

Writing and Speaking Difficulties of Students in One Chinese Middle School

Lin Liu *

Lyceum of the Philippines University-Batangas, Philippines

* Corresponding author Email: 95130976@qq.com

Abstract: Writing and speaking difficulties are prevalent among middle school students, posing significant challenges to their academic success and overall communication abilities. This study aimed to evaluate the writing and speaking difficulties of selected middle school students in China. This descriptive study was participated by middle school students. It made use of an adopted questionnaire as its primary data gathering instrument. This study aimed to determine the relationship between writing and speaking difficulties of students in a selected middle school in China. Specifically, the study sought to: describe the profile of the respondents in terms of sex, level, and kind of community; determine the respondents' writing difficulties in terms of organization of ideas, content and focus, style, and mechanics; assess the speaking difficulties of the respondents with regards to organization of ideas, content and focus, diction, and spontaneity; test the significant difference of the responses when grouped according to their profile; test the significant relationship between writing difficulties and speaking difficulties; and propose a Language Proficiency Program for Middle Schools. The study found that majority of the respondents were male, under the junior middle school, and are living at the urban community. Middle school students rarely encountered writing difficulties and speaking difficulties. Male, senior middle school students, and are living in the rural areas experienced greater writing and speaking difficulties. Writing difficulties and speaking difficulties are highly related with each other which implies that the more students experience difficulty in writing, the more they experience difficulty in speaking. A proposed Language Proficiency Program was devised for Middle Schools for an enhanced English program in their curricula. Future researchers may further explore on the cognitive, linguistic, and social factors that contribute to writing and speaking difficulties.

Keywords: English Skills; Speaking Difficulties; Writing Difficulties; Middle School Students.

1. Introduction

The Communication, whether spoken or written, holds immense importance for students in various aspects of their personal, academic, and future professional lives. It is a crucial ability that affects almost all facets of a student's life. The capacity to communicate effectively is a prudent investment that pays off substantially in all spheres of life, from academic performance to future employment opportunities, interpersonal connections to personal development. It is a talent that must be nourished and developed over the course of a student's academic career.

Students frequently have a variety of difficulties when it comes to speaking and writing. Numerous things, such as a lack of experience, skill gaps, psychological issues, and learning disparities, might contribute to these difficulties. Students may think about requesting assistance from resources like writing centers, communication seminars, and practice sessions to deal with these difficulties (Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2020). These abilities require time and work to develop, and it is important to be open to learning new things. Teachers and mentors may help students develop their writing and speaking skills by giving them constructive criticism and suggesting ways to get better.

In addition, the research by Aeni, et al. (2018) found that the majority of students viewed speaking, listening, writing, and reading as key language skills. However, the findings also revealed that the students prioritized speaking and writing as their top two priorities. While English language learners develop fluency in spoken language, their writing ability deteriorates because speaking alone does not provide enough vocabulary and syntax information for academic tasks

like analyzing, summarizing, persuading, and speculating (Nafa, 2022).

Writing is a complex skill that requires students to master a variety of linguistic and cognitive skills (Hibatullah, 2019). For Chinese students, learning to write effectively in English can be particularly challenging due to several factors such as: difference in language structure, limited exposure to English writing, cultural differences, and the likes. Further, Kim (2020) has argued that speaking is a crucial language skill that allows individuals to express themselves, engage in conversations, and participate effectively in social and academic settings.

In an interconnected world, the ability to communicate across cultures and languages fosters understanding and promotes tolerance among diverse groups of people. Also, good communication is essential for maintaining healthy and meaningful relationships with family, friends, and peers. It enables students to express their feelings, empathize, and resolve conflicts.

Based on research of the target language communication strategies that affect learners' learning and using results (Anwar & Louis, 2017), the communication strategy study is an indispensable part for second language acquisition research. The fruits of it have a crucial significance in how to properly treat communicative strategies in foreign language teaching, how to help second language learners to master the target language in the right direction.

The number of cross-cultural encounters has significantly increased as a result of the English language's globalization. People engage with foreigners more frequently than ever before, and communities are becoming more bilingual and multicultural. This also interests the Chinese community due to the positive results of Wang, et al. (2017) which mentions

that that there is evidence of education-language and skill-language complementarity, that the returns to English proficiency are bigger in higher income segments, and that the returns are usually higher in coastal regions.

Finally, the researcher's primary purpose is to analyze the Chinese students' writing and speaking difficulties. Therefore, the findings will result in a proposed English enhancement program that can be a basis for the school to improve the students' English writing and speaking proficiency. This would ease out the problem that they could possibly encounter in their later years of education, knowing the fact that all countries have been continuously embracing globalization in these times of a VUCA world.

In addition, addressing the writing and speaking difficulties of Chinese middle school students is critical for their academic success and future prospects. By conducting a comprehensive research study, valuable insights can be gained into the nature of these challenges and develop effective solutions to improve English language learning outcomes for this population. This research can contribute significantly to the field of English language education and empower Chinese middle school students to become confident and effective communicators in this globalized, competitive world.

2. Organization of the Text

2.1. METHODS

2.1.1. Design

The researchers utilized a descriptive study. The descriptive design is based to describe the difficulties of the Middle School students on their writing and speaking abilities. According to Siedlecki (2020), descriptive research aims to characterize subjects by seeing them in their natural environment. It examines demographic features, pinpoints issues that exist inside a group, a company, or a population, or examines differences in traits or customs between organizations or even nations.

2.1.2. Participants

The respondents were the students from a selected middle school in China, both in the Junior and Senior level. Moreover, from the total quantity population of enrollees given by the university personnel (322), the total sample size of 176 students was calculated based on a 5% margin of error, 95%

confidence level, and 50% response distribution.

2.1.3. Instrument

This research utilized two adopted and modified instruments namely: Speaking Strategies Questionnaire (Missuom,2014) and ESLP 82 Questionnaire: Self-Assessment of English Writing Skills and Use of Writing Strategies. This underwent the process of validation and pilot testing.

The questionnaire is divided into three parts namely: profile of the respondents, writing difficulties, and speaking difficulties. Further, the respondents will evaluate their writing and speaking difficulties with categorical response like degree of agreement always, usually, sometimes, rarely, and never corresponding to verbal interpretations of very high, high, low, and very low difficulty levels, respectively.

2.1.4. Procedure

Online platforms were used thoroughly in the research for the accessibility and simple tracking of responses. Respondents answered the questions from the adapted research instruments that had been modified and updated after its validation and pilot testing. With the research adviser's and the dean's approval, the researchers immediately administered the survey to the respondents. With the help of the university's statistician, statistical results from the responses of the respondents were calculated following the interpretation and evaluation of the connection of the collected data through statistical analysis and tables between the variables of the study.

2.1.5. Data Analysis

Frequency and percentage distribution were used to describe the profile of the respondents. Weighted mean and rank were used to evaluate the writing and speaking difficulties of the respondents. The result of Shapiro-Wilk Test showed that p-values of all variables were less than 0.05 which means that the data set was not normally distributed. Therefore, Mann-Whitney U test for two groups were used as part of the non-parametric tests to determine the significant differences. Spearman's Rho was used as the non-parametric test to determine the significant relationship between the variables. All analyses were performed using SPSS version 25.

2.2. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of the Respondents' Profile

Sex	Frequency	Percentage %
Male	93	52.2
Female	85	47.8
Level		
Junior Middle School	98	55.1
Senior Middle School	80	44.9
Type of Community		
Urban	125	70.2
Rural	53	29.8

Table 1 shows the percentage distribution of the respondents' profile. There were more male students (93), having a 52.2 percent of the total population compared those who were male (85) which comprised the 47.8 of the total respondents. Further, there were more junior middle school respondents (98 or 55.1%) compared with those senior middle

school students (80 or 44.9%). Finally, there were more students residing in the urban communities (125 or 70.2%) than those living in the rural areas (53 or 29.8%).

Because of the ancient Chinese cultural norm of favoring sons over daughters, more boys than girls are born and raised. This is so that their boys could continue the family name and

heritage, which made them more precious to the family. Boys were therefore more likely than girls to be sent to school and to receive greater resources for their education. Furthermore, there is proof that female infanticide was a long-standing practice in China, which would have added to the gender gap.

Evans et al., (2020) found that the gender gap in education in China is increasing, with more boys completing primary and secondary school than girls. The study also found that girls are less likely to pursue higher education than boys. In addition, it was mentioned that in China, there is a strong cultural preference for boys over girls. This preference is often reflected in the allocation of resources for education, with boys typically receiving more attention and support than girls.

Further, as junior middle school is a part of China's obligatory education system, all students must attend for nine years. Since senior middle school is not required, pupils are free to go or not. Additionally, kids need to pass a challenging entrance exam in order to enroll in senior high school in China. One of the most significant tests in China is this one, known as the Gaokao. Many pupils who score poorly on the Gaokao may decide not to go to senior high school and instead enroll in vocational school or the job.

The number of junior middle school students in China has been consistently higher than the number of senior middle school students in recent years (Xue, et al. 2022). There were approximately 51.3 million junior middle school students and 41.4 million senior middle school students in China. This trend is expected to continue in the coming years.

It was also mentioned there that the several reasons for the higher number of junior middle school students in China. One reason is that the Chinese government has been promoting universal education for many years. As a result, more and more children are able to complete their junior middle school education. Another reason is that the Chinese economy has been growing rapidly in recent years. This has led to an increase in the number of families who can afford to send their children to junior middle school.

In China, urban areas have greater options for employment than rural ones. This is a result of the more varied economies and greater employment options seen in urban regions. As a result, a lot of Chinese parents decide to move to cities in order to give their kids better prospects for employment. Numerous programs adopted by the Chinese government encourage individuals to move to metropolitan regions. For instance, the government has facilitated the process of obtaining urban residency permits and made significant investments in urban infrastructure. Consequently, China's urban population has grown dramatically in the last several years.

It was found on Yiwen and Boran's (2021) analysis on the education inequality in China that there are significant disparities in educational access and quality between urban and rural areas in China. Urban students are more likely to attend better-funded schools with more qualified teachers and resources. They are also more likely to have access to extracurricular activities and other opportunities that can enhance their education.

Table 2. Summary Table on Writing Difficulties

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Organization of Ideas	2.32	Rarely	2
Content and Focus	2.31	Rarely	3
Style	2.38	Rarely	1
Mechanics	2.29	Rarely	4
Composite Mean	2.33	Rarely	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Always; 2.50 – 3.49 = Usually; 1.50 – 2.49 = Rarely; 1.00 – 1.49 = Never

Table 2 summarizes the different sub-variables for writing difficulties, having a grand composite mean of 2.33, which means that Chinese Middle School Students rarely encounter these writing difficulties.

Among the four sub-variables, the most prominent problem was those under style, having a weighted mean of 2.38 and was verbally interpreted as rarely. Writing styles in Chinese and English are quite different. English writing is more direct and explicit than Chinese writing, which is typically more implicit and oblique. Because of this, it might be challenging for Chinese students to write in an English-speaking audience-appropriate manner. Students in middle schools in China frequently have little exposure to real English writing. They may find it challenging to get an understanding of what appropriate English style is as a result.

Butler and Le (2018) argued that Chinese middle school students often struggle to develop a clear and effective writing style. Students may use overly complex vocabulary, write in a disjointed or disorganized manner, and fail to adapt their writing style to the appropriate audience and purpose. To mention, style is a common problem among Chinese middle school students when writing. This problem can be improved with effective teaching methods and interventions that emphasize clarity, conciseness, audience awareness, purpose, modeling, feedback, and practice.

In addition, among the other sub variables were organization of ideas (2.32), and content and focus (2.31).

However, mechanics was the least-encountered problem when it comes to writing difficulties, having a weighted mean of 2.29 and was rarely interpreted.

Although Chinese middle school students frequently have mechanical writing challenges, these problems are typically seen as less frequent than problems with style and grammar. This is mostly because of the structure of the Chinese writing system and the heavy focus on mechanics in Chinese language instruction. Learning the fundamentals of Chinese language training emphasizes spelling, grammar, and punctuation. This is clear from the way these writing-related components are significantly weighted in both formal classroom teaching and standardized assessment. Chinese students benefit from a strong foundation in the technical parts of writing because of this early emphasis on mechanics.

Chinese middle school students are more likely to make errors related to content, organization, and style than they are to make errors related to mechanics (Nair & Hui, 2018). Students often struggled with developing clear and concise thesis statements, organizing their paragraphs in a logical manner, and using effective transitions between ideas. They also often made errors in word choice and sentence fluency.

Table 3. Summary Table on Speaking Difficulties

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Organization of Ideas	2.36	Rarely	2
Content and Focus	2.40	Rarely	1
Diction	2.31	Rarely	3
Spontaneity	2.30	Rarely	4
Composite Mean	2.34	Rarely	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Always; 2.50 – 3.49 = Usually; 1.50 – 2.49 = Rarely; 1.00 - 1.49 = Never

Table 3 summarizes the different sub-variables for speaking difficulties, having a grand composite mean of 2.34, which means that Chinese Middle School Students rarely encounter these speaking difficulties.

Among the four sub-variables, the most encountered difficulty was those under content and focus, having a weighted mean of 2.40 and was verbally interpreted as rarely.

Chinese middle school students may not have as much exposure to English as students in other countries. This could mean that they are not as familiar with the language and culture, and may not have as many opportunities to practice speaking English. This suggests that students had trouble expressing their thoughts in a clear and concise way. They may have struggled to come up with the right words or to organize their ideas in a logical way.

In Chinese middle school English instruction, there is often a strong emphasis on grammar and vocabulary, while content and focus may receive less attention (Ji, 2018). This focus on grammar and vocabulary can lead students to prioritize these aspects of language learning over content and focus, resulting in difficulty in organizing their thoughts, expressing ideas clearly, and maintaining a coherent spoken message.

In addition, among the other sub variables were organization of ideas (2.36), and diction (2.31).

However, spontaneity was the least-encountered problem when it comes to speaking difficulties, having a weighted mean of 2.30 and was rarely interpreted.

Chinese students are often taught to be well-prepared when speaking, and they may be more comfortable speaking when they have had time to think about what they are going to say. In addition, Chinese students may be more likely to use formal register when speaking, even in informal contexts. Formal register is typically more planned and deliberate than informal register, which could make it easier for Chinese students to speak spontaneously in a variety of situations.

Chinese classrooms typically provide a structured and supportive environment for speaking practice (Wang, 2019). Teachers often guide discussions, provide prompts and questions, and offer feedback, creating a safe space for students to practice speaking without fear of excessive criticism or judgment. This structured environment encourages spontaneous responses and helps students develop confidence in their ability to think on their feet.

Table 4. Difference of Responses on Writing Difficulties When Grouped According to Profile

Sex	F-value	p-value	Interpretation
Organization of Ideas	9.837	0.002	Significant
Content and Focus	0.851	0.357	Not Significant
Style	7.622	0.006	Significant
Mechanics	4.211	0.042	Significant
Level			
Organization of Ideas	9.377	0.003	Significant
Content and Focus	8.362	0.004	Significant
Style	14.215	0.000	Significant
Mechanics	8.306	0.004	Significant
Type of Community			
Organization of Ideas	1.297	0.256	Not Significant
Content and Focus	6.252	0.013	Significant
Style	9.375	0.003	Significant
Mechanics	2.341	0.128	Not Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.05

Table 4 displays the comparison of responses on writing difficulties when grouped according to profile. It was observed that there was significant difference when grouped according to sex except on content and focus; level and type of community except on organization of ideas and mechanics. This was noticed since the obtained p-values were less than the alpha level. Thus, the result shows that the responses differ statistically and based on the test conducted, it was found out that male, senior middle school and from rural experienced greater difficulties.

Boys and girls are often socialized differently, with boys being encouraged to be more active and expressive, while girls are encouraged to be more passive and compliant. This could lead boys to be less comfortable with writing, which is a more passive and introspective activity.

Studies have consistently shown that girls outperform boys in grammar and mechanics. For instance, a meta-analysis of 26 studies found that girls had a significant advantage in grammar and punctuation (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997) as cited in (Alexiou, et al., 2019). Similarly, a study of over

100,000 students found that girls consistently scored higher on grammar and mechanics assessments (Reily, et al., 2019).

As students' progress through middle school, writing tasks become more complex and require more sophisticated skills. Senior students may struggle with these more demanding tasks, especially if they have not developed the necessary skills in earlier grades.

Porat, et al., (2018) found that writing skills continue to develop throughout middle school, but that there is a noticeable gap between the writing skills of junior and senior students. Senior middle school students generally have a stronger grasp of grammar, mechanics, and organization than their younger counterparts.

Students in rural areas may not have the same access to resources as students in urban areas. This could include access

to libraries, computers, and writing tutors. In addition, students in rural areas may not have as many opportunities to practice writing outside of the classroom. This could include participating in extracurricular writing activities, such as clubs or competitions.

Ma, et al., (2021) found that rural students in China have lower literacy rates and poorer writing skills than their urban counterparts. This is due to a number of factors, including limited access to quality education, fewer resources for literacy instruction, and a lack of exposure to written language. In addition, Li, et al., (2020) found that rural middle school students in China face a number of challenges that can hinder their writing development, including limited access to books and other resources, a lack of exposure to different writing styles, and a lack of opportunities for feedback and revision.

Table 5. Difference of Responses on Speaking Difficulties When Grouped According to Profile

Sex	F-value	p-value	Interpretation
Organization of Ideas	3.377	0.068	Not Significant
Content and Focus	4.227	0.041	Significant
Diction	2.766	0.098	Not Significant
Spontaneity	0.708	0.401	Not Significant
Level			
Organization of Ideas	2.087	0.150	Not Significant
Content and Focus	2.813	0.095	Not Significant
Style	3.662	0.057	Not Significant
Mechanics	6.188	0.014	Significant
Type of Community			
Organization of Ideas	2.938	0.088	Not Significant
Content and Focus	3.006	0.085	Not Significant
Style	1.888	0.171	Not Significant
Mechanics	10.919	0.001	Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.05

Table 5 displays the comparison of responses on speaking difficulties when grouped according to profile. It was observed that there was significant difference on content and focus when grouped according to sex; mechanics when grouped according to level and type of community. This was noticed since the obtained p-values were less than the alpha level. Thus, the result shows that the responses vary statistically and based on the test conducted, it was found out that male, senior middle school and from rural experienced greater difficulties.

Boys and girls are often socialized differently, with boys being encouraged to be more assertive and take risks, while girls are encouraged to be more cooperative and avoid making mistakes. This could lead boys to be less comfortable speaking in front of others, especially in a formal setting like a classroom.

Grosjean (2022) found that girls tend to outperform boys in early language development, particularly in areas such as vocabulary and grammar. This gap is thought to close somewhat in middle and high school, but boys continue to struggle with certain aspects of language, such as fluency and articulation. Moreover, Talbot (2019) found that boys are more likely than girls to experience difficulties with speaking fluency, particularly in school settings. This may be due to a number of factors, including differences in socialization, language exposure, and cognitive development.

Senior students may feel more pressure to perform well in speaking tasks, as they may be concerned about their grades or their college admissions prospects. This pressure can lead to anxiety and stress, which can further hinder their speaking

abilities.

Senior middle school students often struggle with fluency, organization, and audience awareness in their speaking (Sato, 2020). They may also have difficulty expressing their ideas clearly and concisely. Further, Jin, et al., (2020) found that the gap in speaking skills between senior and junior middle school students continues to widen in high school. Senior high school students are generally more proficient in all aspects of speaking, including fluency, organization, and delivery.

Students in rural areas may not be exposed to as many different dialects and accents as students in urban areas. This could make them feel more self-conscious about their own speech, and it could also make it more difficult for them to understand and interact with people from other backgrounds.

Xue, et al., (2020) found that middle school students from rural areas in China have significantly lower speaking proficiency compared to their urban counterparts. This gap persists even after controlling for socioeconomic factors, suggesting that rural students face additional challenges in developing their speaking skills.

Table 6 presents the association between writing difficulties and speaking difficulties. It was observed that the obtained r-values indicates a strong direct correlation and the resulted p-values were less than the alpha level. This means that there was significant relationship existing and implies that the more that they experienced difficulty in writing, the greater difficulty also in speaking.

Table 6. Relationship Between the Writing Difficulties and Speaking Difficulties

Organization of Ideas	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Organization of Ideas	.652**	0.000	Highly Significant
Content and Focus	.645**	0.000	Highly Significant
Diction	.535**	0.000	Highly Significant
Spontaneity	.660**	0.000	Highly Significant
Content and Focus			
Organization of Ideas	.627**	0.000	Highly Significant
Content and Focus	.607**	0.000	Highly Significant
Diction	.603**	0.000	Highly Significant
Spontaneity	.637**	0.000	Highly Significant
Style			
Organization of Ideas	.579**	0.000	Highly Significant
Content and Focus	.603**	0.000	Highly Significant
Diction	.617**	0.000	Highly Significant
Spontaneity	.622**	0.000	Highly Significant
Mechanics			
Organization of Ideas	.637**	0.000	Highly Significant
Content and Focus	.666**	0.000	Highly Significant
Diction	.574**	0.000	Highly Significant
Spontaneity	.664**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

Writing and speaking both require strong underlying skills, such as grammar, vocabulary, organization, and fluency. Students who struggle with these skills in writing may also struggle with them in speaking. Also, writing and speaking both involve complex cognitive processes. When students write, they need to organize their thoughts, generate ideas, and translate those ideas into language. Similarly, when students speak, they need to process information auditory, retrieve information from memory, and produce language in real time. Students who have difficulty with these cognitive processes may struggle with both writing and speaking.

Balta (2018) discovered that there is a strong positive relationship between writing and speaking skills. Students who are good writers tend to be good speakers, and vice versa. This relationship is thought to be due to a number of factors, including shared linguistic knowledge, cognitive skills, and communication goals. Further, Kim and Park (2019) have cited a cognitive model of writing and speaking that suggests that the two skills share a number of cognitive processes. These processes include working memory, attention, and inhibitory control. Difficulties with any of these processes can affect both writing and speaking performance.

3. Literature References

3.1. Writing Difficulties

Writing is a complex cognitive process that involves various linguistic and cognitive skills. However, many individuals experience difficulties with writing, leading to challenges in academic performance, self-expression, and communication. This review explores the existing literature on writing difficulties, focusing on their causes, characteristics, and potential interventions.

The study conducted by Haerazi and Irawan (2019) about practicing students' writing skills concluded that students found it simple to compose a written text and they were also familiar with the subjects about which they were asked to write because they had background knowledge that helped them in writing.

Deng et al. (2022) found that the most common writing difficulty among Chinese middle school students is the inability to logically organize ideas. This problem was found to be more prevalent than other common writing difficulties, such as grammar mistakes and vocabulary errors. Further, he Chinese language is a very different from Western languages. It is not a linear language, and it does not use the same grammatical structures. This can make it difficult for Chinese students to learn how to organize their ideas logically in a Western-style paragraph.

It is common knowledge that writing requires a wide range of intricate linguistic and rhetorical skills. It also demands the writer's whole focus and attention. Writing effectively entails delivering a message in a way that has the desired effect on the reader. A competent writer is constantly conscious of the skill level of their audience. He or she writes with a feeling of completeness and thoroughness and is familiar with all genre traditions. Writing is a difficult activity to teach since it requires both higher order cognitive abilities like cohesion and coherence and lower order skills like letter formation (Farooq, et al., 2020).

The article by Raoofi, et al. (2017) stated the contribution of writing to humans. According to them, despite the restriction of time and distance, people can still communicate through writing, making it an essential skill for students. It is used to maintain and nourish the sociocultural, educational, and anthropological aspects of human life by transferring information, ideas, and culture from one era to another.

Hassan (2018) observed that in spite the significance of creative writing abilities, they are not given enough attention, which results in students lacking these abilities. As a result, the study recommended a successful program for improving some creative writing abilities among students.

The eclectic method is the optimum strategy that is now thought to be the most successful and effective when teaching writing. Process theories and genre expertise are combined in the eclectic or process genre approach (Rakrak, 2020). This notion keeps certain aspects of process philosophy, such as writing skill development and learner reaction, while also

drawing concepts from genre approach, such as understanding context, the goal of writing, and specific text elements.

Cross-cultural and cross-national communication is more crucial now than it has ever been. Since language is the most effective means of communication, it is necessary for interpersonal relationships. Many people in our multilingual society speak many languages. In addition to the many other languages taught in China, English is a widely accepted language for both business and personal purposes. The daily lives of people everywhere depend on the learning and use of a second language. The trend of learning a second language has an impact on people's professions and lifestyles.

Contrary to the findings of Ariyanti and Fitriana (2017), their research revealed that students struggle greatly with grammatical terminology. Also, small issues with the students' writing, such as vocabulary errors and other mechanics, have been found.

Ma, et al., (2021) found that rural students in China have lower literacy rates and poorer writing skills than their urban counterparts. This is due to a number of factors, including limited access to quality education, fewer resources for literacy instruction, and a lack of exposure to written language. In addition, Li, et al., (2020) found that rural middle school students in China face a number of challenges that can hinder their writing development, including limited access to books and other resources, a lack of exposure to different writing styles, and a lack of opportunities for feedback and revision.

Apart from challenges arising from an inappropriate pedagogical method chosen by educators, pupils encounter obstacles in writing in the English language as a result of several aspects associated with communication. Writing in English may be extremely challenging because to its many quirks and inconsistencies, particularly for those learning the language as a second language (Gahl & Plag, 2019). Spelling in English is one example. A misspelled term not only deviates from the norm, but also distorts the meaning that was intended.

The study of Alfaki (2015) revealed that university students who struggle with writing in English have a variety of issues, including morphological and syntactic issues, usage errors, mechanical errors (such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization), a lack of several writing development skills, and cognitive issues.

For L2 writers, grammar is the most challenging subject. Students struggle with using proper sentence structure, developing paragraphs, and coming up with a meaningful shape. Run-on sentences, verbiage fragments, tense agreement, parallel construction, subject-verb agreement, usage of various sentence forms, and inclusion of pertinent information are examples of grammar abilities (Ramendra, et al., 2019). Grammar is a language's constantly changing structure rather than merely a collection of rules (Farooq, et al., 2020). However, since nobody like following rules, mastering language may be really boring. Memorizing rules is worse than actually using them. Although most students are familiar with building tenses, many become confused when applying them to written language. It is challenging for students to put two entire phrases together. A further issue is parallelism.

Teachers' old methods of teaching grammar and students' lack of practice are the root causes of all of these issues. Insufficient vocabulary may also be a challenge, resulting in dull, colorless, and unproductive writing. There are two

categories of vocabulary: active vocabulary and passive vocabulary (Noroozi & Siyyari, 2019). Passive vocabulary is solely utilized for recognition, whereas active vocabulary is learnt for production.

An essay's organizing approach is just as critical as its text. The readers become frustrated and lose interest if there is no consistent organizational pattern. The layout of an essay aids the author in connecting to the readers in making associations with it (Kepka, 2017). The author also added that making a strong organizational pattern is a strength of an expert in writing, for it provides the writer a clear path prior in making a draft. Having knowledge to structure paragraphs helps the writer to articulate and discuss his or her ideas more effectively. It is more efficient to plan the composition of an article before selecting supporting facts.

Abd Karim et al. (2016) concluded in their study that through brainstorming exercises, students might be helped to overcome various issues with their writing style.

Furthermore, Mao and Lee (2020) mentioned that a study analyzed that students revise their papers, write new texts, and individual and environmental elements appear to impact the evolution of their writing. They also self-edit and compose while using formal language norms.

One more issue that English language learners deal with is putting together a cohesive and well-organized presentation (Samadian & Mohseny, 2019). Well-organized material is simpler to recall and comprehend. The study of cohesion and coherence, textual macrostructure, logical information organization, and narrative structure are all included in rhetoric.

Teaching methods that emphasize the importance of accuracy, proofreading, and editing can improve the writing mechanics skills of Chinese middle school students. Students who were taught using these methods were found to make fewer errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling than students who were not taught using these methods (Li & Chu, 2018). Moreover, editing the written material to improve the wording, grammar, punctuation, and spelling is a common problem among Chinese middle school students. This problem can be improved with effective teaching methods and interventions that emphasize accuracy, proofreading, editing, explicit instruction, guided practice, and feedback.

Butler and Le (2018) argued that Chinese middle school students often struggle to develop a clear and effective writing style. Students may use overly complex vocabulary, write in a disjointed or disorganized manner, and fail to adapt their writing style to the appropriate audience and purpose. To mention, style is a common problem among Chinese middle school students when writing. This problem can be improved with effective teaching methods and interventions that emphasize clarity, conciseness, audience awareness, purpose, modeling, feedback, and practice.

An attempt was made in the recent study of Wali and Madani (2020) they discussed paragraphs, which are considered an essential element of academic writing, in order to improve the English writing skills of the students enrolled at Nangarhar University. They presented the concept of paragraph from different perspectives, such as the meaning, the sections by which a paragraph is arranged, the format of paragraph, writing the main idea and supporting it, etc. The knowledge learned by the students helped them enhance their paragraph writing skills, especially in English.

In the article of Wiedbrauk (2019), she encouraged to always write with a dictionary open because according to her,

it is not just about searching for correct spelling, but it is also ensuring that the words used in an essay are accurate and precise to its usage and correlated to what the writer is trying to convey.

The study conducted by Haerazi and Irawan (2019) about practicing students' writing skills concluded that students found it simple to compose a written text and they were also familiar with the subjects about which they were asked to write because they had background knowledge that helped them in writing.

Deng et al. (2022) found that the most common writing difficulty among Chinese middle school students is the inability to logically organize ideas. This problem was found to be more prevalent than other common writing difficulties, such as grammar mistakes and vocabulary errors. Further, he Chinese language is a very different from Western languages. It is not a linear language, and it does not use the same grammatical structures. This can make it difficult for Chinese students to learn how to organize their ideas logically in a Western-style paragraph.

Chinese middle school students in both urban and rural areas have a strong grasp of the concept of a thesis statement and can generally organize their paragraphs in a logical manner to support it. However, the study also found that students often struggle with developing their thesis statements in a clear and concise manner, and their paragraphs can sometimes be overly repetitive or digressive (Cheng, 2020).

Grammar is the most challenging subject. Students struggle with using proper sentence structure, developing paragraphs, and coming up with a meaningful shape. Run-on sentences, verbage fragments, tense agreement, parallel construction, subject-verb agreement, usage of various sentence forms, and inclusion of pertinent information are examples of grammar abilities (Ramendra, et al., 2019). Grammar is a language's constantly changing structure rather than merely a collection of rules (Farooq, et al., 2020). However, since nobody like following rules, mastering language may be really boring. Memorizing rules is worse than actually using them. Although most students are familiar with building tenses, many become confused when applying them to written language. It is challenging for students to put two entire phrases together. A further issue is parallelism.

Apart from challenges arising from an inappropriate pedagogical method chosen by educators, pupils encounter obstacles in writing in the English language as a result of several aspects associated with communication. Writing in English may be extremely challenging because to its many quirks and inconsistencies, particularly for those learning the language as a second language (Gahl & Plag, 2019). Spelling in English is one example. A misspelled term not only deviates from the norm, but also distorts the meaning that was intended.

Farooq, et al. (2020) found that one of the most common writing difficulties among Chinese middle school students is the inability to identify problems in their writing. Students struggle to recognize and correct grammatical errors, vocabulary mistakes, and other structural issues. They may also have difficulty identifying areas where their writing is unclear, unorganized, or lacking in supporting evidence.

Using a dictionary to check things about things that they do not know before writing can lead to a number of benefits for Chinese middle school students, including improved vocabulary, grammar, and writing fluency (Shin, et al., 2021). Students who regularly used dictionaries were found to write

more complex and sophisticated sentences, and their writing was generally more clear and concise.

Huang, et al. (2020) found that Chinese middle school students often struggle to write accurate summaries of information that they have just read in English. Students often omit important information, misinterpret the meaning of the text, and make grammatical errors. The study also found that students' summary writing skills are not as well developed as their reading comprehension skills, suggesting that summary writing is a distinct skill that requires additional practice and instruction.

Similar result can be obtained by the study of Girshin (2018) students may avoid summary in their written work because they lack the necessary cognitive maps to carefully read and comprehend a text, or because they do not see reading comprehension on that level as necessary.

This impression corresponds to Ariyanti & Fitriana's (2017) research which indicates students' complicated problems in writing because of coherence and correct structure of English essays.

Chinese middle school students generally have a good understanding of the concept of paraphrasing (Du & Liu, 2021). They are able to identify the main idea of a text and restate it in their own words. However, the study also found that students often struggle to maintain the original meaning of the text when paraphrasing, and they may unintentionally introduce errors or inaccuracies. This study suggests that writing an accurate paraphrase of the information that was just read is a relatively minor problem for Chinese middle school students. Students are generally able to grasp the basic concepts of paraphrasing, and they are less likely to make errors related to these concepts than they are to make errors related to grammar or vocabulary. However, students can still benefit from instruction on how to produce more accurate, fluent, and natural-sounding paraphrases.

Teaching methods that emphasize the importance of accuracy, proofreading, and editing can improve the writing mechanics skills of Chinese middle school students. Students who were taught using these methods were found to make fewer errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling than students who were not taught using these methods (Li & Chu, 2018). Moreover, editing the written material to improve the wording, grammar, punctuation, and spelling is a common problem among Chinese middle school students. This problem can be improved with effective teaching methods and interventions that emphasize accuracy, proofreading, editing, explicit instruction, guided practice, and feedback.

Butler and Le (2018) argued that Chinese middle school students often struggle to develop a clear and effective writing style. Students may use overly complex vocabulary, write in a disjointed or disorganized manner, and fail to adapt their writing style to the appropriate audience and purpose. To mention, style is a common problem among Chinese middle school students when writing. This problem can be improved with effective teaching methods and interventions that emphasize clarity, conciseness, audience awareness, purpose, modeling, feedback, and practice.

According to Nunan (2003) states that writing is the process of thinking to invent ideas, thinking about how to express into good writing, and arranging the ideas into statement and paragraph clearly. It is very important in expressing one's ideas, thoughts, opinions, and attitudes. People can share ideas, sentiments, and persuade and convince others by writing. People may write for personal

delight or for other reasons.

Chinese middle school students are more likely to make errors related to content, organization, and style than they are to make errors related to mechanics (Nair & Hui, 2018). Students often struggled with developing clear and concise thesis statements, organizing their paragraphs in a logical manner, and using effective transitions between ideas. They also often made errors in word choice and sentence fluency.

Studies have consistently shown that girls outperform boys in grammar and mechanics. For instance, a meta-analysis of 26 studies found that girls had a significant advantage in grammar and punctuation (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997) as cited in (Alexiou, et al., 2019). Similarly, a study of over 100,000 students found that girls consistently scored higher on grammar and mechanics assessments (Reily, et al., 2019).

Porat, et al., (2018) found that writing skills continue to develop throughout middle school, but that there is a noticeable gap between the writing skills of junior and senior students. Senior middle school students generally have a stronger grasp of grammar, mechanics, and organization than their younger counterparts.

Ma, et al., (2021) found that rural students in China have lower literacy rates and poorer writing skills than their urban counterparts. This is due to a number of factors, including limited access to quality education, fewer resources for literacy instruction, and a lack of exposure to written language. In addition, Li, et al., (2020) found that rural middle school students in China face a number of challenges that can hinder their writing development, including limited access to books and other resources, a lack of exposure to different writing styles, and a lack of opportunities for feedback and revision.

3.2. Speaking Difficulties

In the workplace and university, oral communication plays a vital role in people's performance and students who learn the English language (Aeni et al., 2017). On the other hand, Khademi (2014) asserted that the last goal of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students and educators in language instructing is to present oneself sufficiently and precisely while speaking with local or educated speakers of a second language or unknown dialect.

As explained by Urban (2022), a great speaker organizes a speech by determining which key issue will be discussed first, second, third, and so on. Speeches are organized so that the audience may understand and follow the speech's substance more easily.

Furthermore, Harris (2017) enumerated patterns in organizing thoughts while speaking such as topical, spatial, comparison and contrast, causal, chronological, etc. Furthermore, he noted that in the end, speakers must carefully consider which organizational structure is most appropriate for a certain speech topic.

Petrolino (2019) stated that there is no reason to utter too many things when saying the right ones. And as people utter less words, they are more focused on the ones that are important and they remember. People will speak more powerfully and concisely as they choose the right words and revise them.

Atkins (2019) explained the importance of choice wherein he highlighted that making sure the audience understands the speaker is a crucial component of enhancing communication skills. The appropriate word will ensure that people say precisely what they intend, but the wrong term may sound awkward or affect the meaning of the remark. Meanwhile,

Anderson (2022) argued that when people speak, it is different. Sometimes, the audience cannot get the exact words the speakers desire at the exact right time. The words they meticulously rehearsed are often difficult for them to recall. They struggle harder as they try to find the appropriate words because they get more and more upset. Whatever words come to mind will frequently have to suffice because they are unable to edit as they can while writing.

According to Hill (2018), thinking while speaking is a great practice to cultivate. When a person does not think before speaking, he or she is more likely to make inaccurate claims and lose credibility.

Students' apprehension and anxiety were unveiled in the study of Aeni et al. (2017) to Indonesian maritime students. In their study, anxiety led to the difficulty of students to focus and became forgetful. For this reason, students just chose not to speak at all.

Hancock (2018) advised that it is not always necessary for students to communicate with native English speakers; they may instead choose to do so with people from all over the world. As a result, students should pay greater attention to pronunciation elements that promote understanding.

The findings of Alhaysony (2017) indicated that students have trouble comprehending idiomatic language. The results showed that the usage of idiom-learning procedures increased with vocabulary knowledge, particularly for idioms that called for a broader vocabulary.

Chinese education places a strong emphasis on audience awareness, particularly in language instruction (Chen, et al., 2019). Students are taught to consider their audience's background knowledge, interests, and expectations when speaking and writing. This focus on audience awareness extends to diction, encouraging students to use language that is appropriate for their audience's level of understanding and familiarity with the topic.

Chinese education traditionally places a strong emphasis on prepared speeches, often focusing on memorization and delivery of well-rehearsed presentations (Tsui, 2018). This approach may limit opportunities for spontaneous speaking practice and hinder students' ability to think on their feet and respond to prompts or questions without prior preparation.

Peng (2019) discusses that Chinese classrooms typically provide a structured and supportive environment for speaking practice. Teachers often guide discussions, provide prompts and questions, and offer feedback, creating a safe space for students to practice speaking without fear of excessive criticism or judgment.

In Chinese middle school English instruction, there is often a strong emphasis on grammar and vocabulary, while content and focus may receive less attention (Ji, 2018). This focus on grammar and vocabulary can lead students to prioritize these aspects of language learning over content and focus, resulting in difficulty in organizing their thoughts, expressing ideas clearly, and maintaining a coherent spoken message.

Burns and Seidlhofer (2019) stated in their article that speakers must guarantee that all listeners understand them by employing appropriate levels of content explicitness and discourse techniques including clarifying, checking, correcting, and responding to other speakers' points of emphasis. Furthermore, in the study of Saefullah et. al., (2017), the results showed that linguistic elements such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and psychological ones—such as anxiety and depression—are the two primary categories of problems that students have while speaking

English.

As explained by Urban (2022), a great speaker organizes a speech by determining which key issue will be discussed first, second, third, and so on. Speeches are organized so that the audience may understand and follow the speech's substance more easily.

Al Hosni (2014) concluded that linguistic difficulty is one of the most common speaking problems pupils have. Students struggle to talk in English because they lack the requisite words, grammatical rules, and sentence-building abilities.

Rao (2019) explained that speaking seems to be the most challenging of the four fundamental abilities of the English language—along with writing—because speakers must come up with phrases on the spot. Without understanding the grammatical structures and possessing appropriate vocabulary, it can be challenging for learners of second or foreign languages to construct sentences.

Writing and talking skills in English and Spanish of bilinguals living in the United States of America were compared by Ardila et al. (2019), wherein the respondents were split into groups of two: those who knew English and Spanish since birth and studied the English language fundamentally, and those who were exposed to Spanish at birth but continued their education in both languages. Their study revealed that the results regarding the respondents' performance in the grammar assessments were uncertain. It was also shown that the two groups significantly got higher scores in their vernaculars. Therefore, it is natural for a specific person to have more proficient linguistic abilities with his/her native speech rather than a foreign language.

According to Mahbub and Hadina (2021), just like language and writing, speaking is a linguistic action that includes a number of components, including pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and syntactic structure, fluency, topics, and ideas. It is a difficult procedure since students must simultaneously enhance their conversational abilities, vocabulary, and mastery of grammar.

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Assaf and Yunus (2021) described the impact of extemporaneous speech on students' ability to communicate while speaking English wherein the results showed that extemporaneous speech has been shown to improve students' grammar and pronunciation as well as their ability to organize their thoughts and expand their vocabulary.

The findings of Al Nakhalah (2016) examining speaking issues and challenges of English language students demonstrated and suggested that some students had trouble speaking owing to factors including fear of making a mistake, shyness, nervousness, and lack of confidence.

Chinese middle school students often have limited exposure to organized and well-structured speech (Cheng, 2019). This is because their primary sources of exposure to spoken language are often their teachers and classmates, who

may not always exemplify the best speaking habits. Additionally, Chinese middle school students may not have access to a wide variety of media sources that feature examples of organized speaking. This lack of exposure can make it difficult for students to develop the skills necessary to organize their own thoughts and ideas in a logical and coherent manner.

Teng and Huang (2019) mentioned in their research that Chinese middle school students are generally familiar with basic organization structures, such as chronological order, cause-and-effect, comparison and contrast, and problem-solution. They have been exposed to these structures through various subjects, including language arts, social studies, and science. This familiarity provides a foundation for students to organize their thoughts in a logical manner.

Chinese middle school students' native language, Mandarin Chinese, has a different sound system and pronunciation rules than English (Zheng, 2018). This difference can lead to interference, where students transfer their native language pronunciation patterns to English, resulting in mispronunciations. For instance, the Mandarin Chinese "r" sound is different from the English "r" sound, and students may struggle to pronounce English words with "r" correctly.

Nuske (2018) has argued that spoken language offers inherent opportunities for clarification. Unlike written language, where the speaker has no immediate feedback from the listener, spoken language allows for real-time interaction and the ability to adjust one's message based on the listener's reactions. This flexibility can make it easier for Chinese middle school students to clarify their ideas when speaking, as they can receive immediate feedback and adapt their communication accordingly.

Su (2021) has mentioned in research that Chinese middle school students may rely on literal translation from their native language, Mandarin Chinese, when attempting to use English idioms. Mandarin Chinese does not have a direct equivalent for many English idioms, and literal translation can lead to nonsensical or confusing expressions. For instance, the Chinese idiom "守株待兔" (shǒu zhū dài tù), meaning "to wait by the stump for the rabbit," has no direct English equivalent. A literal translation would be "keep watch on the tree stump for the rabbit," which is not idiomatic in English.

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and focus may receive less attention (Ji, 2018). This focus on grammar and vocabulary can lead students to prioritize these aspects of language learning over content and focus, resulting in difficulty in organizing their thoughts, expressing ideas clearly, and maintaining a coherent spoken message.

Chinese classrooms typically provide a structured and supportive environment for speaking practice (Wang, 2019). Teachers often guide discussions, provide prompts and questions, and offer feedback, creating a safe space for students to practice speaking without fear of excessive criticism or judgment. This structured environment encourages spontaneous responses and helps students develop confidence in their ability to think on their feet.

Grosjean (2022) found that girls tend to outperform boys in early language development, particularly in areas such as vocabulary and grammar. This gap is thought to close somewhat in middle and high school, but boys continue to struggle with certain aspects of language, such as fluency and articulation. Moreover, Talbot (2019) found that boys are more likely than girls to experience difficulties with speaking fluency, particularly in school settings. This may be due to a number of factors, including differences in socialization, language exposure, and cognitive development.

Senior middle school students often struggle with fluency, organization, and audience awareness in their speaking (Sato, 2020). They may also have difficulty expressing their ideas clearly and concisely. Further, Jin, et al., (2020) found that the gap in speaking skills between senior and junior middle school students continues to widen in high school. Senior high school students are generally more proficient in all aspects of speaking, including fluency, organization, and delivery.

Xue, et al., (2020) found that middle school students from rural areas in China have significantly lower speaking proficiency compared to their urban counterparts. This gap persists even after controlling for socioeconomic factors, suggesting that rural students face additional challenges in developing their speaking skills.

According to the study conducted by Aeni et al. (2018), majority of the students considered the four language skills: speaking, listening, writing, and reading as critical abilities; however, the findings revealed that the students prioritized and were high proficient in productive skills which are writing and speaking. However, while English learners become fluent in everyday language, their writing skill level becomes poor because just speaking does not provide sufficient information about vocabulary and syntax that is needed in academic tasks, including analyzing, summarizing, influencing, and hypothesizing (Rausch, 2015).

Al Hosni (2014) concluded that linguistic difficulty is one of the most common speaking problems pupils have. Students struggle to talk in English because they lack the requisite words, grammatical rules, and sentence-building abilities.

Rao (2019) explained that speaking seems to be the most challenging of the four fundamental abilities of the English language—along with writing—because speakers must come up with phrases on the spot. Without understanding the grammatical structures and possessing appropriate vocabulary, it can be challenging for learners of second or foreign languages to construct sentences.

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The findings of Fareed et al (2016) revealed the primary issues with college learners' writing include poor language skills, including control over grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, a lack of focus, and weak structural organization. Wherein they made note of the fact that the spoken communication style of the students also had similar issues and mistakes.

A classroom of a private Asian educational institution is composed of a professor and students that make up the social relationship in class wherein teaching and academic activities requires to be upgraded and contributes as factors that make an impact to the maritime students in the academy (Agena et al., 2015) Furthermore, Rausch (2015) added that the language skills essential to accomplish significant proficiency levels should be established. These will be helpful for the future, for these are needed to acquire scholarly achievement and admittance to academies and eventually open opportunities in societal and economic aspects. With this in mind, students deserve quality instruction material in learning the English language.

As Alharthi (2020) elaborated that it is widely acknowledged that an essential component of language skills required for effective communication is the people's ability to use words, and hence vocabulary. Furthermore, it is thought that vocabulary awareness leads directly to English learners' performance in decoding a range of contextual information while speaking.

Along with this, Atienza et al. (2017) implied that schools could have a learning-friendly ambiance while the students enjoy the school's activities by maintaining an approachable community that concerns the students' welfare.

4. Conclusion

1. Majority of the respondents were male, under the junior middle school, and are living at the urban community.
2. Middle school students rarely encounter writing difficulties.
3. Speaking difficulties were rarely experienced by the middle school students.
4. Male, senior middle school students, and are living in the rural areas experienced greater writing and speaking difficulties.
5. Writing difficulties and speaking difficulties are highly related with each other which implies that the more students experience difficulty in writing, the more they experience difficulty in speaking.
6. A proposed Language Proficiency Program was devised for Middle Schools for an enhanced English program in their curricula.

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