

Cultural Influences on English Writing Styles: A Review of Studies on Indonesian ESL Learners

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Abstract

This study investigates the cultural influences on English writing styles among Indonesian ESL learners. Through a systematic literature review, it identifies common characteristics, challenges, and themes in the writing of these students. The findings indicate that the influence of the Indonesian language and culture significantly impacts the coherence, organization, and syntax of English writing. Indonesian students tend to face difficulties in structuring their essays and utilizing the appropriate academic tone, often due to the transfer of their native language structures and cultural norms. This research emphasizes the need for culturally responsive teaching strategies in ESL classrooms to better support Indonesian learners. The findings highlight the importance of understanding cultural contexts when teaching writing skills, providing meaningful insights for educators looking to enhance their teaching practices in Indonesia. Future research should study more ways to help Indonesian ESL students overcome cultural challenges in writing. Because culture affects how students write, new studies can look at teaching methods that help them write in a way that fits both their own culture and English academic writing rules. For example, researchers can explore how teaching argument writing, giving peer feedback, and using culture-friendly lessons can help students express their ideas more clearly. Also, future research should look at how students' English level, school background, and experience with English affect their writing skills. It is also important to study how digital tools, online writing programs, and AI feedback can support ESL students in learning to write better. Studying this topic more will help improve teaching methods and lesson plans so that Indonesian students get better support in learning to write in English. By finding the best ways to include culture in writing lessons, teachers can help students succeed in school and in their future careers.

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INTRODUCTION

Many Indonesian students find it hard to write in English because of language and cultural differences. First, English grammar is more complex than Indonesian grammar, making translation and writing difficult. For example, noun phrases in English have different structures than in Indonesian, which can cause confusion (Fithriani et al., 2019). Moreover, since Indonesian lacks a tense system, students often struggle with verb tenses in English. In English, time is shown through verb forms, while in Indonesian, it is often understood from the context. This difference makes students use incorrect verb forms when writing (Sukarno, 2016).

Another challenge is the lack of English exposure in daily life. Many students only use English in school, so they do not have enough practice in real situations (Maulidiyah, 2023). Without regular contact with native speakers, students may not fully understand how to write in a natural and fluent way (Hartono & Maharani, 2020). Because of these difficulties, academic writing in English becomes even harder for Indonesian students. Limited exposure also means that students

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do not develop strong vocabulary and expressions commonly used in English writing, leading to unnatural sentence structures and awkward phrasing.

Cultural differences also affect how students write. In Indonesian culture, people value harmony and community, which influences their writing style. Indonesian students may avoid direct and strong statements in their writing because they are used to indirect communication. However, English academic writing prefers clear and direct arguments, which can be difficult for Indonesian students to follow (Arsyad & Arono, 2016). This indirect style may make their arguments appear weak or unclear when judged by English academic standards.

The way ideas are organized in writing is also different. Indonesian writing often presents ideas in a circular way, while English writing follows a clear and straight structure (Fajrina et al., 2022). Because of this, Indonesian students may struggle to organize their writing according to English rules while still wanting to keep their cultural style. These cultural and language differences create extra challenges for Indonesian students learning to write in English. Additionally, in English writing, paragraphs are expected to have a clear topic sentence followed by supporting details, whereas in Indonesian writing, ideas may be developed in a less linear manner.

Many Indonesian students also experience anxiety when writing in English. They worry about making mistakes and being judged by their teachers or classmates. Research shows that this fear can make students hesitant to express their ideas, which affects their writing performance (Kusumaningputri et al., 2018). The problem gets worse when students do not practice writing enough, making them less confident in their skills (Cahyono et al., 2023). Furthermore, students who lack confidence often write shorter and simpler sentences to avoid mistakes, which limits their ability to develop complex ideas in their essays.

Grammar mistakes are another common problem. Many students make errors in prepositions and tenses because these rules are different from Indonesian grammar (Budiharto et al., 2022). These mistakes happen because students apply Indonesian language rules to English writing, which leads to errors (Sukarno, 2016). To improve their writing, students need clear guidance and practice to overcome these difficulties. In addition, errors in subject-verb agreement and article usage are frequent because these elements do not function the same way in Indonesian, making it difficult for students to master them without constant practice and feedback.

Many studies have explored how cultural influences affect Indonesian students' English writing. Research shows that students often use their native writing style when writing in English, which can cause misunderstandings (Abbott et al., 2010). One key issue is that Indonesian students may struggle to present strong arguments because their culture values group harmony, which is different from English academic writing that encourages individual expression (Alzubi & Nazim, 2024). These differences make it important to adjust writing instruction in Indonesia to help students succeed. Teachers should consider incorporating contrastive rhetoric approaches to help students understand the differences between Indonesian and English writing styles.

Another significant issue is the influence of translation strategies on writing quality. Many Indonesian students think in their native language and translate their ideas into English, which often results in awkward or unnatural sentence structures. This process can cause errors in word choice, sentence coherence, and paragraph development. Encouraging students to think in English while writing and exposing them to authentic English texts can help reduce these issues and improve their overall writing proficiency.

Furthermore, the lack of strong reading habits among students contributes to their difficulties in writing. Reading widely in English helps students internalize grammar patterns, sentence structures, and academic vocabulary, but many Indonesian students do not engage in extensive reading. As a result, they struggle to produce well-organized essays with appropriate academic language. Teachers can address this issue by integrating reading activities into writing instruction and encouraging students to analyze well-written texts as models for their writing.

In addition to reading habits, cultural influences also shape students' writing styles, making it essential for teachers to understand these factors when teaching English in Indonesia. Teachers should recognize these cultural influences and adapt their instructional approaches to enhance students' writing skills (Fajriah et al., 2019). By considering both language and cultural differences, teachers can create better learning experiences and support students in writing more effectively in English. Providing explicit instruction on the differences between Indonesian and English academic

writing can help students adjust their writing strategies and develop confidence in expressing their ideas clearly.

This research reviews previous studies on cultural influences and writing styles in Indonesian students learning English. It aims to highlight the challenges they face and provide ideas for better teaching methods. By understanding these issues, teachers can develop strategies to help students become better English writers. Practical approaches such as writing workshops, peer reviews, and individualized feedback can help address students' unique difficulties and enhance their writing abilities over time.

In conclusion, studying how culture affects English writing in Indonesian students is important for improving their writing skills. This research can help teachers create better learning environments and improve education in Indonesia. By understanding the relationship between language, culture, and writing, teachers can support students in achieving success in English writing. With the right strategies and a supportive learning environment, Indonesian students can develop their writing skills and become more confident in expressing their ideas in English.

METHOD

This research used a mixed-methods approach, focusing on a literature review and qualitative analysis (Richards et al., 2022). The literature review summarized past research on how Indonesian ESL students wrote and how culture influenced their writing. The qualitative part looked deeper into common themes, patterns, and problems found in previous studies (Ospina et al., 2017). Combining these methods allowed the research to answer its main questions clearly and systematically.

To select past studies, the researcher followed clear criteria. The studies had to be relevant to Indonesian ESL learners, especially if they discussed how culture affected writing styles. The main selection rules included choosing studies published in respected academic journals and ensuring they had been reviewed by experts (Hyett et al., 2014). Also, the studies needed to focus on cultural influences on writing and directly relate to Indonesian students' experiences. By selecting studies carefully, the researcher aimed to collect reliable information on how culture shaped writing habits.

The researcher organized the chosen studies into themes to make analysis easier. The main themes included how culture affected writing, common writing problems Indonesian students faced, and how their writing differed from English writing norms. Each theme was explained in detail, with examples from the studies. This organization helped in understanding how culture influenced writing and the challenges students experienced.

After organizing the data, the researcher analyzed it using qualitative content analysis. This method helped identify patterns, key ideas, and differences across studies (Mawn et al., 2009). It was important because it provided a deep understanding of how culture affected writing styles. Thematic analysis was also used to find key findings from different studies, ensuring various cultural perspectives were included (Alam & Shaba, 2022).

Additionally, the researcher **used** triangulation to make the findings stronger. This **meant** combining different sources of information to improve accuracy. By comparing different studies and viewpoints, the researcher **hoped** to give a balanced picture of how cultural influences **shaped** Indonesian ESL students' writing styles. This careful approach **ensured** the results **were** reliable and useful in the educational field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study wants to know how Indonesian students who learn English as a second language (ESL) write and how their culture affects their writing style. It also talks about the difficulties they face when writing in English.

First, the study shows that Indonesian ESL students often write in a way that is similar to their native language, Indonesian. This influence appears in grammar, sentence structure, and how ideas are connected in writing. Many students use Indonesian sentence structures when writing in English, which can cause confusion (Bhowmik & Kim, 2024). For example, how conjunctions and sentence flow work in Indonesian is different from English. This shows that a student's first language has a big role in learning English writing.

Second, the study finds that many Indonesian students have problems organizing their essays. Their writing may not have a clear introduction, body, and conclusion, making their ideas less clear. Also, Indonesian students often do not follow the linear structure of English essays, making their writing hard to understand (Azmar & Razali, 2024). This lack of structure can result in disorganized arguments, making it difficult for readers to follow their reasoning.

Another challenge is making writing connected and smooth. Good writing needs sentences and paragraphs to be well linked. The study finds that Indonesian ESL learners use fewer linking words compared to native English speakers. For example, they often repeat simple conjunctions, which makes their writing sound repetitive and less advanced (Sasaki, 2007). Without strong cohesion, their writing may feel fragmented, making it hard for readers to see logical connections between ideas.

Also, grammar and sentence structure are common problems. Indonesian does not have the same formal and complex sentence structures as English. While many students write in short and simple sentences, this clarity often comes at the expense of the complexity required in academic English (Yang et al., 2022). As a result, they struggle to express deeper ideas in writing. Furthermore, Indonesian ESL learners tend to struggle with verb tenses, prepositions, and subject-verb agreement, as these grammatical elements work differently in their native language.

Compared to native English speakers, Indonesian students use fewer types of sentences. English writing mixes simple, compound, and complex sentences, but Indonesian learners often write only simple ones because they are not comfortable with more difficult structures (Liao, 2018). For example, native speakers change sentence length and style to make writing interesting, but Indonesian students usually write short sentences because they are unsure or not used to writing differently. This lack of variety can make their writing monotonous and less engaging to readers.

The way Indonesian students write also shows how their culture affects their writing. In Indonesia, people value politeness and indirect speech, so their writing style is often longer and more indirect. However, in Western academic writing, people prefer to be direct and brief (Ismail et al., 2024). Because of this, Indonesian students may find it hard to write in a way that feels natural to them. They may use flowery language or lengthy introductions instead of getting straight to the point, which can make their arguments less effective in an English academic setting.

Culture is important in explaining why Indonesian students have difficulties in writing. For example, Indonesian culture values collectivism, meaning people do not want to express strong personal opinions. This results in essays that are less persuasive and lack strong argumentative structure (Maznun et al., 2017). In English writing, strong arguments and critical thinking are important, but Indonesian students may not be used to this style. This reluctance to assert individual perspectives can make their essays lack a strong thesis statement or clear argumentative stance.

Additionally, Indonesian students may struggle with expressing disagreement or critique in their writing due to cultural norms that prioritize social harmony. Unlike Western academic traditions that encourage debate and counterarguments, Indonesian learners might avoid directly challenging opposing views, leading to essays that lack critical engagement. This hesitance can weaken their ability to construct persuasive or analytical essays in English.

Moreover, Indonesian students tend to rely more on memorization and repetition in their learning process. While this approach helps them remember grammatical rules and vocabulary, it does not necessarily improve their ability to develop original ideas in writing. Academic writing in English often requires independent thinking and argumentation, which may be challenging for students who are accustomed to rote learning methods.

English teachers in Indonesia should understand these cultural differences to help their students better. If teachers know how culture affects writing, they can teach in a way that helps students overcome their challenges. For example, teachers can train students to write more directly and clearly, following the English academic style (Vorobel & Kim, 2011). They can also introduce strategies such as brainstorming and outlining to help students organize their thoughts before writing.

Teachers can also help students feel more confident in writing. They can organize writing workshops to guide students on essay structure, organization, and how to make their writing flow

better. Teachers can also encourage peer review activities, where students check each other's work and learn from one another (Sulfiana et al., 2022). Through these activities, students can receive constructive feedback and develop their writing skills in a supportive environment.

Future research should look at different teaching methods and how they improve the writing skills of Indonesian ESL students. For example, studies can see if group writing tasks help students become better writers (Raus et al., 2023). Other studies can also check how students' writing improves over time when they learn cultural adaptation strategies. By examining long-term progress, researchers can identify effective pedagogical approaches for teaching English writing to Indonesian learners.

Moreover, more studies should focus on different ethnic groups in Indonesia. Since Indonesia has many cultures, students from different backgrounds may write in different ways. Understanding these differences can help teachers improve their teaching methods (Raofi et al., 2017). Researchers can also study how teacher training can prepare educators to teach students with cultural influences in writing. Tailoring teaching strategies to accommodate cultural diversity can enhance learning outcomes for Indonesian ESL learners.

Another area for research is the role of technology in improving writing skills. Online writing tools, artificial intelligence-assisted feedback, and digital platforms for collaborative writing could help Indonesian ESL students enhance their proficiency. Investigating the impact of these tools on students' writing development could offer valuable insights for modernizing ESL instruction in Indonesia.

Finally, researchers should compare Indonesian ESL learners with students from other countries. This can help teachers understand common writing problems among ESL students and improve writing education in Indonesia (Fareed et al., 2016). A comparative approach can reveal whether Indonesian students' challenges are unique to their cultural background or shared with learners from other regions, helping educators design targeted interventions.

In conclusion, the study shows that Indonesian ESL students' writing is influenced by their culture. They face many challenges in writing, but teachers can help them with the right teaching methods. Helping students learn English writing while respecting their cultural background can improve their skills and make learning English easier. With continued research and culturally responsive teaching approaches, educators can better support Indonesian ESL learners in developing strong writing abilities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study reveals significant cultural influences on the English writing styles of Indonesian ESL learners. It highlights the challenges these students encounter, such as organizational issues, coherence, and language transfer, which stem from the interplay of their native linguistic backgrounds and cultural norms. These findings underscore the necessity for English teachers in Indonesia to adopt culturally sensitive strategies that acknowledge the students' unique backgrounds. By implementing tailored pedagogical methods, educators can aid students in navigating the complexities of English writing more effectively. Future research should expand on these findings by exploring additional strategies for addressing cultural barriers and enhancing the writing skills of ESL students in Indonesia. Continued investigation in this area is essential for improving educational practices and outcomes for Indonesian learners in English language learning contexts.

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