

# Empowering Adult EFL Learners: A Self-Directed, Process-Oriented Writing Program

Nouf Aljasir

English Language Institute, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

**Abstract**—This quasi-experimental study aimed to empower adult learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) by designing a self-directed, process-oriented writing program to enhance their writing proficiency and address the challenges they face in improving their writing skills outside formal classroom settings. A total of 50 Saudi individuals participated in this 12-week program, which integrated self-directed learning (SDL) principles with the process writing approach. The participants engaged in various writing tasks, reflective activities, and peer feedback sessions. The instruments used for data collection included pre- and post-program writing assessments, weekly writing tasks, and reflective journals. The findings revealed significant improvements in the participants' writing skills across all of the assessed criteria, with the strongest gains in coherence, content and ideas, and cohesion. Additionally, the analysis of the demographic factors indicated that the participants' educational attainment significantly influenced their writing skills improvement. The participants' reflections highlighted several features of the program, such as its structured approach, focus on building self-awareness, opportunities for independent learning, and peer feedback, as key factors in their progress. The study concludes with recommendations for future self-directed writing programs and suggests avenues for further research.

**Index Terms**—self-directed learning (SDL), process-oriented writing, writing proficiency, adult EFL learners, autonomous learning

## I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, proficiency in English has become a vital skill for personal, academic, and professional success. For adult learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), writing proficiency is particularly crucial as it enables effective communication across various contexts, thereby facilitating better opportunities for career advancement and integration into English-speaking environments (Hinkel, 2011; Hyland, 2019; Weigle, 2002). However, many adult EFL learners encounter significant challenges in terms of improving their writing skills, especially when they are not enrolled in formal language classes. These challenges include limited access to structured learning environments, insufficient practice opportunities, and lack of feedback (Fernandez et al., 2017; Reinders & Benson, 2017). For these learners, self-directed learning (SDL) can provide the flexibility and autonomy needed to improve their writing skills outside of formal classroom settings. SDL is a learner-centered approach that empowers individuals to take control of their learning journey. It encourages learners to set their own objectives, identify pertinent resources, select and implement appropriate strategies, and assess their progress (Brookfield, 1985; Candy, 1991; Garrison, 1997; Knowles, 1975; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

In conjunction with SDL, the process writing approach has emerged as a promising method for improving writing skills. This approach encourages learners to view writing not merely as a product but as a recursive activity that benefits from ongoing feedback and revision (Badger & White, 2000; White & Arndt, 1991; Zamel, 1983). By integrating SDL with the process writing approach, learners can tailor their writing practice to their personal goals and contexts, thus leading to more meaningful and sustained improvements.

Despite the potential benefits of SDL and the process writing approach, many adult EFL learners lack access to educational programs that integrate these methodologies. This gap highlights the need for a targeted intervention that can support these learners in developing their writing skills autonomously. Addressing this issue is significant for several reasons:

1. It can empower learners and foster autonomy by providing the necessary resources and tools to improve their writing independently, thereby encouraging a sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning.
2. It can increase accessibility by offering a flexible learning framework that adult learners can integrate into their busy schedules, regardless of their location.
3. It can enhance writing proficiency by improving learners' ability to express ideas clearly and effectively in written English.
4. It can promote lifelong learning through the encouragement of SDL skills, thereby equipping learners with the ability to continuously enhance their writing skills beyond the program's duration.

For more details on the benefits of SDL and the process writing approach, see Brookfield (1985), Candy (1991), Garrison (1997), White and Arndt (1991), and Badger and White (2000).

This study, therefore, sought to address a critical need in EFL education by designing a 12-week program aimed at empowering adult learners who were not enrolled in formal classes to improve their writing skills through self-directed, process-oriented learning. To the author's knowledge, this is the first study to combine the strengths of SDL and the process writing approach, which provides a flexible program to enhance learners' English writing proficiency outside formal educational settings. The specific objectives of the current study included:

1. Designing a comprehensive program: creating a structured yet flexible program that covers all stages of the writing process.
2. Recommending strategies and resources: providing guidance on suitable materials, online tools, and feedback mechanisms that learners can employ for independent learning.
3. Assessing learner outcomes: evaluating improvements in writing skills and analyzing learner perceptions to determine the program's effectiveness.

Three key research questions were investigated in this study:

1. How much and in what ways did the adult EFL learners' writing skills improve after participating in the 12-week self-directed, process-oriented program, as measured by the differences in their pre-program and post-program assessment scores?
2. How did demographic factors such as gender, age, educational attainment, and employment status influence the improvement in writing skills among the learners?
3. How did the learners perceive the effectiveness of the program, based on their reflections throughout the program?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are four main types of paragraphs used in writing: descriptive, narrative, expository, and persuasive. Each type fulfills a distinct function and uses specific techniques to achieve its objective (see e.g., Hameed, 2024; Hwang et al., 2024; Jeong, 2017; Karasinski, 2023; Lee & Lee, 2024; Pourdana & Asghari, 2021). Descriptive writing aims to provide a detailed depiction of a person, place, thing, or event by engaging the reader's senses through detailed observations and sensory details. It uses rich, precise language, including metaphors, similes, and adjectives, to help readers visualize and emotionally experience the scene. Narrative writing tells a story or recounts events with a clear structure, including a beginning, middle, and end, by incorporating elements such as characters, setting, plot, and conflict. It aims to entertain, inform, or convey deeper meanings through engaging and relatable experiences. Expository writing explains, informs, or presents information clearly and concisely, often using definitions, instructions, comparisons, and analyses. It is commonly used in academic writing, journalism, and technical writing to help readers understand complex information by breaking it down into understandable parts. Persuasive writing aims to convince the reader to embrace a specific viewpoint or undertake a particular action through the use of logical reasoning, emotional appeals, and evidence. This type of writing is prevalent in opinion texts and speeches, where the goal is to influence the reader's beliefs or behaviors.

The integration of these various types of writing within educational programs highlights the importance of a comprehensive approach to writing instruction. Building on this foundation, the process writing approach has gained significant recognition in the field of language education for its effectiveness in enhancing writing skills (see e.g., Faraj, 2015; Jalaluddin, 2019; Kadmiry, 2021; Listyani, 2018; Martínez et al., 2020). This approach shifts the focus from producing a final written product to engaging in a series of iterative and reflective stages that enhance the overall writing process. Larsen-Freeman (2000) and Hyland (2019) explained that in the process approach, the writing task is not viewed as a linear sequence of steps but rather as a dynamic and recursive process. According to Tompkins and Goss (1987), this approach involves five key stages that support learners in developing their writing skills, as follows. First, the prewriting stage involves brainstorming and organizing ideas. Learners may use techniques such as mind mapping, listing, or free writing to generate and structure their thoughts. Second, in the drafting stage, learners begin to write their first draft by prioritizing the articulation of their ideas without concern for grammar or punctuation errors. In the revising stage, learners review and modify their drafts to improve content, clarity, and organization. This may involve adding new information, reorganizing paragraphs, and refining the overall structure of the text. The fourth stage, editing, addresses the correction of grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors. Learners polish their drafts to ensure accuracy and readability. Finally, the publishing stage involves sharing the completed work, whether through peer review, submission to a teacher, or publication in a class anthology or online platform. Tompkins and Goss's (1987) five-stage classification was adopted in this research due to its comprehensive nature. Engaging learners in these stages can foster continual improvement and better mastery of the writing process.

The recursive nature of the process writing approach naturally aligns with the principles of SDL by encouraging learners to take charge of their learning. By promoting independence and critical thinking throughout the writing stages, students are better prepared to engage in SDL activities. Knowles (1975, p. 18) defined SDL as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes." Garrison (1997, p. 18) further described SDL as "an approach where learners are motivated to assume personal responsibility and collaborative control of the cognitive (self-monitoring) and contextual (self-management) processes in constructing and confirming meaningful and worthwhile learning outcomes." From these definitions, it is evident that SDL emphasizes the proactive role of learners in managing their own learning processes,

including setting goals, selecting resources, and evaluating outcomes. This approach fosters personal responsibility and autonomy, thereby enabling learners to tailor their learning experiences to their individual needs and contexts.

Garrison's SDL model, developed in 1997, is a comprehensive framework that highlights the active role of learners in their learning process. This model is built around the three key elements of motivation, self-management, and self-monitoring. First, motivation is the driving force behind the initiation and continuation of learning activities. It encompasses two additional elements, entering motivation and task motivation. Entering motivation refers to the initial drive that prompts an individual to engage in learning activities. It is influenced by personal goals, interests, and the perceived value of the learning outcomes. Task motivation focuses on the sustained engagement and effort required to complete specific learning tasks. It is critical for maintaining momentum throughout the learning process. Second, self-management (contextual control) refers to the ability of learners to manage and control the contextual and environmental factors that affect their learning. It involves setting clear learning goals, organizing resources, and managing time effectively. It also includes planning and prioritizing tasks to ensure consistent progress. Overall, self-management focuses on controlling the external factors that influence the learning process. The third element of Garrison's (1997) SDL model is self-monitoring (cognitive responsibility), which involves the cognitive processes by which learners take responsibility for monitoring and evaluating their own learning. It entails regularly assessing progress and reflecting on learning experiences to improve learning outcomes. This element focuses on the internal, cognitive aspects of learning by emphasizing continual evaluation and adjustment of learning approaches.

Garrison's model illustrates that motivation influences self-management by driving the learner to take control of the learning activities. A highly motivated learner is more likely to effectively plan and organize the learning process. Motivation also affects self-monitoring because motivated learners are more inclined to regularly evaluate their progress and seek improvements. Self-management and self-monitoring are closely linked, as effective self-management requires regular self-monitoring to ensure that the learning activities align with the set goals. Self-monitoring also provides the feedback necessary to adjust the management strategies, thus leading to a more controlled and efficient learning process. The interplay between motivation, self-management, and self-monitoring creates a dynamic process that defines SDL. Each element supports and enhances the others, thus fostering an environment where learners are proactive, reflective, and driven in their pursuit of knowledge (Garrison, 1997).

This model is particularly well-suited for the educational program proposed in this study, which aimed to improve writing proficiency among adult EFL learners outside formal educational settings through the process writing approach. The model's three key elements align closely with the needs and challenges faced by these learners. First, the model's focus on both entering and task motivation helps sustain learners' engagement throughout the writing process. Entering motivation encourages learners to initiate the learning journey, which is often driven by personal or professional goals, such as career advancement or effective communication in English-speaking environments. Task motivation keeps learners committed to completing writing tasks, which is essential for the iterative nature of the process writing approach. Additionally, self-management allows learners to set personal goals, select appropriate resources, and create an environment conducive to learning. This autonomy is vital in the process writing approach, in which learners need to manage multiple stages—prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing—each of which requires distinct strategies and resources. Effective self-management helps learners stay organized and focused and ensures that they progress through each stage methodically and effectively. Furthermore, self-monitoring involves continual evaluation and reflection on one's learning progress, which is integral to the process writing approach. Learners must regularly assess their writing, identify areas for improvement, and adjust their strategies accordingly. Garrison's model encourages this reflective practice by promoting responsibility and self-assessment.

It is also important to highlight the synergy between Garrison's SDL model and the process writing approach, which lies in their shared emphasis on iterative learning and autonomy. The process writing approach views writing as a dynamic activity that benefits from ongoing feedback and revision. Garrison's model provides the framework for learners to take charge of this process by leveraging their motivation, self-management, and self-monitoring capabilities. This alignment ensures that learners can independently navigate the complexities of writing, receive and act on feedback, and continually improve their skills.

A comprehensive review of the relevant literature revealed a notable scarcity of research on the impact of SDL on improving writing skills among EFL learners, with no studies having been conducted in the Arab world. However, the limited studies available consistently highlighted the positive effects of SDL and demonstrated significant improvements in learners' writing performance and increased learner autonomy. Coomber (2016), for instance, explored methods to encourage self-directed revision among Japanese EFL students. This study involved two classes: a control group and a treatment group that participated in a grammar workshop and oral presentations and used a 20-point checklist to guide the revision of their drafts. The treatment group made nearly three times as many self-directed revisions as the control group, with 80% improvement in their essays compared to 66% in the control group. Despite these gains, the second drafts still relied heavily on teacher feedback, which underscored the need for additional revision activities to further foster independence in the writing process. In a more recent study, Aghayani and Janfeshan (2020) investigated the impact of SDL on the writing achievements of Iranian EFL students at pre-intermediate and intermediate proficiency levels. Thirty male EFL learners were randomly selected to participate in the study, and posttest results were compared with pretest results to evaluate the effectiveness of the two approaches. The findings demonstrated that SDL significantly

enhanced the writing performance of the students at both proficiency levels. Around the same time, Ramadhani et al. (2020) conducted a quasi-experimental study to explore the impact of SDL on enhancing the academic writing skills of Indonesian university students, both independently and within traditional classroom settings. The findings revealed that SDL significantly enhanced the students' academic writing abilities and promoted greater autonomy in learning. Together, these research studies demonstrated that by engaging in SDL activities, learners developed responsibility for their learning, which led to greater autonomy and improved writing proficiency.

### III. METHODS

This study employed a quasi-experimental design to evaluate the effectiveness of a 12-week self-directed, process-oriented writing program for adult EFL learners. The program (see Appendix A) was designed based on Garrison's SDL model and the process writing approach. It required the participants to devote five to six hours per week and covered four main types of writing: descriptive, narrative, expository, and persuasive. Each week was divided into specific tasks and activities to ensure a well-rounded approach. Additionally, the program ensured that learners had both the resources and tools needed for each task in the program. "Resources" refers to the educational content and materials that provided information, instructions, and examples to help the learners understand and complete each task. These included online articles, videos, guides, and prompts. Tools, on the other hand, are the systems that the learners used to practice or implement the tasks. These included applications, websites, and digital platforms that facilitate writing, editing, and collaboration.

#### A. Participants

The participants in this study were Saudi adult EFL learners who were not enrolled in formal English language classes or engaged in self-study through online learning platforms. This selection was made to ensure that any observed improvements in writing skills could be attributed solely to the program rather than to other forms of learning. A total of 50 participants were recruited through friends and acquaintances using a convenience sampling method. This method involved selecting participants who were readily available and willing to participate in the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). Arabic was the first language of all of the participants. The inclusion criteria were as follows.

- Aged 21 years or older
- Intermediate proficiency in English as determined by a reliable English test, such as the one offered by [efset.org](https://www.efset.org)
- Willingness to commit to the 12-week program and complete all of the required tasks

Table 1 presents the demographic information of the study participants.

TABLE 1  
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Characteristic	Value	Frequency (n = 50)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	23	46.00
	Female	27	54.00
Age group	21-30	29	58.00
	31-40	21	42.00
Educational attainment	High school	14	28.00
	Bachelor's degree	26	52.00
	Master's degree	10	20.00
Employment status	Unemployed	9	18.00
	Employed part-time	15	30.00
	Employed full-time	26	52.00

#### B. Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

To comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of the writing program, several instruments and data collection procedures were employed, commencing in March 2023. At the outset of the study, the participants were informed about the voluntary nature of their participation through an informed consent form, which clearly stated that they were not obligated to complete the program. They were also assured that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without facing any consequences. Furthermore, it was emphasized that their responses would remain confidential, ensuring their privacy and encouraging honest feedback. Following this initial step, the study proceeded with the implementation of the following data collection methods:

##### 1. Demographic Information Questionnaire

This was administered to gather the participants' background information, as detailed in the "Participants" section.

##### 2. Pre-program Writing Assessment

The participants completed this assessment to evaluate their initial writing skills. The following prompt was provided: "Describe a memorable experience from your life and explain why it was significant to you. In your paragraph, be sure to include specific details about the event, how it made you feel, and what you learned from the experience. Use descriptive language to help the reader visualize the scene and understand the importance of this event in your life".

This topic was chosen because it engages participants in descriptive writing by encouraging the use of vivid language and narrative elements. It allows them to express personal experiences and insights and demonstrate their ability to convey

emotions, details, and reflections. The prompt is broad enough to accommodate varying levels of language proficiency while challenging participants to organize their thoughts coherently and use a diverse vocabulary. The assessment was scored using a comprehensive rubric that assessed all of the key elements practiced in the program. This detailed evaluation of the learners' progress included the following eight criteria: paragraph structure, content and ideas, coherence, cohesion, vocabulary usage, sentence structure, grammar, and mechanics (see Appendix B).

3. Weekly Writing Tasks

The participants completed weekly writing tasks using various resources and tools provided in the program (see Appendix A).

4. Reflective Journal

The participants maintained a reflective journal throughout the program to document their learning experiences, challenges, and progress.

5. Post-program Writing Assessment

At the end of the 12-week program, the participants completed a writing assessment on the same topic as the pre-program assessment. This assessment was scored using the same rubric (in Appendix B) to evaluate improvements in their writing skills and to gather feedback on the program.

C. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The pre- and post-program writing assessments were graded by two assessors using the rubric described in the previous section. The assessors were experienced EFL instructors with doctoral degrees in applied linguistics and more than 15 years of experience teaching and evaluating English writing skills. The scores were then compared to determine inter-rater reliability, and a high percentage of 85% was obtained, which indicated strong consistency between the raters. Subsequently, each participant's scores were compared statistically to determine the improvements in writing skills.

Additionally, the participants' reflective journals were translated from Arabic to English, and thematic analysis was conducted to identify common themes and insights regarding their learning experiences and the perceived effectiveness of the program. This analysis involved coding the data, grouping similar codes into themes, and interpreting these themes to obtain a deeper understanding of the learners' perspectives. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the program's impact on the learners' writing skills and their perceptions of the program.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Research Question 1

To assess the improvement in the participants' writing skills, the means for the pre- and post-program writing assessment scores were computed, and a paired-sample t-test was conducted for comparison. The results are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2  
PRE- AND POST-PROGRAM WRITING ASSESSMENT MEAN SCORES AND PAIRED-SAMPLE T-TEST RESULTS

Criteria	Pre-program mean score (SD)	Post-program mean score (SD)	Mean difference	Improvement (%)	t-value
Paragraph structure	3.04 (0.78)	3.94 (0.65)	0.90	29.61	-7.37
Content and ideas	3.00 (0.81)	3.86 (0.78)	0.86	28.67	-10.03
Coherence	2.96 (0.81)	3.76 (0.74)	0.80	27.03	-10.58
Cohesion	3.02 (0.80)	3.90 (0.68)	0.88	29.14	-9.92
Vocabulary usage	2.98 (0.80)	3.72 (0.67)	0.74	24.83	-9.27
Sentence structure	3.04 (0.81)	3.72 (0.73)	0.68	22.37	-7.37
Grammar	2.98 (0.80)	3.74 (0.69)	0.76	25.50	-8.19
Mechanics	2.98 (0.80)	3.86 (0.81)	0.88	29.53	-8.67
Total score	24.00 (4.88)	30.50 (3.50)	6.50	27.08	-14.41

The results indicated that the participants showed notable improvements across all of the assessed criteria. The average total score increased from 24.00 to 30.50, which represented a 27.08% improvement. The strongest improvements in writing skills were observed in the criteria of paragraph structure (29.61%), cohesion (29.14%), and mechanics (29.53%). Figure 1 shows the changes in the pre- and post-program writing assessment scores, which illustrate the noticeable improvements in the writing skills of the participants.

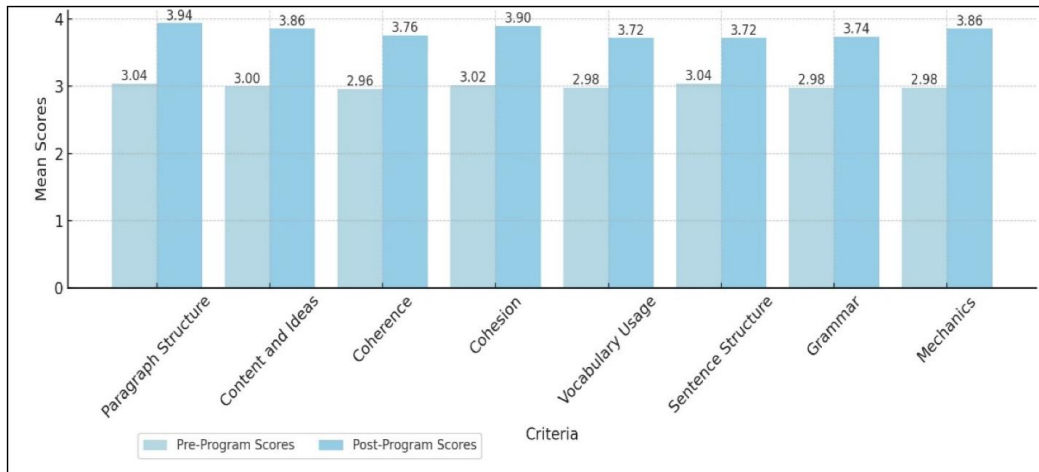


Figure 1. Pre- and Post-Program Writing Assessment Mean Scores

The paired-sample t-test results indicated that the differences in the pre- and post-program scores were statistically significant across all of the criteria ( $p < 0.001$ ), which confirmed the efficacy of the program at enhancing various aspects of the participants' writing skills. The horizontal bar chart presented in Figure 2 shows the t-values for the paired-sample t-tests across the different writing skills criteria. The red dashed line represents the significance threshold. Because all of the t-values exceeded this threshold, the improvements in all of the criteria were considered statistically significant.

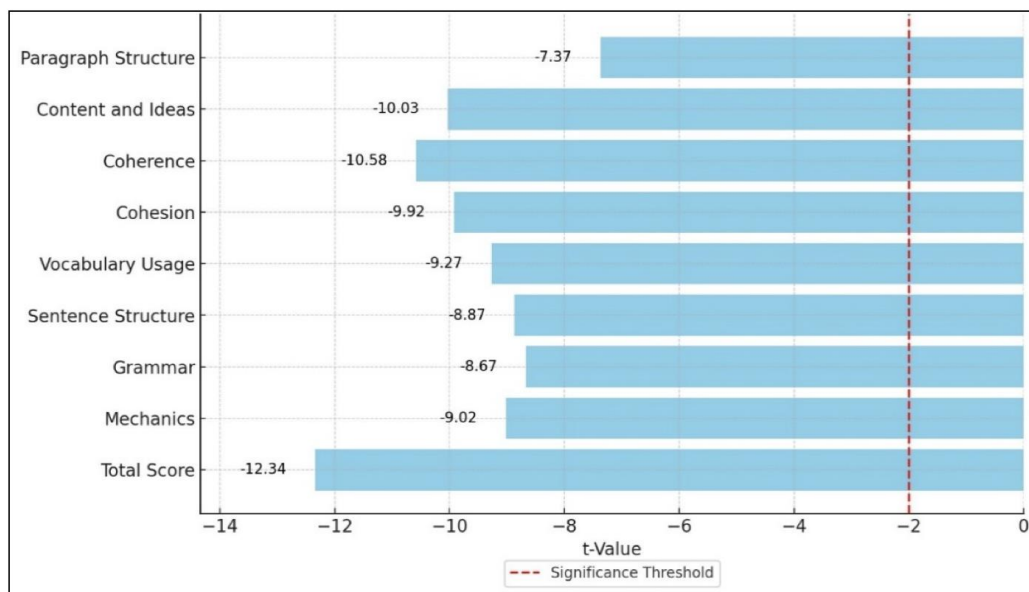


Figure 2. Paired-Sample T-Test Results for Writing Skills Improvement

The three criteria that showed the strongest improvements based on their t-values were coherence ( $t = -10.58$ ), content and ideas ( $t = -10.03$ ), and cohesion ( $t = -9.92$ ). The notable improvement in coherence highlighted the program's success at helping learners logically connect ideas and create a smooth flow in their writing, which is crucial for producing clear and understandable written communication. As one participant reflected, "I learned to connect my ideas better, making my paragraphs clearer. The program's techniques for structuring paragraphs were very effective." The enhancement in content and ideas reflected the participants' ability to generate and develop insightful, engaging, and well-organized ideas and suggests that the program effectively encouraged learners to think critically and express their thoughts effectively. Additionally, the significant improvement in cohesion underscored the program's impact on helping learners use cohesive devices effectively to link sentences and paragraphs. As one participant remarked, "I now understand how to use transition words to connect my sentences. This has made my writing flow much better and clearer".

These findings underscored the program's effectiveness at enhancing critical aspects of writing, thereby enabling the learners to achieve significant progress. This is corroborated by the studies of Aghayani and Janfeshan (2020) and Ramadhani et al. (2020), which also demonstrated that SDL markedly improved their participants' writing performance. Furthermore, the importance of these results is highlighted by earlier research in formal EFL settings (e.g., Hassan et al., 2020; Huang & Zhang, 2020; Kadmiry, 2021; Martinez et al., 2020), which aimed to achieve similar advancements in students' writing through process writing instruction.

**B. Research Question 2**

To understand how various demographic factors influence the improvement in writing skills, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted. This analysis helped isolate the effects of these factors while controlling for baseline performance differences.

TABLE 3  
ANCOVA RESULTS FOR WRITING SKILLS IMPROVEMENT

Variable	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p value
Gender	4.55	1	4.55	0.98	0.33
Age group	0.38	1	0.38	0.08	0.78
Educational attainment	40.27	2	20.13	4.31	0.02
Employment status	1.18	2	0.59	0.13	0.88

The results of the ANCOVA indicated that only educational attainment had a statistically significant effect on the improvement in writing skills, as evidenced by its *p* value of 0.02, which was less than the conventional significance level of 0.05. This means that differences in educational attainment significantly affected how much the participants had improved their writing skills after completing the program. Participants with higher levels of education (e.g., master’s degree) showed greater improvements compared to those with lower educational attainment (e.g., high school). This finding is corroborated by Guerra-Carrillo et al. (2017), who also reported that higher education enhanced cognitive functioning and learning efficacy. This could be attributed to several factors. First, individuals with higher educational attainment are likely to have more experience with academic writing and structured learning environments, which can enhance their ability to engage with and benefit from the self-directed, process-oriented writing program. As one participant reflected, “Having a master’s degree, I found it easier to grasp the program’s writing strategies, as I was already familiar with structured academic writing.” These learners might also possess better-developed critical thinking and self-regulation skills that enable them to apply the program’s strategies more effectively. As another participant noted, “Higher education has taught me to approach learning tasks more critically and systematically.” Furthermore, higher education often provides greater exposure to a variety of writing styles, which can facilitate more substantial improvements when additional instruction and practice are provided.

The box plot in Figure 3 illustrates the improvement in writing skills across the different levels of educational attainment of the participants in the program. It shows that individuals with higher educational attainment (master’s and bachelor’s degrees) tended to have greater improvements compared to those with only a high school education.

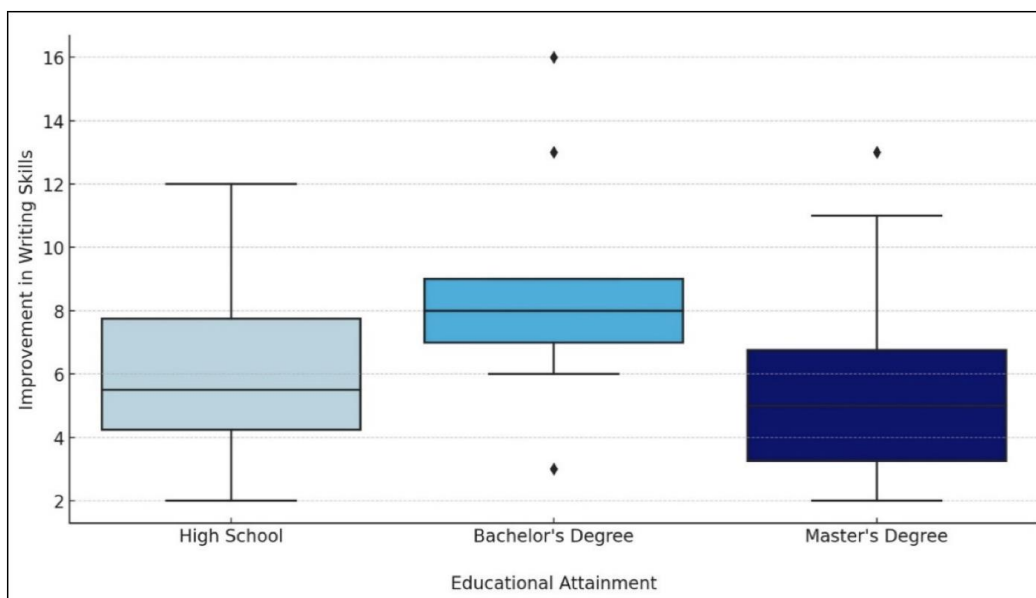


Figure 3. Impact of Educational Attainment on Writing Skills Improvement

**C. Research Question 3**

The participants maintained reflective journals throughout the program where they documented their learning experiences, challenges, and progress. The thematic analysis of these journals revealed several key themes, as detailed below.

**1. Appreciation for the structured approach**

The participants valued the program’s structured yet flexible design, which offered clear guidelines and resources for each writing stage. As one participant remarked, “The step-by-step approach helped me a lot. Breaking down the writing process into smaller tasks made it more manageable and less overwhelming.” Another participant commented, “Having

access to various resources and tools was very helpful. I learned new techniques that I could apply immediately to my writing.” This appreciation aligned with the findings of Cate and Dynan (2010) and Fisher and Frey (2021), who emphasized the importance of structured frameworks and support in enhancing learners’ skills. Their research highlighted how breaking down complex tasks into manageable steps aids learners in effectively navigating the learning process.

#### 2. Increased self-awareness

Many participants noted that the program helped them become more aware of their writing process and areas needing improvement. The reflective activities, in particular, were highlighted for aiding this self-awareness. Self-monitoring, a key element of Garrison’s (1997) SDL model, played a significant role in this process. By regularly tracking their progress and identifying patterns in their writing, the participants were able to pinpoint specific areas for improvement and adjust their strategies accordingly. As one participant remarked, “At the beginning, I was unsure about my writing strengths and weaknesses, but the reflective tasks helped me see where I needed to improve.” Another participant noted, “Through regular reflection on my writing, I became more aware of my common mistakes and areas that needed improvement. This self-awareness was crucial in helping me focus on specific aspects of my writing that I needed to work on.” The role of reflective practice in increasing self-awareness among language learners was well documented by Moon (2013) and Chaika (2023), who discussed how reflective activities, such as journaling, help learners critically analyze their learning and identify areas for improvement.

#### 3. Improvement in writing skills

The step-by-step progression through different writing stages and the focus on specific skills each week facilitated a comprehensive enhancement of the learners’ writing abilities. This gradual skill development aligned with the principles of the process writing approach, as detailed by Badger and White (2000) and Ferris and Hedgcock (2023), who emphasized the importance of iterative practice and continual feedback in developing writing proficiency. As one participant observed, “I noticed a significant improvement in my ability to organize my thoughts and use more varied styles. The weekly tasks really helped in building these skills gradually.” Additionally, participants frequently mentioned the benefits of the vocabulary exercises and grammar reviews, which significantly enhanced their ability to articulate ideas clearly and correctly. As one participant shared, “The vocabulary exercises were very beneficial. I started using more varied and precise words in my writing. This not only made my paragraphs more interesting but also helped me convey my ideas more effectively”.

#### 4. Empowerment and autonomy

The program’s emphasis on SDL principles fostered a sense of autonomy among the participants. By taking control of their learning journeys, setting personal goals, and reflecting on their progress, the participants developed greater responsibility in terms of improving their writing skills. This empowerment is crucial for lifelong learning as it equips learners with the necessary tools to continue enhancing their skills beyond the program. As one participant expressed, “Being able to set my own goals and track my progress made me more committed to improving my writing. I felt more in control of my learning, which motivated me to work harder.” Another participant remarked, “Reflecting on my progress regularly helped me understand my strengths and areas for improvement. This process made me more responsible and proactive in my learning.” This perspective aligned with the views of Knowles (1975) and Garrison (1997), who emphasized the significance of SDL in fostering learner autonomy and empowering individuals to take control of their learning journeys. This ability to self-regulate not only enhances learning efficiency but also builds independence, which ultimately leads to more effective and sustainable learning outcomes.

#### 5. Increased confidence and motivation

The reflective journal entries indicated a boost in confidence and motivation as the participants progressed through the program. Setting personal goals and tracking achievement played a crucial role in maintaining the participants’ motivation. The sense of accomplishment upon task completion reinforced their commitment to improving their writing skills. As one participant noted, “At the beginning of the program, I was hesitant to write because I was afraid of making mistakes. But, as I completed each task and received feedback, I felt more confident. Now, I enjoy writing and look forward to it.” Another participant shared, “Setting my own goals and seeing my progress motivated me to keep improving. I realized that I can write well if I put in the effort.” This finding aligned with Garrison’s (1997) emphasis on motivation as a critical component of SDL. As learners gain confidence, their intrinsic motivation to engage in and persist with challenging tasks increases, which further enhances their learning outcomes.

#### 6. Value of peer feedback

The peer review component provided valuable feedback that enabled the participants to view their writing from different perspectives and incorporate constructive criticism into their revisions. As one participant mentioned, “Peer feedback was really insightful. It helped me see my writing from a different angle and make improvements that I had not thought of.” Another participant observed, “Reviewing others’ work also taught me a lot. I learned new ideas and techniques by seeing how others approached the same tasks.” The positive reception of peer feedback underscored its importance in the writing process. The participants valued the constructive criticism and different viewpoints provided by their peers, which enhanced their ability to revise and improve their drafts. This finding corroborated previous studies (e.g., Gao et al., 2023; Jin et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023), which highlighted the significance of collaborative learning and peer interactions in enhancing writing skills. Peer feedback not only provides immediate insights for improvement but also fosters a sense of community and shared learning.

### 7. Challenges with time management

Time management emerged as an occasional challenge among the participants, particularly those balancing work and study commitments. As one participant expressed, “Balancing work and study was tough. Sometimes I struggled to find time for the writing tasks, especially when work got busy.” Another participant shared a similar experience, “Balancing the writing tasks with my job was tough at times. I found it challenging to stick to the schedule, especially during busy weeks at work.” This highlighted the need for additional support mechanisms, such as time management workshops or more flexible deadlines, to help participants stay on track. This difficulty in balancing tasks supported the findings of Fernandez et al. (2017), who noted that adult EFL learners often face barriers related to time constraints and external responsibilities. Addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering sustained engagement in SDL programs.

## V. CONCLUSION

The findings of this quasi-experimental research demonstrated that the self-directed, process-oriented writing program significantly enhanced the writing skills of the adult EFL learners. The participants exhibited notable improvements across all of the assessed criteria, with the strongest gains being achieved in the areas of coherence, content and ideas, and cohesion. These results underscore the efficacy of integrating SDL with the process writing approach, as it enables learners to take ownership of their learning and engage in continual practice and reflection. This suggests that EFL educators could consider incorporating SDL principles and the process writing approach into their instruction to foster autonomy and improve writing proficiency among learners. Providing structured yet flexible programs with clear guidelines, resources, and reflection opportunities can lead to meaningful and sustained improvements in writing skills.

The analysis of the demographic factors revealed that educational attainment significantly influenced the improvement in the writing skills of the participants, while gender, age, and employment status did not have a notable impact. The learners with higher educational attainment demonstrated greater improvements, likely due to their prior experience with academic writing and structured learning environments. This finding indicated that tailored support might be necessary for learners with lower levels of educational attainment to ensure equitable progress. Future self-directed writing programs could benefit from offering preliminary modules that focus on basic writing skills and foundational grammar for learners who may need extra support. Additionally, creating peer mentorship systems where more experienced learners guide those with less educational attainment could foster a collaborative learning environment.

The participants’ reflections on the program revealed several key themes, including appreciation for the structured approach, increased self-awareness, improvement in writing skills, empowerment and autonomy, increased confidence and motivation, the value of peer feedback, and challenges with time management. These insights emphasized the importance of a well-designed program that offers a clear structure, opportunities for reflection, and peer interaction. Pedagogically, this suggests that EFL writing programs should integrate reflective activities and peer feedback mechanisms to enhance self-awareness and foster a collaborative learning environment. Additionally, addressing time management challenges through flexible scheduling and time management workshops can support adult learners in balancing their commitments.

While this study offered valuable insights into the design and effectiveness of the self-directed, process-oriented writing program, it is important to recognize certain limitations to guide future research. The study’s focus on intermediate proficiency learners may not generalize to those with significantly lower or higher levels of English proficiency. Further research across different proficiency levels is recommended to ascertain the program’s efficacy for learners with varying language skills. Additionally, access to and familiarity with the digital tools and resources provided in the program may have varied among the learners, potentially influencing their ability to fully engage with the program. It is advisable for subsequent studies to assess participants’ technological proficiency at the outset and provide necessary training to ensure equitable engagement with the program’s digital components. Finally, the 12-week duration may not capture long-term improvements in writing proficiency. It is recommended to conduct studies with extended durations to provide more comprehensive conclusions regarding the sustained impact of self-directed, process-oriented programs on the development of writing skills over time.

### APPENDIX A. 12-WEEK SELF-DIRECTED WRITING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

#### *Week 1: Introduction and Goal Setting (SDL: Entering Motivation)*

- Task 1: Complete a pre-program writing assessment provided by the researcher.
- Task 2: Watch a short video introduction to the SDL model and the process writing approach.  
Resources/Tools: Video resources (e.g., YouTube videos on SDL and process writing), note-taking app (e.g., Evernote).
- Task 3: Set personal writing goals for the 12-week program.  
Resources/Tools: Goal-setting guide (e.g., “SMART Goals: How to Make Your Goals Achievable” from mindtools.com), goal-setting worksheets, goal tracking app (e.g., Way of Life).

#### *Week 2: Generating Content and Ideas (Writing Stage: Prewriting, SDL: Self-Management)*

- Task 1: Learn about generating ideas.

Resources/Tools: Online articles and videos on idea generation (e.g., “Introduction to Prewriting (Invention)” from owl.purdue.edu, “Pre-Writing Strategies: Mind Mapping” on YouTube).

- Task 2: Practice generating ideas for a descriptive paragraph on a chosen topic.

Resources/Tools: Writing prompt (e.g., “40 Topics to Help with Descriptive Writing Assignments” from thoughtco.com), brainstorming worksheet or mind mapping tool (e.g., mindmeister.com)

- Task 3: Reflect on the effectiveness of the techniques used.

Resources/Tools: Reflection journal or journal app (e.g., Day One).

*Week 3: Organization and Structure (Writing Stages: Prewriting and Drafting, SDL: Task Motivation)*

- Task 1: Understand the importance of clear organization and structure in writing.

Resources/Tools: Online articles and videos on paragraph structure (e.g., “Writing: Building up paragraphs” from BBC.com, “Basic Paragraph Structure” on YouTube).

- Task 2: Outline and structure your descriptive paragraph.

Resources/Tools: Paragraph outline template.

- Task 3: Write the first draft of the paragraph using the outline.

*Week 4: Grammar and Sentence Structure (Writing Stage: Drafting, SDL: Self-Management)*

- Task 1: Review common grammar rules and sentence structures.

Resources/Tools: Grammar guides and websites (e.g., “English Grammar in Use” by Raymond Murphy, “Grammar” from owl.purdue.edu).

- Task 2: Complete grammar and sentence structure exercises.

Resources/Tools: Online grammar exercises (e.g., Englishpage.com).

- Task 3: Apply grammar and sentence structure knowledge to your draft.

Resources/Tools: Online grammar checking tool (e.g., grammarly.com)

*Week 5: Vocabulary Usage (Writing Stage: Drafting, SDL: Self-Management)*

- Task 1: Learn techniques for improving vocabulary.

Resources/Tools: Vocabulary building books and websites (e.g., “Word Power Made Easy” by Norman Lewis, vocabulary.com)

- Task 2: Engage in vocabulary exercises and apply new words in sentences.

Resources/Tools: Vocabulary exercise app (e.g., Quizlet).

- Task 3: Enhance your draft of the descriptive paragraph by adding a variety of vocabulary.

Resources/Tools: Vocabulary websites (e.g., vocabulary.com, thesaurus.com).

*Week 6: Descriptive Language and Narrative Elements (Writing Stages: Revising, SDL: Task Motivation, Self-Monitoring)*

- Task 1: Study the use of descriptive language and narrative elements.

Resources/Tools: Online articles and videos on descriptive writing (e.g., “Descriptive Writing” from writersdigest.com, “Improve your Descriptive Writing” on YouTube).

- Task 2: Complete practice exercises to apply descriptive language and narrative elements.

Resources/Tools: Descriptive writing exercises (e.g., “8 ESL Descriptive Writing Activities” from fluentu.com).

- Task 3: Enhance your draft of the descriptive paragraph by applying what you have learned about descriptive language and narrative elements.

*Week 7: Coherence and Cohesion (Writing Stage: Revising, SDL: Self-Monitoring)*

- Task 1: Learn techniques for improving coherence and cohesion in writing.

Resources/Tools: Online articles and videos on coherence and cohesion (e.g., “Methodology: Coherence and Cohesion” from onestopenglish.com, “Coherence and Cohesion – What Does it REALLY Mean?” on YouTube).

- Task 2: Revise your draft focusing on coherence and cohesion.

Resources/Tools: Revision checklist (e.g., “Revision Checklist” from owl.excelsior.edu, “An Essay Revision Checklist” from thoughtco.com).

- Task 3: Reflect on the changes made to improve coherence and cohesion.

*Week 8: Editing and Mechanics (Writing Stage: Editing and Publishing, SDL: Task Motivation, Self-Monitoring)*

- Task 1: Review editing techniques and mechanics (spelling, punctuation, formatting).

Resources/Tools: Online articles and videos on editing techniques (e.g., “Editing and Proofreading” from writingcenter.unc.edu, “How to edit an essay - 6 editing tips” on YouTube).

- Task 2: Edit the final draft of the descriptive paragraph for mechanics.

Resources/Tools: Editing tool (e.g., grammarly.com).

- Task 3: Peer-review the paragraph.

Resources/Tools: Online platform for peer review (e.g., scribophile.com, wattpad.com, medium.com).

*Week 9: Writing Practice: Narrative Paragraph (Writing Stages: Prewriting, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Publishing, SDL: Task Motivation, Self-Monitoring)*

- Task 1: Select a topic for a narrative paragraph and conduct prewriting activities.

Resources/Tools: Paragraph topic list (e.g., “500 Prompts for Narrative and Personal Writing” from topscholars.oregonstate.edu).

- Task 2: Learn about narrative paragraph structure and techniques.

Resources/Tools: Online articles and videos on narrative paragraph writing (e.g., “How to Write a Narrative Paragraph” on YouTube).

- Task 3: Write the first draft of the paragraph

- Task 4: Revise and edit the paragraph using the techniques you have learned in the previous weeks.

- Task 5: Peer-review the paragraph.

*Week 10: Writing Practice: Expository Paragraph (Writing Stages: Prewriting, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Publishing, SDL: Task Motivation, Self-Monitoring)*

- Task 1: Select a topic for an expository paragraph and conduct prewriting activities.

Resources/Tools: Paragraph topic list (e.g., “61 General Expository Essay Topic Ideas to Practice Academic Writing” from thoughtco.com).

- Task 2: Learn about expository paragraph structure and techniques.

Resources/Tools: Online articles and videos on expository paragraph writing (e.g., “Expository Writing: Writing to Explain” on YouTube).

- Task 3: Write the first draft of the paragraph

- Task 4: Revise and edit the paragraph using the techniques you have learned in the previous weeks.

- Task 5: Peer-review the paragraph.

*Week 11: Writing Practice: Persuasive Paragraph (Writing Stages: Prewriting, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Publishing, SDL: Task Motivation, Self-Monitoring)*

- Task 1: Select a topic for a persuasive paragraph and conduct prewriting activities.

Resources/Tools: Paragraph topic list (e.g., “100 Persuasive Essay Topics” from thoughtco.com).

- Task 2: Learn about persuasive paragraph structure and techniques.

Resources/Tools: Online articles and videos on persuasive paragraph writing (e.g., “How to Structure a Persuasive Paragraph” on YouTube).

- Task 3: Write the first draft of the paragraph

- Task 4: Revise and edit the paragraph using the techniques you have learned in the previous weeks.

- Task 5: Peer-review the paragraph.

*Week 12: Reflection (SDL: Self-Monitoring)*

- Task 1: Complete a post-program writing assessment provided by the researcher.

- Task 2: Reflect on the 12-week journey, evaluating progress and identifying areas for improvement.

- Task 3: Set future writing goals based on the reflection and assessment.

## APPENDIX B. WRITING ASSESSMENT RUBRIC AND RATING SCALE

Criteria	Excellent (5)	Good (4)	Satisfactory (3)	Needs Improvement (2)	Poor (1)
Paragraph Structure	Follows the structure appropriate for the paragraph type precisely.	Follows the structure appropriate for the paragraph type well.	Adequately follows the structure appropriate for the paragraph type.	Limited adherence to the structure appropriate for the paragraph type.	Poor adherence to the structure appropriate for the paragraph type.
Content and Ideas	Clear, insightful, and well-developed ideas. <u>Very engaging.</u>	Clear and developed ideas. Interesting.	Adequately developed ideas. Some engagement.	Somewhat developed ideas. Lacks engagement.	Unclear and poorly developed ideas. Not engaging.
Coherence	Ideas are logically connected and text flows smoothly.	Good logical connections and flow.	Adequate connections and flow.	Limited logical connections and flow.	Poor logical connections and flow.
Cohesion	Uses cohesive devices effectively to connect ideas.	Good use of cohesive devices.	Adequate use of cohesive devices.	Limited use of cohesive devices.	Poor use of cohesive devices.
Vocabulary Usage	Rich, precise, and varied vocabulary.	Good range and appropriate use of vocabulary.	Adequate range and mostly appropriate vocabulary.	Limited range and some inappropriate vocabulary.	Very limited range and frequent inappropriate vocabulary.
Sentence Structure	Uses complex and varied sentence structures effectively.	Good use of varied sentence structures.	Adequate use of varied sentence structures.	Mostly uses basic sentence structures.	Predominantly uses basic sentence structures.
Grammar	No errors in grammar.	Few errors in grammar.	Some errors in grammar.	Many errors in grammar.	Frequent errors in grammar.
Mechanics	No errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.	Few errors in mechanics.	Some errors in mechanics.	Many errors in mechanics.	Frequent errors in mechanics.

Total Score: \_\_\_\_ / 40

Rating Scale:

36-40: Excellent

32-35: Very Good

28-31: Good

24-27: Satisfactory

8-23: Needs Improvement

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**Nouf Aljasir** has earned her PhD from the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom. She is currently an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at the English Language Institute, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Her research interests include the psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic aspects of second language learning. She is specifically interested in individual differences in learning second languages.