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Elementary students' writing difficulties in Makassar: Patterns, challenges, and learning implications

Authors

- **Tasrif Akib** Department of Primary Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, Makassar
- **Burhan Burhan** Department of Primary Education, Universitas Bosowa, Makassar
- **Arisa Darwis** Department of Primary Education, Universitas Bosowa, Makassar
- **Agung Rinaldy Malik** Department of Foreign Language Education, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar
- **Zaqueu António Freitas** Instituto Superior Cristal (ISC)

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Abstract

This study investigates elementary students' writing difficulties in Makassar, Indonesia, using a convergent mixed-methods design. It responds to the need for contextually grounded evidence that not only maps students' writing performance across analytic dimensions but also explains the classroom conditions shaping those patterns. Quantitative data were collected from 170 upper-elementary students through a classroom-based writing test assessed with an analytic rubric covering content development, organization, vocabulary use, sentence construction, and mechanics. Qualitative data were obtained through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with 15 teachers. The findings revealed that students' overall writing performance was moderate, with a total mean score of 66.00 (SD = 9.84). Most students were in the moderate category (60.0%), followed by the low category (22.9%) and the high category (17.1%). Dimensionally, students performed better in mechanics/spelling (M = 14.63, SD = 2.87) and vocabulary use (M = 14.11, SD = 2.94), while content development (M = 12.48, SD = 3.21) and sentence construction (M = 11.76, SD = 3.35) remained the most fragile areas. Writing performance also showed gradual improvement across grade levels. Qualitative findings identified four interrelated challenges: limited idea development, weak sentence construction and grammatical control, restricted opportunities for meaningful writing practice, and product-oriented assessment with limited feedback scaffolding. These findings indicate that students'

writing difficulties are shaped by both learner-level limitations and classroom instructional conditions. The study suggests the need for process-based writing pedagogy that strengthens idea elaboration, sentence-level support, sustained writing practice, and revision-oriented feedback.