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Exploring English Education Students' Scientific Writing: Competence Prior to Dyadic Essay Intervention

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ABSTRACT

Scientific writing is an essential academic competence for English education students, requiring the integration of critical thinking, logical organization, and linguistic accuracy. Nevertheless, students often encounter challenges in transforming their ideas into coherent and academically appropriate written arguments. This study aims to explore English education students' scientific writing competence prior to the implementation of the Dyadic Essay Technique (DET). The study draws on baseline data from a broader quantitative pre-experimental research project employing a one-group pretest-posttest design. A total of 32 undergraduate students from the English Education Study Program at Universitas Negeri Medan participated in the study. During the pre-test, students independently completed an argumentative essay entitled "The Importance of Critical Thinking in Higher Education" within 80 minutes. Their writing was assessed using an analytical rubric covering five components: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. The pre-test results were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings revealed a mean score of 68.88 out of 100, with individual scores ranging from 55 to 86, indicating variation in students' initial scientific writing performance. These findings highlight the importance of diagnostic assessment in understanding students' writing readiness and identifying potential instructional needs. The study provides an empirical baseline for contextualizing subsequent writing instruction using the Dyadic Essay Technique without drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of the intervention.

Keywords: *academic writing; Dyadic Essay Technique, EFL students, scientific writing, writing competence*

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INTRODUCTION

Scientific writing has become an essential academic competence in higher education, particularly for undergraduate students enrolled in English teacher education programs (Syahputri & Harahap, 2025). Beyond the ability to construct grammatically accurate sentences, scientific writing requires students to demonstrate critical thinking, logical reasoning, and the capacity to communicate complex ideas through systematic and evidence-based arguments (Ngang et al., 2026). In university contexts, students are expected to engage with academic literature, evaluate different perspectives, identify relevant problems, and formulate arguments supported by credible evidence (Tiwari, 2023). These competencies are increasingly emphasized through instructional approaches such as the *Case Method*, *Project-Based Learning*, and *Critical Journal Reviews*, which require students to integrate theoretical knowledge with analytical thinking and academic communication (Ramadhan & Harahap, 2023). For prospective English teachers, scientific writing competence is particularly important because it contributes not only to their academic achievement but also to their professional preparation as educators who are expected to demonstrate effective language use and critical engagement with knowledge.

The increasing integration of digital technologies into higher education has further transformed the demands of academic writing. Artificial intelligence (AI) applications, including ChatGPT, have introduced new opportunities for accessing information, generating ideas, and supporting various stages of the writing process (Hasan & Jomaa, 2025). These technological developments may facilitate students' academic activities by providing immediate access to explanations, linguistic suggestions, and digital learning resources. However, excessive dependence on AI-generated information may limit opportunities for students to independently evaluate evidence, formulate arguments, and develop their own academic voices (Wormuth & Hughey, 2024). Students who rely heavily on digital assistance without critically examining the information they receive may experience difficulties distinguishing reliable evidence from unsupported claims (Hasan & Jomaa, 2025). Consequently, scientific writing instruction should encourage students to develop independent reasoning, responsible engagement with technology, and the ability to communicate ideas accurately without relying entirely on automated writing assistance (Sitohang & Gultom, 2026). Assessing students' independent writing competence is therefore important for understanding their actual academic writing abilities in technology-rich learning environments.

Despite the increasing importance of scientific writing, undergraduate students continue to encounter substantial challenges in producing coherent and academically appropriate texts (Malik et al., 2025). These challenges are particularly evident among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, who must simultaneously manage the cognitive demands of argument development and the linguistic requirements of writing in a foreign language. Students may possess relevant ideas and demonstrate awareness of contemporary academic issues, yet experience difficulties transforming their thoughts into logically organized English essays (Ananda & Siregar, 2023). Previous studies have identified recurring difficulties involving grammatical accuracy, vocabulary selection, sentence construction, paragraph development, and coherence (Rahma & Parpatian, 2025). Such problems may interfere with students' ability to communicate arguments effectively, even when they understand the subject matter being discussed. Furthermore, the cognitive demands of academic writing, combined with writing anxiety and limited linguistic confidence, may affect students' ability to organize their ideas and complete writing tasks successfully (Wanda & Nasution, 2025; Sutoni & Ginting, 2024).

Scientific writing difficulties should also be understood as interconnected rather than isolated

linguistic problems. The development of an academic argument requires students to formulate a clear position, select relevant supporting information, establish logical relationships between ideas, and express those relationships through appropriate grammatical structures. Weaknesses in one aspect of writing may consequently influence the overall quality of the text. For example, insufficient vocabulary may restrict students' ability to articulate complex arguments, while inaccurate sentence structures may obscure the intended meaning of otherwise relevant ideas. Similarly, difficulties in organizing paragraphs may weaken the coherence of an essay despite the presence of appropriate supporting arguments. These interconnected demands highlight the importance of evaluating writing competence through multiple dimensions, including content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. A diagnostic assessment covering these dimensions can provide a more systematic understanding of students' writing performance and support the identification of areas requiring instructional attention.

Collaborative learning has been proposed as an instructional approach that may help students address the cognitive and linguistic demands of academic writing (Wardani et al., 2025). Through structured interaction, students are encouraged to exchange ideas, evaluate different perspectives, and provide feedback on written work. One collaborative approach relevant to this context is the Dyadic Essay Technique (DET), which emphasizes reciprocal learning through paired activities involving question formulation, discussion, response development, and peer feedback (Setyowati & Sukmawan, 2020). By engaging students in collaborative academic tasks, DET provides opportunities for them to clarify their understanding, examine the logical development of arguments, and reflect on the effectiveness of their written communication (Amin & Radiah, 2021). Peer interaction may also encourage greater awareness of language accuracy, vocabulary appropriateness, and textual organization as students examine and respond to one another's work (Yusuf & Tasco, 2024). Nevertheless, the potential instructional value of collaborative writing activities should be considered in relation to students' existing writing competence and the specific challenges they experience before participating in such activities.

A comprehensive understanding of students' initial scientific writing competence is essential for establishing an empirical foundation for instructional intervention. Students entering the same academic writing course may demonstrate different levels of proficiency, reflecting variations in their linguistic knowledge, academic experiences, critical thinking abilities, and familiarity with scientific writing conventions. Consequently, instructional strategies developed without adequate information about students' baseline performance may not fully address the range of learning needs within a particular classroom. Diagnostic writing assessment provides an opportunity to examine these differences systematically and identify patterns in students' academic writing achievement. It also enables researchers to establish a reference point for interpreting subsequent learning outcomes within an intervention-based research project. In this respect, examining students' writing competence before the implementation of DET is not merely a preliminary procedural requirement but an important analytical stage that contributes to understanding the educational context in which the intervention takes place.

Existing discussions of collaborative writing frequently emphasize instructional processes, peer interaction, and the potential benefits of cooperative learning (Wijaya & Usaha, 2026). However, interpreting the outcomes of collaborative writing instruction also requires careful attention to students' initial writing performance. A baseline-focused analysis can contribute to this understanding by documenting students' competence before they receive instructional support through a particular technique. Such an analysis is especially relevant in EFL higher education, where students are expected to produce

academic texts while managing both linguistic limitations and complex cognitive demands. Examining initial writing performance can therefore provide valuable insights into students' academic writing readiness and establish a meaningful context for subsequent intervention research. Rather than treating baseline assessment solely as a measurement used for later statistical comparison, the present article considers students' pre-intervention performance as a distinct area of investigation.

Accordingly, this article aims to explore English education students' scientific writing competence prior to the implementation of the Dyadic Essay Technique. The article draws on pre-test data collected from a broader quantitative research project employing a one-group pretest–posttest design. Although the overall research project involved diagnostic assessment, instructional treatment using DET, and post-test evaluation, the present article specifically examines students' writing performance before the intervention. Its primary objective is to describe their initial scientific writing achievement and consider the implications of the findings for academic writing instruction. By providing an empirical account of students' baseline competence, the study seeks to contribute to a clearer understanding of their writing readiness and establish a foundation for interpreting subsequent research on collaborative scientific writing instruction.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

This study was conducted within a quantitative pre-experimental research framework employing a one-group pretest–posttest design (Creswell & Guetterman, 2024). The overall research project was designed to investigate students' scientific writing competence before and after the implementation of the Dyadic Essay Technique (DET). The research procedures consisted of three sequential phases: diagnostic assessment through a pre-test, instructional treatment using DET, and evaluation through a post-test. The pre-test was administered to establish students' initial writing competence, while the treatment and post-test were conducted to examine changes in their writing performance following collaborative instruction. Nevertheless, the present article specifically focuses on the diagnostic phase of the research, presenting and analyzing students' scientific writing competence before the implementation of DET. Accordingly, the findings reported in this article are limited to pre-test performance, while the intervention outcomes and pre-test–post-test comparisons remain outside its analytical scope.

The participants consisted of 32 undergraduate students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia. They were selected through *purposive sampling* based on their participation in university-level academic writing activities and their previous exposure to foundational English language courses. The participants had studied relevant linguistic subjects, including grammar, syntax, and academic writing, which provided the necessary background for undertaking a scientific writing assessment. This group was considered appropriate for the research because students in the program are required to engage in academic activities involving critical thinking, argument development, and written communication. University learning approaches such as the *Case Method*, *Project-Based Learning*, and *Critical Journal Reviews* further emphasize students' ability to evaluate information, construct evidence-based arguments, and communicate academic ideas systematically (Ramadhan & Harahap, 2023).

The primary instrument used to collect baseline data was a timed argumentative essay-writing test. During the pre-test, participants were instructed to independently compose an academic essay within 80 minutes on the topic "The Importance of Critical Thinking in Higher Education." The writing task required

students to formulate a clear position, develop relevant supporting arguments, and organize their ideas into a coherent academic text. Students were encouraged to demonstrate their understanding of critical thinking in higher education and could incorporate relevant contemporary issues, including digital technologies and artificial intelligence, where appropriate to their discussion. To assess students' independent writing competence, dictionaries, external reference materials, and AI-assisted writing tools were not permitted during the pre-test. This procedure was intended to obtain a direct representation of students' writing performance before they received collaborative instructional support through DET.

Following the pre-test, the broader research project proceeded with an instructional intervention using the Dyadic Essay Technique. The intervention was implemented over six instructional sessions and involved structured collaborative learning activities in which students worked in pairs to formulate questions, exchange responses, discuss academic ideas, and provide reciprocal feedback (Setyowati & Sukmawan, 2020). The instructional activities encouraged students to evaluate the relevance of arguments, identify weaknesses in written expression, and revise their academic writing through peer interaction (Amin & Radiah, 2021). After the instructional phase, students completed a post-test to assess their writing performance following the intervention. These procedures formed part of the complete research design; however, the present article does not report the results of the treatment or post-test because its primary objective is to investigate students' scientific writing competence prior to DET implementation.

Students' essays were evaluated using an analytical writing rubric consisting of five components: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Content was allocated a maximum of 30 points and assessed the relevance, development, and supporting evidence of students' arguments. Organization accounted for 20 points and evaluated the logical arrangement of ideas, paragraph structure, and textual coherence. Vocabulary contributed 20 points and examined lexical appropriateness, word choice, and academic register. Language use was allocated 25 points and focused on grammatical accuracy, sentence construction, and syntactic control. Mechanics accounted for the remaining 5 points and assessed spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and other writing conventions. The maximum total score was 100 points. The rubric was applied to evaluate students' writing performance systematically across the principal dimensions of academic composition.

The pre-test data were analyzed using descriptive statistical procedures to identify students' initial scientific writing performance. The analysis included the number of participants, minimum and maximum scores, and mean score. The mean score was calculated by dividing the sum of students' pre-test scores by the total number of participants. These descriptive measures were used to summarize the overall distribution of students' initial writing achievement and identify variations in their baseline performance. Although the complete research project involved subsequent evaluation of students' writing development, the analysis presented in this article was restricted to the pre-intervention data. Therefore, no statistical claims regarding the effectiveness of the Dyadic Essay Technique were derived from the findings reported here. The results were interpreted as diagnostic evidence of students' initial scientific writing competence and as a foundation for understanding their instructional needs before collaborative writing activities were introduced.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the diagnostic writing assessment administered to 32 English education students at Universitas Negeri Medan before the implementation of the Dyadic Essay Technique

(DET). The assessment aimed to identify students' initial scientific writing competence through an independent argumentative essay-writing task. Students' writing performance was evaluated using an analytical rubric encompassing five components: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Scientific Writing Pre-test

Statistical Indicator	Result
Number of Participant	32
Total Score	2,204
Minimum Score	55
Maximum Score	86
Mean Score	68.88
Median Score	68.00
Standard Deviation	7.43
Score Range	31

Source: Primary data (2026)

As presented in Table 1, the mean pre-test score was 68.88 out of a maximum possible score of 100. The highest score was 86, while the lowest score was 55, resulting in a range of 31 points. The median score of 68.00 was relatively close to the mean, indicating that the central values of the distribution were similar. The standard deviation of 7.43 further demonstrates variation in students' initial writing achievement.

To provide a more detailed description of the students' performance, the pre-test scores were grouped into four score intervals, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Students' Scientific Writing Pre-test Scores

Score Interval	Frequency	Percentage
50-59	4	12.50%
60-69	15	46.88%
70-79	11	34.38%
80-89	2	6.25%
Total	**32**	**100%**

Source: Primary data (2026)

Table 2 shows that the largest proportion of students (46.88%) obtained scores between 60 and 69, followed by 34.38% who scored between 70 and 79. Four students (12.50%) obtained scores between 50 and 59, while only two students (6.25%) achieved scores between 80 and 89. These results indicate that most participants were concentrated within the middle score intervals, with relatively few students obtaining scores at either end of the observed distribution.

Overall, 26 students (81.25%) obtained scores between 60 and 79. This concentration suggests that the majority of participants demonstrated broadly comparable overall writing achievement, although individual differences remained evident. The results provide a quantitative description of students' initial scientific writing performance before their participation in DET-based instructional activities.

Discussion

The findings reveal variation in English education students' scientific writing competence before the implementation of the Dyadic Essay Technique. The mean score of 68.88 indicates that students

demonstrated differing levels of achievement when completing an independent academic writing task. Although most students obtained scores between 60 and 79, the difference between the highest and lowest scores suggests that participants did not enter the instructional program with identical writing abilities.

The distribution of scores is particularly relevant to understanding students' readiness for scientific writing instruction. The concentration of scores within the 60–69 and 70–79 intervals indicates that a substantial proportion of participants performed within the middle of the observed score distribution. Meanwhile, the smaller groups obtaining scores below 60 or above 79 demonstrate the presence of students with comparatively lower and higher initial writing achievement. These differences may have implications for instructional planning, particularly when students are expected to complete academic writing tasks involving argument development, logical organization, and appropriate language use.

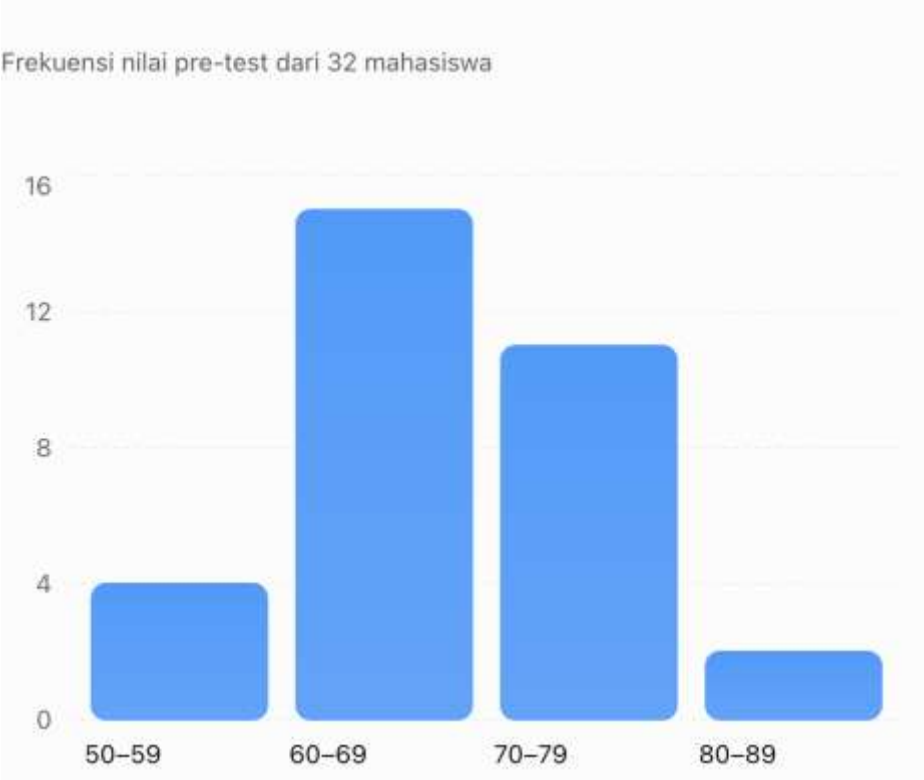

Figure 1. Frequency of 32 students pre-test score
Source: Primary data (2026)

Scientific writing requires the integration of cognitive and linguistic competencies. Students must develop relevant ideas, organize arguments coherently, select appropriate academic vocabulary, and construct grammatically accurate sentences. In EFL learning environments, these demands may create challenges because students must communicate complex academic ideas through a language that they are still developing. The findings therefore reinforce the importance of considering students' initial writing achievement when planning academic writing instruction.

The diagnostic assessment also provides a foundation for understanding the instructional context in which DET was implemented. As a collaborative learning approach, DET involves reciprocal activities that encourage students to exchange ideas, formulate questions, discuss academic content, and provide feedback. These activities may offer opportunities for students with different levels of writing competence

to participate in structured academic interaction. However, the present findings do not establish whether DET improved students' writing performance, since the analysis is limited to pre-intervention data.

Another important implication concerns the role of diagnostic assessment in instructional decision-making. The observed variation in scores suggests that students may require different forms of support when developing scientific writing competence. Lecturers can use baseline assessment results to identify students who may benefit from additional guidance and to plan activities that accommodate different levels of writing achievement. Nevertheless, total scores alone cannot establish which writing components require the greatest attention. A more detailed analysis of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics would be necessary to identify specific areas of strength and difficulty.

The findings should also be interpreted in relation to the study's scope. The analysis provides a descriptive account of students' overall pre-test performance rather than a detailed explanation of the linguistic and rhetorical features of their essays. Consequently, the results cannot independently establish the causes of lower writing scores or identify recurring grammatical and organizational errors. Further analysis of the original essays and their component-level rubric scores would provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' scientific writing competence.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that students entered the DET instructional program with varying levels of scientific writing achievement. The baseline assessment provides an empirical description of their initial performance and establishes a reference point for interpreting subsequent writing development within the broader research project. By focusing on students' pre-intervention competence, this article highlights the relevance of diagnostic assessment in supporting evidence-informed scientific writing instruction.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the initial scientific writing competence of 32 English education students at Universitas Negeri Medan prior to the implementation of the Dyadic Essay Technique (DET). The findings revealed a mean pre-test score of 68.88, with individual scores ranging from 55 to 86. Most students (81.25%) obtained scores between 60 and 79, indicating that their writing performance was predominantly concentrated within the middle score intervals, although individual differences remained evident. These findings highlight the importance of diagnostic assessment in identifying variations in students' initial academic writing achievement and informing instructional planning. The results provide an empirical baseline for understanding students' writing readiness before participating in collaborative learning activities. As this article focuses exclusively on pre-intervention performance, conclusions regarding the effectiveness of DET require separate analysis of the intervention and post-test results. Further examination of individual writing components is also recommended to identify specific linguistic and organizational difficulties and develop more targeted scientific writing instruction.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author, Johannes Jefria Gultom, contributed to the conceptualization of the study, research design, development of the methodology, supervision of research activities, data analysis, and preparation of the original manuscript. The second author, Puan Suri Mira Annisa Sembiring, contributed to the

development of research instruments, data collection, analysis and interpretation of research findings, and manuscript preparation. The third author, Hawai Apriani Br Ginting, contributed to data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, literature review, and critical revision of the manuscript. The fourth author, Diah Mutiara Isnaeni, served as a research assistant and contributed to data collection, data processing, organization and analysis of research data, and manuscript writing and editing. The fifth author, Karunia Devi Frida, served as a research assistant and contributed to data collection, data processing and analysis, interpretation of research findings, and manuscript writing and revision. All authors participated in discussing the research findings, critically reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript, and agreed to be accountable for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conduct of this research, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, or preparation and publication of this article. The research received institutional funding from Universitas Negeri Medan through the 2026 PNBP Research Grant. The funding support did not influence the research findings, analysis, or conclusions presented in this article.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) USE STATEMENT

In preparing this manuscript, the authors used artificial intelligence (AI) tools, including ChatGPT, to assist with language editing, grammar checking, improving academic writing style, organizing manuscript sections, and refining the clarity and coherence of the text. AI assistance was also used in drafting and revising portions of the manuscript. The authors are responsible for verifying the accuracy of all research data, statistical analyses, references, and interpretations presented in the article. All authors have reviewed and approved the final manuscript and take full responsibility for its content, originality, and academic integrity.

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