuous feedback helped students develop coherence, critical thinking, and appropriate vocabulary use. Similarly, Sulistyio et al. (2017),

demonstrated that PBL enhances higher-order cognitive skills, such as analysis and synthesis, which directly contribute to better writing outcomes. A clear understanding of the stages and principles of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is essential for effectively applying this model in teaching writing skills. From the theories presented by Atmaningsih (2019) and Dastgeer & Afzal (2014), it can be concluded that the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model is a relevant and effective learning approach to be applied in teaching writing skills. Atmaningsih (2019), explains the systematic stages in implementing PBL in the classroom, starting from orientation to the problem, organizing learning groups, investigation, developing and presenting work results, to evaluation and reflection on the problem-solving process. These stages provide clear guidance for teachers and students in implementing structured learning.

The practical application of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in writing instruction has been proven in improving students' writing ability and critical thinking skills. Meanwhile, Dastgeer and Afzal (2014), emphasize more on the practical implementation of PBL in the context of learning to write essays at the secondary school level. They showed that the application of PBL through small group work, discussion of real problems, and collaborative drafting of written solutions was able to improve students' critical thinking skills, learning independence, and writing quality. Based on the understanding from both sources, it can be concluded that PBL not only improves the technical aspects of writing, but also forms an active,

reflective, and responsive attitude to problems, which is very important in learning in a vocational school environment. Therefore, PBL can be an effective alternative to develop students' writing skills more thoroughly.

4. Assessing Writing Skills for Vocational High Schools

Assessing vocational high school students' writing skill needs to be done in a delicate manner taking into account the language skills of EFL learners as well as communication demands of their occupational fields. Writing in such environments is not just a function of language form, but also conveying job-related information effectively, such as writing business letters, project reports, or technical writing.

Contextualized writing assessment in vocational education must align with specific genres, purposes, and audiences to prepare students for authentic workplace communication tasks. As suggested by Weigle (2002), writing assessment should be responsive to genre, purpose, and audience domain areas that are particularly germane to vocational education. Assessment will then have to be contextualized, approximating real communication scenarios students can anticipate in the labor market. For example, students enrolled in a banking program might be required to write memos, financial statements, or customer service e-mails. Thus, assessment is still academically challenging yet professionally relevant.

The following items are generally tested in writing testing:

1. Content relevance and clarity – how much the student responds to the prompt/problem.

2. Organization and coherence – logical sequence of ideas.
3. Use of vocabulary – specialized vocabulary included.
4. Grammatical accuracy – developmental error tolerance in early drafts.
5. Task fulfillment – how much the writing is accomplished for communicative purpose.

Both formative and summative assessment play essential roles. Formative tests (e.g., writing journals, peer review, drafts) are the core within a process approach, as they allow for reflection, revision, and gradual improvement. Summative tests (e.g., final projects or tests) assess overall proficiency and task completion. The incorporation of self- and peer assessment into writing curriculum leads to metacognitive growth and student independence. Black and Wiliam (2009) emphasize that these methods enhance learning gains through the engagement of students in the assessment process, which is crucial for vocational learners who will be working independently in the industry.

Assessment in the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) environment is more authentic. Writing tasks are placed within real-life situations and require that students provide reflective writing in the resolution of a problem. Dastgeer and Afzal (2014) concluded that writing tests administered through a PBL concentration—such as reflective reports, proposal for solutions, and group written presentations enhanced writing quality alongside developing critical thinking as well as mastery of the subject.

Assessment plays a crucial role in shaping students' writing skills, especially when aligned with real-world tasks and meaningful learning processes. Furthermore, Kristyanawati et al. (2018) argue that assessment based on PBL incites students to write with more purpose and ownership, hence improvement in expression clarity and motivation. Their study is evidence of the argument that when writing is anchored to authentic problems, students are more motivated and capable of expressing ideas in systematic, purposeful designs. In general, writing assessment in vocational schools must be authentic, formative, and for workplace communication tasks. Through the use of PBL, assessment is no longer a static product assessment but a dynamic learning process, facilitating writing as a problem-solving and professional development tool.

B. Relevant Research

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) has been widely studied as an instructional model aimed at fostering student engagement and improving learning outcomes. This section compares findings from previous research to understand how PBL has been implemented and its effectiveness, particularly in enhancing writing skills.

Motivation and writing proficiency are key factors in successful language learning, and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) has been shown to positively affect both aspects in classroom settings. Kristyanawati et al. (2018), conducted a study at SMP Negeri 3 Surakarta to examine the impact of PBL on students' motivation and writing skills in composing exposition texts. Their

findings revealed that PBL significantly improved students' motivation, with the percentage of highly motivated students increasing throughout three learning cycles. Furthermore, the students' writing scores rose steadily, with an average increase from 63.09 in Cycle I to 80.22 in Cycle III. The study concluded that PBL effectively enhanced writing proficiency, particularly in organizing ideas coherently and using appropriate language structures.

One of the main focuses in teaching writing in EFL contexts is finding effective methods to improve students' writing skills, especially in essay writing. Dastveer and Afzal (2014), explored the effectiveness of PBL in an EFL writing context. Their research highlighted that PBL significantly outperformed traditional lecture-based methods in improving students' essay-writing skills. The study found that PBL provided opportunities for students to engage in authentic tasks, which fostered critical thinking and collaboration. The researchers emphasized the role of group discussions in enabling students to refine their ideas and improve the structure of their essays.

The development of students' critical thinking and argumentative writing skills has become a key concern in EFL writing instruction. Sulistyono et al. (2017), in their study published in the *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, investigated the influence of PBL on critical thinking and argumentative writing skills. The results demonstrated that PBL not only improved students' ability to construct logical arguments but also enhanced their capacity to synthesize and evaluate information. The authors highlighted that the inquiry-based nature of PBL encouraged students to develop higher-order thinking

skills, which directly contributed to better writing outcomes.

These studies collectively suggest that PBL is an effective approach for improving writing skills, particularly in EFL and vocational education contexts. While Kristyanawati et al. (2018), emphasized its role in enhancing motivation and language use, Dastveer and Afzal (2014), highlighted its impact on essay structure and collaborative learning. Sulistyono et al. (2017), focused on the development of critical thinking and argumentative writing. Together, these findings underline the adaptability of PBL across different educational settings and its potential to address various challenges in teaching writing. By synthesizing insights from these studies, it can be concluded that PBL not only enhances students' writing proficiency but also fosters skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration. These attributes are essential for vocational students, as they prepare for real-world communication tasks in their future professions.

C. Theoretical Framework

Writing is a crucial skill for EFL students, as it enables them to express their thoughts, ideas, and knowledge effectively. However, many students face challenges when writing in a foreign language, such as difficulty organizing their ideas, limited vocabulary, and grammatical inaccuracies. Developing writing skills requires not only linguistic knowledge but also practice, motivation, and confidence. In vocational education, the ability to write effectively becomes even more critical, as it often serves as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical application in real-world contexts.

PBL is an innovative teaching model that focuses on solving real-world problems. In this approach, students are encouraged to think critically, collaborate with peers, and take ownership of their learning process. By working through complex issues, learners develop the ability to analyze situations, find solutions, and reflect on their work. PBL shifts the traditional role of the teacher from a primary source of knowledge to a facilitator, guiding students as they navigate and construct their understanding. This model creates an active learning environment where students are motivated to explore and engage deeply with the content.

PBL provides a dynamic platform to address the challenges of writing in EFL contexts. By engaging students in real-world problems, PBL creates meaningful opportunities for them to practice writing. The problem-solving nature of PBL mirrors the stages of the writing process, such as brainstorming, drafting, revising, and finalizing. Through this approach, students not only enhance their linguistic competence but also develop critical thinking and organizational skills essential for effective writing. Additionally, the collaborative and inquiry-based nature of PBL fosters a supportive learning environment, which can increase students' motivation and confidence in their writing abilities. This alignment between the PBL approach and the process of writing makes it an effective method for improving both the technical and creative aspects of students' writing skills.

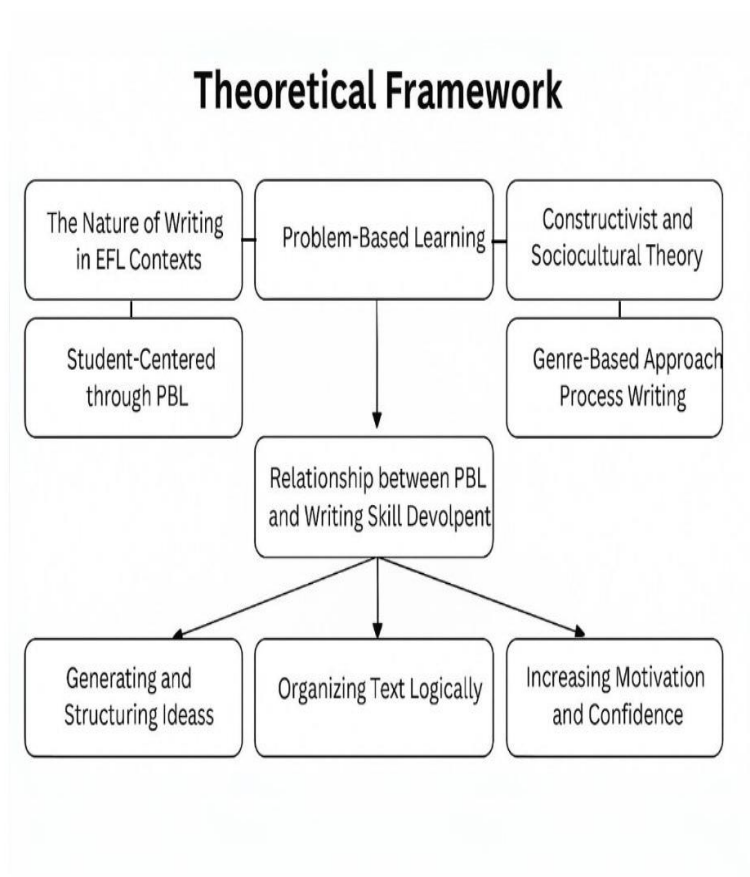


Figure 2. 1 Theoretical Framework