

How do EFL Students write outside of the classroom? Time, challenges, and strategies

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Abstract: Writing English in a non-English environment can be challenging, mostly for students whose first language is not English. Students are therefore encouraged to develop additional classroom activities, such as maintaining a consistent writing habit, to improve their writing performance and competence when using the language. The current paper aims to explore how graduate students engage in such writing routines by examining the time they allocate to this activity and the challenges they encounter when trying to perform. To achieve this aim, qualitative data that consists of in-depth interviews with 30 EFL graduate students ($n = 21$ male and 09 female) enrolled in the master's program of the English Department were collected. Findings revealed that graduate students had very limited extra-classroom writing habits because of challenges related to time constraints, lack of motivation, and limited language skills. Strategies such as using social media, creating writing groups, and maintaining writing journals were proposed by student participants as strategies to enhance their extra-class writing activities.

Key words: Challenges; English; Habit Strategies, Students; Writing

Résumé : Écrire en anglais dans un environnement non anglophone peut être difficile, surtout pour les étudiants dont la première langue n'est pas l'anglais. Les étudiants sont donc encouragés à développer des activités supplémentaires en classe, telles que le maintien d'une habitude d'écriture, afin d'améliorer leurs performances rédactionnelles et leur compétence dans l'utilisation de la langue. Le présent article vise à explorer comment les étudiants inscrits au cycle master maintiennent de telles routines en examinant le temps qu'ils allouent à cette activité et les défis qu'ils rencontrent dans cette activité. Pour atteindre cet objectif, des données qualitatives ont été recueillies à partir d'entretiens approfondis avec 30 étudiants de troisième cycle EFL ($n = 21$ hommes et 9 femmes) inscrits au programme de master du département d'anglais. Les résultats ont révélé que les étudiants diplômés avaient des habitudes d'écriture très limitées en dehors de la salle de classe en raison de défis liés aux contraintes de temps, au manque de motivation et à des compétences linguistiques limitées. Des stratégies telles que l'utilisation des médias sociaux, la création de groupes d'écriture et la tenue de journaux d'écriture ont été proposées par les étudiants participants comme stratégies pour améliorer leurs activités d'écriture en dehors des cours.

Mots-clés : Anglais, Défis, Écriture, Étudiant, Habitude

Introduction

In a second- or foreign-language learning situation, there are some skills learners need to master to improve their linguistic competence and to demonstrate their mastery of the target language. Among these skills, academic writing appears among the most important, though one of the most daunting for both native and non-native learners of English. In fact, research has shown that writing in English as a foreign language can be stressful, challenging, and even a source of anxiety for learners of English as a foreign

language because of their limited exposure to formal written English compared to their native peers (Irawati et al., 2022; Matsuda, 2012).

Nonetheless, mastery of academic writing constitutes an asset for both native and nonnative learners of English, for it has a significant impact on their academic and professional performance (Graham, 2019). It is a requirement in the academic journey of students and facilitates their transition into the job market, from their application process to their daily services at work. Further, with the multiple purposes writing serves (tell a story, report a meeting, publish academic and scientific results, gauge content knowledge, cope with stress, share personal experience...), it is a versatile tool used nowadays beyond academic and professional spaces; it has become a ubiquitous instrument for entertainment and communication by academics and non-academics. For instance, technology is nowadays playing a great role in the expansion of writing, and the internet and social media are offering spaces where thousands communicate and socialize by writing emails, blogs, tags, and personal stories through websites such as Facebook, Twitter, My Space (Graham et al., 2015).

In a language learning situation, engaging in extra writing activities gives a huge advantage to learners. Angelo et al. (2023) maintain that students in the process of learning an additional language like English should develop consistent writing habits outside of their academic contexts. They further argue that maintaining this consistency in writing contributes to building up students' confidence and competence and facilitates their engagement in formal writing activities. As a result, students will easily develop a spontaneous writing routine that will serve to foster their confidence and critical thinking. The same idea is reinforced by Akmal et al. (2024), as they stressed the importance of developing learning strategies in an EFL writing situation.

However, evidence has been found from research that students, even at graduate and post-graduate levels, engage in very limited writing activities, especially those that are not assignment-driven or formal classroom requirements (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Graham & Perin, 2007). Further, in most writing classes, students are given simple writing assignments such as filling in the blank, note-taking, or simple paragraph writing, activities that do not encourage students to display the depth of their knowledge and understanding of a subject matter (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Graham et al., 2013; Koita & Thiam, 2024). Further, general observations from the researcher and discussions with colleagues have revealed that students' writing performance was very low because many of them were reluctant to engage in extra-class writing activities. This result was noticeable in students' final written productions, which are very simplistic and lack the vigor and in-depth academic requirements of their levels. Some factors have been reported to impact students' writing routines, including students' cultural and social background, their lack of confidence in their writing competence, their skills as writers, and the relationship shared with the reader (Deane, 2018).

Despite the importance of investigating how students engage in extra-class writing activities and the challenges that impact their writing routines, few studies have tried to unveil students' insights into the challenges that hinder their writing routines and the strategies they believe will boost these routines. Based on empirical data collection, this

study aims to investigate the different writing habits that EFL graduate students from Mali have at the university, the challenges that hinder these habits, and the strategies that students think can help them maintain these extra writing activities. Three research questions guide this research:

- 1) What extra writing habits do graduate students from Mali have?
- 2) What challenges prevent EFL graduate students from developing writing habits?
- 3) What strategies do graduate students believe will foster and maintain their writing habits?

1. Theoretical framework

The current study is framed under Graham's (2018) Writing Within a Community model (WWC model), which suggests that writing is a societal activity that occurs within the context of a community of writers. This model draws on a social and cognitive approach to explain how writing occurs within a community (Ekholm et al., 2018). Writing is therefore seen as an activity that takes place within a community and is shaped by the cognitive competence of the writer and the socio-cultural backgrounds that he/she carries as a writer. In this model, Graham listed interrelated components that intervene to impact this activity. These features include the purpose for engaging in writing, the members involved in the activity, including the writers and the readers; the tools that can vary from paper and computers to digital materials; the practices used to achieve the writing goals; the physical and social environment, including the classroom, writing centers, or digitalized spaces; and the relationship between the members that make this community (Graham, 2018). These interrelated components interact to guide motivations and interests into writing (Pajares et al., 1999) and can also serve as guiding points to explain attitudes and habits writers develop as part of a certain community.

The WWC model is a useful model that helps understand both writers' motivations (Graham, 2018) and attitudes toward writing (Pajares et al., 1999). In the current research, the model will help to understand what writing habits students develop as members of a certain social community and how this membership shapes their development to become writers.

2. Literature review

2.1. Developing to become a writer

Whether carried out individually or as members of a writing community, consistent writing habits are useful in building students' proficiency and serve as a touchstone for the development of students into writers. Vrika (2023) defines writing habits as the systematic and consistent actions that individuals use to engage in a writing activity. Vrika further indicated that these habits are impacted by the slot of time dedicated to it, the space where the writing occurs, and the tools and strategies employed to facilitate the process.

Despite the paucity of studies that have explored university students' writing habits and challenges that hinder such habits or motivate them, research has documented some factors that may impact writing development. In fact, students' development into writers has been reported to be shaped by cognitive, social, individual, cultural, and

environmental factors (Beard et al., 2009). According to Hayes (2012), as cited in Graham (2021), students' writing and learning actions are motivated or constrained by limitations in human cognitive capacities and by the skills, knowledge, strategies, and beliefs that they have access to. Writing requires, therefore, a careful coordination and execution of both cognitive and emotional senses, including attention, motor, memory, and knowledge of language and writing. Further, Graham (2012) reported writing to be a socially constructed activity carried out within a writing community that shares common goals and aspirations. For instance, students who belong to a scientific community are likely to engage in scientific writing activities and will develop writing habits related to science. Importantly, students' experience with how writing is instructed and the knowledge that they have gained or fail to gain can also determine the habits they will build up as they grow to become writers. Hence, when students belong to a social community in which they are encouraged to carry out daily writing activities through strategies like keeping diaries or journals, they are likely to develop a certain autonomy and habit in writing. In the same vein, Applebee et al. (2017) suggest that the development of writing is not a simplistic action but the result of interrelated dimensions such as changing learning contexts, social needs, opportunities, resources, technologies, relationship with language, and writing instruction.

Furthermore, various strategies exist today to facilitate students' development into writers and to forge students' writing habits. From physical sites to virtual platforms, communities such as writing groups, research groups, writing communities, and writing centers, made up of small to substantial members and shaped by common goals or assumptions, are developing. However, despite the various opportunities that exist today, students' individual active participation in these writing interactions is shaped by many challenges.

2. Challenges and motivations for maintaining writing habits

Maintaining a writing habit is complex and problematic even for skilled writers. Those habits that an individual develops as a writer are mostly shaped by academic or professional needs, or personal experience (Mills, 2004; Tredinnick, 2008; Tulley, 2018; Vrika, 2023). This implies that motivation to maintain writing habits is determined by different reasons. In fact, by investigating the writing habits of students from diverse faculties and domains using a sample of 232 students, Vrika (2023) has explored factors that can facilitate or challenge the writing habits of students. The researcher typically focused on elements such as writing frequency, preferred spaces for writing, methodologies used by students, and difficulties encountered. The author found that students' writing habits were mostly shaped by the desire or requirement to complete a classroom assignment rather than a hobby that they have developed and nurtured. He further found that students' eagerness to write was hindered by time constraints, lack of inspiration, and challenges related to limited vocabulary and limited knowledge of the language. Similar challenges, such as uncertainty of how to begin their writing, difficulties of maintaining a flow of ideas, and challenges related to vocabulary, were also revealed to hinder the writing habits of students labelled as English language learners in a study investigating the motivations of students to engage in writing (Graham2021).

Therefore, daily writing has a huge impact on fostering students' writing habits. It can render writing enjoyable and motivate students to engage in free goal writing, which is

not necessary curriculum driven. As put by Graham (2012), creating a writing environment by developing routines that facilitate writing development and students' motivation to engage in writing is important while teaching students the required skills, tips, competence, and willingness to become writers.

Further, research has indicated that when students develop consistent writing habits, they are likely to gain a certain autonomy in using the language and a certain ease and fluency when reporting their thoughts on paper. Because of the in-depth knowledge of the language that students will develop, their writing will be characterized by a deep knowledge of the topic, a refined style, and a critical development of the topic at hand. Therefore, they are likely to develop a certain autonomy in the command of the language, critical thinking, and consistent writing habits.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Procedure

The current study focuses on the extra-classroom writing habits of graduate and postgraduate students in an EFL context. It is a case study (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2023) that collected the data through in-depth, semi-structured interviews that asked open ended questions to students about their writing habits. Therefore, an in-depth interview of 30 to 45 minutes was used to collect the data from 30 students (21 males and 09 females) enrolled in Master's studies in the English Department (Master of Linguistics and Master of Translation Studies). Being a teacher in both targeted programs (Composition in the Master of Translation and Communication in the master of Linguistics), the researcher has utilized a convenience sampling technique (Patton, 2022) to select participants for the study. The study was motivated by an informal conversation with students about their writing habits and difficulties in holding to these habits. This aroused the researcher's curiosity about students' writing habits and inherent challenges. Therefore, during one of his or her ordinary classes, s/he explained to students the purpose of the study and the willingness to collect data related to it. A sheet was then distributed to students on which they had to indicate their availability to participate in the study, their phone numbers, and their convenient time for the face-to-face interview. According to the indicated times, the researcher then suggested different appointments for students to record the interviews. Students were divided into four groups of 10 students each, and the researcher met with each group for the in-depth interview. After the face-to-face interview, a discussion was held in an informal way so that students could easily share their insights. Although the researcher had a specific schedule for teaching the different programs, s/he did not impose these teaching times on the students. The interview questions combined background information about participants and open-ended questions, which collected narrative and reflective data on writing. All the participants were required to sign a consent form in which the purpose of the study, its importance, and the participants' ability to withdraw at any stage of the study were clearly indicated.

3.2. Participants

The initial targeted sample was 40 students; however, a total of 30 students participated in the interview. The target population is students enrolled in one of the two existing Master's programs (Master of Translation and that of Linguistics Studies) of the English

Department of the University of Letters and Humanities of Bamako (currently University Yambo Ouologuem of Bamako). The population of students attending both programs ranges between 30 students for the Master of Translation and 24 for Linguistics Studies. Students enrolled in the different master's programs come from different socio-economic backgrounds and have different professional statuses; some have no other activities apart from the master's, but others are professional students. As described in the tables, for the master of Translation Studies (see Table 1), 18 students participated in the study; that is, a total of twelve (12) males and six (06) females from different occupational backgrounds.

As far as the Master of Linguistics studies (Table 2) is concerned, 09 males and 03 females, with a total of 12 students, participated in the study.

Participants' permission was sought by the researcher, and consent forms stating the purpose of the study were signed by each participant before the recordings. The interviews were administered according to the students' and the researcher's convenience. In addition, participants' names were changed into pseudonyms for the sake of confidentiality.

Table 1- Profile of students from the Master of Translation

Enrolled program		Translation studies					Total
Gender		Professions			Age groups		
Male	Female	teachers	Permanent students	other	20 to 35	35 to 45	
12	06	14	02	02	14	04	
18		18			18		18

Table 2- profile of students from the Master of Linguistics

Enrolled program		Linguistics studies					Total
Gender		Professions			Age groups		
Male	Female	teachers	Permanent students	other	20 to 35	35 to 45	
09	03	07	01	04	08	04	
12		12			12		12

3.3. Data analysis

Once the different responses were collected, the verbatim was transcribed, and a meticulous reading and a manual coding process were applied to the data to determine the preliminary codes following the six-step process of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility, allowing the researcher to interact between different stages of analysis as needed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Students' responses were then read multiple times, and initial codes were generated. Similar codes were then gathered to form preliminary themes. To ensure credibility and avoid bias, the findings were discussed with the participants to check their perspectives

and agreement on the final themes. In addition to that, the findings were cross-checked and discussed with one of the researcher's assistants according to his general views about students' writing habits.

4.Results

Six codes were found upon the final analysis of the data and were converted into three themes. The first theme that has been framed as **time allocated to writing**, emerged from the following set of codes: no specific time for writing and limited time devoted to writing. This initial theme informed how time is an important aspect in students' writing habits. The second set of codes that gave the theme **blocks to writing persistence** is the following: lack of inspiration, lack of motivation, limited knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, and lack of confidence in oneself. This second theme responds to the questions of the obstacles students face when they engage in consistent writing exercise. The last and third theme found from the data analysis is **strategies proposed by students to maintain a writing habit**. This theme was inspired by the following codes: set timely writing activities, use social media to exercise writing, create a writing group, and maintain a writing journal.

4.1. Time allocated to writing

The researcher was interested in understanding how students were using extracurricular time to develop and maintain a certain consistency in their writing activities. Students were asked to specify how much time in a day, a week, and a month they dedicated to writing activities that are not assigned by a teacher. Another related question was whether students have a specific schedule for their writing. It was found that students dedicate very little time to writing activities outside an academic setting, and they scarcely have a planned or specific time allotted to writing that is not assignment-bound. They share that most of their extra class writing was shaped by academic activities such as writing a research article, responding to a class assignment, or preparing for a presentation. Even though they gave a positive answer to the question of whether they enjoy writing in English (see appendix), they have recognized that they lack enough time to engage in consistent writing activities. For instance, one of the participants, Hamidou, confirmed: 'I don't have a daily planned time for writing. Most of the time, I write from inspiration or necessity.'

Further, students reported that they had limited extra class time for writing. Some students believe that maintaining a consistent writing habit is challenged by their busy academic and professional schedules and daily social issues that limit their time for writing. For them, their academic occupation does not allow them to plan for any other writing activity. They shared their knowledge of the importance of developing extracurricular writing and its impact on their performance, but they think they are unable to create a time slot to carry out this activity. This view is shared by Omar, one postgraduate student:

'If I could develop a consistent writing habit, I think my overall writing skills and my performance in English would increase. Unfortunately, I am too busy with my professional activities, such as teaching, and the social ones; that is why limited time is left for writing. Therefore, I scarcely engage in extra-class writing

activities. I always think that I will have time for that, but it is very difficult for me to find the time.'

The same line of thought is shared by Rama, a graduate student, who confessed that her teacher encourages her to schedule reading and writing time to improve her linguistic performance, but she judges being too occupied by her academic activities so that she has very limited time for extra-class writing exercises.

4.2. Blocks to students' writing habits

The researcher was also interested in understanding what challenges students face that impede their writing routines. They were then asked to list all the difficulties they face when they engage in the writing activity and state how each difficulty impacts their writing. The results revealed that in addition to the lack of time dedicated to writing, students' writing habits were hindered by a certain number of challenges, such as lack of inspiration, lack of motivation, and limited linguistic knowledge. Students shared that even though they would like to develop consistent writing habits, they lack the inspiration and the motivation to engage in such an activity. From their conversations, the researcher understood that they are not inspired to write because they do not know what to write about and have not been taught to maintain a writing habit. Further, some students reported their frustration at struggling with English vocabulary and grammar when they engaged in extra writing activities. For example, a participant, Daniel, describes his feelings about this point:

'Sometimes, I set my alarm to write about my daily reflection, or any other topic, because I would like to develop good writing habits, but I struggle to produce something meaningful. I feel that I do not know enough English words to convey my thoughts or write appropriately, and I therefore find myself stuck without a single word coming. It is frustrating for me and kills my motivation to write.'

Another student, Fatou, thinks that her lack of maintaining daily writing habits is hindered by her lack of confidence in her writing production due to her limited knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar. Fatou maintains that this lack of confidence does not encourage her to write consistently and share her writing with her friends.

This shows that students' writing habits are governed by the motivation they develop over time, but also by their confidence in their writing abilities. Consequently, some students are afraid of sharing what they have written because they think the quality is not acceptable, or they are afraid of the judgment of their peers. This frustration is shared by David, a student enrolled in the master of Communication program:

I cannot share my writing with my peers because I am not very satisfied with the vocabulary and grammar that I use. Sometimes the words I want to employ are not really the ones I use, and I also make a lot of grammar mistakes, especially with punctuation and the use of tenses. During in-class assignments, my papers come back with a lot of red ink, and I don't know how my peers will judge my writing or me once they see that. Therefore, I write very rarely.

Students' motivation to write and share their writing with their peers is therefore motivated by the confidence they have in their linguistic skills. It is therefore important that they be

taught how to gain/regain confidence in what they produce and be ready to seek feedback from their peers. What is encouraging is that some students are trying to move beyond these hurdles and are thinking of developing strategies that will maintain their writing habits. Questions related to what strategies they think can boost their writing habits and improve their competence in writing received responses presented in the section.

4.3. Strategies proposed by students to maintain a writing habit

It is important to notice that even though students are struggling to maintain a writing routine, they are conscientious of their situation and, therefore, they were asked to brainstorm strategies that they believe may enhance and reinforce their writing habits. By sharing their perspectives on this question, the researcher has enumerated some significant points, which are presented as follows:

- Set a timely writing schedule

Students believe that one of the biggest challenges to their writing habit is time. They believe that they are unable to find an appropriate time to engage in writing. Therefore, scheduling a daily time and striving to respect this set time is, in the view of students, very important to induce long-term writing habits. Whether individually or as a group, students believe that they should create a certain time that they will spare for their writing habits. They shared that setting a writing time is not enough to maintain a writing habit, but they must respect and value this time and make sure they will produce meaningful writing. This view is shared by Fama when she states:

‘Now that you are asking, I am sure if I had a dedicated writing time framed for myself I would improve my writing habits. We have time for connecting to social media and chatting with friends, then we can make sure we devote some time to our academic activities such as writing and reading. I will try to set a time for my daily writing and will do my best to stick to it.’

- Use social media to maintain writing habits

Social media has become a versatile tool for people to engage in many activities. Many writing platforms exist today that give students opportunities to engage and improve their writing skills. In fact, students are not ignorant of these platforms. Some have confirmed that they already use these platforms to share their writings with friends and peers. This is the case of Abdallah, one respondent who claimed:

‘Whenever I have something special happening in my life, I share my insights about it with my friends by posting on my Facebook page long paragraphs and essays about it. It is a good writing exercise for me. It gives me the opportunity to practice my writing and to improve as a writer.’

Like Abdallah, many students believe social media can offer students spaces for displaying their writing skills by expressing their views and perspectives about various topics, ranging from personal to public interest. They believe that these media platforms can help them maintain a certain consistency in their writing habits.

4.4. Creating writing groups

In addition to using social media, students believe that if they could gather into writing communities or writing groups, they would give themselves opportunities to create and maintain writing habits. For instance, Fama believes that if she belonged to a group that gathered each week with some specific writing objectives, she would be motivated to keep on writing. A writing group as noted by Daniel,

'Not only does it provide us with collaborative sharing of experiences, but also allows us to inspire each other, to have different views on projects, and provide encouragement to each other when we find ourselves stuck. It is also an occasion for us to not only write but also discuss with each other our written productions.'

As noted by most students, writing groups allow them to receive feedback and benefit from the expertise of their peers by sharing what they have written. This will contribute to an overall boost in students' confidence by creating a safe space for confidently sharing their writing with each other. It can also serve to motivate each other to engage in writing. From their insights, students believe that peer review being a powerful tool for confidence building, these writing groups will also allow them to compare their mistakes and correct each other. Consequently, students will be more equipped with the motivation and confidence to carry on the writing.

4.5. Maintaining a writing journal

Another strategy proposed by students to maintain a writing habit is to record their daily activities in a written journal or a diary. A written journal may be personal or public, and it will allow students to foster their daily writing skills as they engage in the practice. Some students judge it necessary to regularly reflect on their thoughts, ideas, or daily activities through this regular writing activity. Even though the majority of participants confess not to have a daily recording in a diary or journal, some have revealed that they are already engaged in such an exercise, and they believe that maintaining a writing journal can help improve their overall academic performance. Others have stressed the impact that maintaining a writing journal has on their personal and mental abilities. For instance, one student, David, mentioned, "By regularly writing about my daily activities, I create my own writing routine that I keep personal and sometimes use it as a tool to ponder about my writing competence and my daily routines." In fact, many students who are already engaged in such a practice have found it rewarding for them in many ways. Another student, Sali, believed that a writing journal is for her a tool for self-discovery and self-improvement. She further noticed that it allows her to find inspiration and maintain a writing habit. This idea is reinforced by Djebou, a student enrolled in the second year of the Master of Linguistics:

I believe that I should have a journal in which I record everything that I live, witness, or learn. It is a good way to improve your writing competency and to keep memories of the important moments of your life. However, sometimes we think that we are too busy for that. I think that we have not acquired such habits from an early stage, and it is cultural to my view.

These responses by students clearly indicate that maintaining a diary or a journal in which they record their views and insights can enhance students' writing performance

and allow them to grow both academically and spiritually. As stated by one student, it is a way for them to preserve their memories and eventually share them with other people. Overall, these findings show that students are striving to create writing habits through individual and collaborative strategies. However, as raised by one participant, the social and cultural background of students also has an important impact on their maintaining sustainable habits in writing.

5. Discussion

The current paper aimed to explore writing habits held by graduate and postgraduate students outside the classroom, the constraints they face when embarking on such an activity, and the different strategies they believe can reinforce their writing habits. It was found that students have very limited writing experience outside their academic context and that most of their writing activities do not follow any set schedule. These same findings align with those of De Smedt et al. (2018), who find that most of the writing that students carry out is motivated by their willingness to perform an assignment task rather than a habit that they have developed. Furthermore, some constraints, such as time limitations and limited language skills, were found to hinder students' writing routines. In the same vein, Lee (2020) and Williams and Takaku (2011) found that students face the same writing apprehensions when engaged in writing practices. Consistently, Vicra (2023) has found that students' eagerness to write is mostly impeded by constraints related to time limitations. The data have also revealed that students have proposed multiple ways that they think can encourage their writing habits. For instance, students propose strategies such as setting a timely writing schedule, using social media, creating writing groups, and maintaining a writing journal to help them engage and maintain writing habits. These findings are consistent with outcomes from earlier research. Indeed, in her workbook entitled *Becoming an Academic Writer*, Goodson (2024) has enumerated several strategies that can help writers maintain a writing habit. Among these strategies, scheduling one's writing sessions was proposed as one of the best ways to manage contingency and boost writing production (p.20). Furthermore, students' proposals identified writing groups as positive spaces for their writing practices. This idea was reinforced by Wilmot, K. & McKenna, S. (2018) as they praised the transformative effects of writing groups on students' writing performance in accordance with their findings in a study that investigates the role that writing groups play in postgraduate students' lives. Overall, the findings remind us that even though writing is a social activity, the context in which it occurs determines how it is performed. This perfectly echoes Graham's (2018) model of *Writing Within Community*. Most students confess that they were unable to maintain a writing discipline outside the classroom because of social and professional constraints, which impacted the time they could dedicate to extracurricular writing. However, further studies suggest that the impact of socio-cultural constraints on students' extra-class writing should be the object of future research.

Conclusion (and implication)

Writing contributes to both students' academic and professional success. It is therefore imperative that students develop useful and enjoyable ways to improve their writing skills. Developing writing habits outside the classroom can highly participate to raising students'

writing competence and equip them with robust skills to face any academic or professional endeavor. This study has shed some light on what routines EFL students from Mali have regarding their writing activities. The current study has revealed that students lack writing time dedicated to extra-class writing and face some pressures provoked by writing hustles, such as lack of inspiration, incompetence in the use of the language, and lack of confidence. Students are, however, conscient of the importance of creating strategic methods which will help them establish and maintain a certain writing habit in their daily routines. They have therefore proposed some strategies that can help induce and develop writing habits. It is, however, important that students also understand that only consistent writing practices will have real impact on their competence and will equip them with the confidence they need in any situation. Further, teachers must contribute to enhancing students' writing routines by creating an appropriate writing environment, by supervising the different writing groups created by students, and by regularly giving feedback to students. Finally, it is important to help students acquire their writing habits at a very early stage by encouraging them to engage in such practices before they even reach the university.

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Appendix (students' interview protocol)

Investigating the writing habits of graduate' students

Hi ladies and gentlemen, this study aims to investigate the writing habits of graduates and post-graduates outside the classroom. Your sincere responses will be very helpful to us in understanding these habits and planning how to improve them. Please take some of your very important time and answer the questions on this form. We really appreciate your help and participation in this study.

1) Personal information

Tell us about yourself

What is your level of study in English

What is your gender?

In which Master's program are you enrolled?

2) Students' writing experience

Tell us about your writing habits

1-How often do you write in English in a day/ week/ month?

2-How much have you enjoyed your writing course?

3-What do you think you have learned that has fostered your writing habits? What did you wish to learn?

4-In which subjects were you assigned a lot of writing? What was the maximum length?

5-Do you enjoy writing in English?

6- What kind of writing do you often do? (for example, letters, stories, poetry, news articles, school assignments, journal writing, shopping lists)

-Do you engage in any other writing that is not assigned by your teachers? If no, why? If yes, which kind?

7-What motivates you to write outside of the classroom?

8-What difficulties do you face when you write outside the classroom?(please make a list by level of importance) In what way do they impact your writing habit?

9-What strategies do you use to overcome these difficulties?

10-What strategies do you think can help students enhance their writing habits? Cite as many as possible and say which ones you have already used.

1. What else about your writing habits do you want to share with us?

Thank you for your participation and for sharing your insights with us