

**The Consequences of Secondary Teachers' Low Efficacy in Delivering
Writing Instruction: A Phenomenological Study**

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Abstract

The problem addressed by this research study was secondary English teachers' low efficacy in delivering writing instruction, which results in the deficient writing performance of students in Maryland public high schools. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of secondary English teachers with low efficacy levels in delivering writing instruction. Pre-service and in-service professional development lacks adequate focus on writing instruction to prepare teachers for success in delivering the content effectively in their role. Teachers' preparedness influences their psychological well-being and confidence to perform. The study's final purposeful sample included seven secondary English teachers with more than 1 year of experience teaching students in grades 10 – 12. The research participants were employed in the state of Maryland at one of the three public high schools. Data was gathered through semi structured interviews and a focus group and confirmed through member checking. The three major themes that emerged from data analysis using NVivo 15 software were: (a) culture of learning, (b) strategies to deliver writing instruction, and (c) teacher preparation. Three recommendations for practice were: (a) to revisit the pre-service training for new teachers, (b) for school system leaders to provide more communal in-service training to encourage reflective conversations around writing instruction, and (c) for the leaders of school systems to develop professional learning communities centering on writing instruction delivery and student support. Recommendations for future research were to (a) add an interview question where teachers exemplify their success in delivering writing instruction, (b) delve deeper into instructional writing strategies used by successful teachers in a focus group question, (c) include student writing artifacts to show growth, and (d) include an interview question about students' preparation for technology competency for success on online high-stakes writing assessments.

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Section 1: Foundation

Historically, teacher preparation training programs have not provided secondary instructors with adequate training in writing instruction to effectively deliver the content to their students (Kramer-Vida et al., 2021). Consequently, teachers enter the classroom with a sense of unpreparedness (Athans, 2022) that impacts their emotional state and, in turn, their instructional practices (Xiyun et al., 2022). A teacher's primary job is to provide instruction to students, so lacking knowledge about how to teach certain content can weigh on a teacher's psychological well-being (Athans, 2022) and adversely influence their instructional tendencies (Athans, 2022), which will be counterproductive to their efforts to realize student success (Xiyun et al., 2022).

Spiker (2023) reveals that writing instruction, in the era of high stakes testing, has been limited to preparing students for standardized tests. This reduced scope of instruction produces students who are hyper-dependent on teachers' guidance to synthesize ideas (Wang & Troia, 2023). Graham et al. (2023) asserts that the quality of writing instruction is significant to teaching writing to students. Often schools that are in high-poverty areas lack quality instruction because of the caliber of teachers employed at these institutions (Spiker, 2023). Additionally, the professional development at the high-poverty schools is centered on select literacy content rather than writing instruction as a daily literacy need (Graham et al., 2023). Teachers are forced to teach in a scripted and formulaic approach, which strips students from writing exploration and restricts their growth as writers (Shanahan et al., 2023).

Teachers' psychological well-being--their emotions--can have a domino effect on a learning environment. According to Xiyun et al. (2022), teachers' emotions affect their students' motivation, ability to think, and their behavior. That said, it is essential that teachers' emotional state be intact and that they perform their duties with confidence (Athans, 2022). Literature

shows that teachers' well-being can support deep learning and facilitate positive social and emotional development in their students (Xiyun et al., 2022). In short, the energy that the teacher delivers to the students within the classroom can affect students' overall adjustment to the learning environment that can support or inhibit students' academic achievement (Hajovsky et al., 2024; Tang & Zhu, 2024).

In addition to considering the inadequate training in writing instruction provided to instructors (Kramer-Vida et al., 2021), for the purpose of this study, it is important to be knowledgeable of an ongoing trend of students' deficiencies in writing in Maryland (MD) high schools according to recent MD Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) results, a standardized assessment that measures students' level of proficiency in various subjects, namely high-level writing proficiency. The MD School Report Card, a year-end comprehensive report of MCAP English 10 Writing Assessment data for school years 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, was used for this study.

According to the student performance data for the time periods indicated above, a large percentage of students scored in the lowest performance band of beginning and developing, the performance band just above emerging, but below on-grade level, i.e., respectively, 46.6% in 2022 (MD State Department of Education, 2023a) and 46.5% in 2023 on the English 10 Writing Assessment (MD State Department of Education, 2023b). These gaps in students' knowledge and ability in writing impact students' academic efficacy in writing (Kreamer & Breaux, 2025), which will increase the difficulties that teachers face in improving students' writing performance now and years to come in their educational career if these deficiencies are not addressed. To provide additional context, it is important to know that high school students take the MCAP in English, where their writing proficiency is assessed, in grade 10 only. That said, there is time,

that is, there is a year between students' sophomore and senior year, before the students graduate from high school for teachers to provide targeted support for students' writing deficiencies to fortify their writing abilities. However, the prevalence of teachers with a low efficacy level in delivering writing instruction is a hinderance that blocks students' potential for growth in their writing ability (Xiyun et al., 2022) because of the teachers inability to effectively deliver the writing content in a way that promotes student engagement and that provides the necessary individualized writing support that students need (Reeve & Cheon, 2021).

Students' motivation is dependent upon the enthusiasm and commitment that teachers display in their role as the instructor (Zou et al., 2024). The teacher-student relationship that originates from that student motivation to engage in the learning process is facilitated by the classroom teacher that acts as a lifeline of support for students (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). Studies show that teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy demonstrate higher instructional quality in how they engage students, provide individualized support, and manage their classrooms (Kreamer & Breaux, 2025). Thus, establishing an atmosphere of trust and support that results in a level of self-efficacy for both the teacher and the students is essential to forging a strong bond with students, which impacts their motivation to engage in the learning process (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2021; Lazarides et al., 2023).

Using this study's data, school systems can make informed decisions to develop a professional learning culture centered on collective exchanges among teachers and to encourage teachers to engage in routine reflection of their sentiment, beliefs, and goals for writing instruction (Athans, 2022). In other words, if the goal is to improve students' writing performance, then there should be some professional development programming that should focus primarily on building teachers' self-efficacy in writing and writing instructional strategies

(Hodges et al., 2021). Developing a climate where teachers engage in regular discourse with other teachers about their apprehensions, experiences, best practices, speculations, and instructional goals regarding writing instruction will help to improve teachers' self-efficacy in delivering writing instruction (Athans, 2022; Kreamer & Breaux, 2025).

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed by this research study was secondary English teachers' low efficacy in delivering writing instruction, which results in the deficient writing performance of students in Maryland public high schools. Student improvement in performance, namely, in the area of writing, is dependent upon teachers having a specialized skillset to inspire a sense of self agency in students, which, in turn, will fortify students' self-efficacy in writing, that is, the conviction that one can achieve at a given level in a writing (Lesley et al., 2021).

Thus, the types of training provided to secondary English instructors influences their ability to confidently support their students in writing instruction (Zou et al., 2024) and to effectively deliver instruction (Xiyun et al., 2022). Without enhancing secondary English teachers' knowledge of how to deliver writing instruction, many students will continue to be deficient in writing. Consequently, these students will also be incapable of meeting collegiate writing standards and will face insurmountable academic challenges in higher education.

(Kramer-Vida et al., 2021).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of secondary English teachers with low efficacy levels in delivering writing instruction. Examining these teachers' experiences provided insight into the support that they give in the classroom to fortify students' efficacy in writing and overall writing performance.

This study utilized seven teachers from three public high schools in MD, who taught English to students in grades 10 – 12 and have taught English for more than 1 year at the secondary level. Participants engaged in semi structured interviews to describe their lived experiences regarding the writing instruction training received, their perception of the quality of their instruction, and their perspective regarding their level of readiness to deliver writing instruction. Teachers' level of efficacy in delivering writing instruction was derived from the semi-structured interview. One of the interview questions asked teachers to rate their level of confidence in delivering writing instruction.

Participating teachers from select high schools also engaged in a virtual focus group to initiate a conversation about their professional development in writing instruction and to exchange best practices in teaching writing to high school students. With proper training, teachers will be inclined to be more creative in delivering the writing instruction (Xiyun et al., 2022) and will be able to provide individualized student support (Zou et al., 2024) to satisfy different student needs. Most importantly, students will become more motivated to engage in the learning process (Athans, 2022) and, in turn, improvements in students' writing ability (Hunter et al., 2023) will be realized.

Research Questions

RQ1

What are the lived experiences of secondary English teachers with low efficacy in delivering writing instruction to students?

RQ2

How do the classroom practices and strategies of secondary English teachers with a low efficacy level in delivering writing instruction provide support to students to improve their writing performance?

RQ3

What professional development experiences should secondary English teachers engage in to gain a better understanding of their efficacy level in delivering writing instruction to improve student performance at the secondary level?

Theoretical Framework

Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as one's perception of how well they can execute an action in a particular situation. Regarding educators, self-efficacy in teachers centers on their confidence in their role within the classroom and their ability to influence student learning (Athans, 2022). The self-efficacy theory has been used to highlight how the influence that teachers' attitudes towards delivering instruction impacts students' attitudes towards learning (Fathi et al., 2021; Xiyun et al., 2022). Students mimic the behaviors demonstrated by their teachers, so it is important that instructors reflect a behavior of confidence so that students can imitate high-level efficacy behaviors (Athans, 2022). In relation to delivering writing instruction, a teacher's self-efficacy in delivering the content affects students' motivation to learn, their perception of their ability to complete writing tasks, and their level of engagement in instructional activities (Xiyun et al., 2022).

For English teachers, the self-efficacy theory relates to their feeling or perception of their preparedness to deliver writing content to the students. Studies have shown that teachers' pre-service professional development opportunities fall short in preparing teachers to teach writing

instruction (Kramer-Vida et al., 2021). This gap in support weighs on teachers' psychological well-being (Athans, 2022), which impacts teachers' creativity in the classroom and the quality of the relationships with their students (Zou et al., 2024).

Teacher-student relationships define the culture and climate of a learning environment as they consist of the past experiences that both the teacher and the student bring to daily classroom interactions (Zou et al., 2024). Ciampa and Gallagher (2021) assert that efforts to build strong teacher-student relationships should be made to develop an atmosphere of trust. An environment where trust is at its core is one where the self-efficacy levels of both the teacher and the student can flourish (Lazarides et al., 2023).

According to Athans (2022), teachers who possess self-efficacy produce students who possess self-efficacy. Thus, when teachers demonstrate a sense of confidence in delivering instructional content to students, namely, in the English classroom, students are more inclined to engage in writing activities and growth in writing performance, resulting from this exposure and their affinity to want to learn more about writing (Athans, 2022). The classroom culture must also include the expectations that the teacher will teach students a sense of agency, where they are accountable for and are in control of their own learning (Lesley et al., 2021), in addition to building relationships with students. Developing a sense of agency involves increasing students' confidence in engaging in classroom content by providing students with individualized learning experiences to support their specific needs through transformative learning efforts (Zou, et al., 2024).

This study also provided insight into the transformative learning theory, which centers on autonomy-supportive teaching (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). In transformative learning, individual students and their specific deficiencies in a content area are recognized, consequently, students

feel seen and heard (Tang & Zhu, 2024). When teachers have a vested interest in students' individual success, it helps to promote a positive teacher-student relationship, which improves students' motivation to engage in learning because they know that they have a line of support in the classroom that can be trusted (Xu et al., 2025).

When teachers feel more prepared, their level of creativity in the design of their lessons heightens, resulting in more meaningful learning experiences from which students can glean specialized skills (Xiyun et al., 2022) that could result in improved writing performance. Collectively, with habitual writing activities, e.g., reflective journaling (Athans, 2022), students' increased motivation, and their established sense of agency, students become active decisionmakers in the learning experience about writing instruction (Perry & McMurtry, 2022). Likewise, with their own heightened self-efficacy and sense of agency in delivering writing content, teachers can create these communities of confident student writers who are motivated to learn more about writing (Wang & Troia, 2023). In student-teacher relationships, the increase in confidence in both the student and the teacher regarding writing is beneficial for the teacher and the student (Xiyun et al., 2022). In detail, teachers' emotions, in this instance, those associated with the instructor's confidence, affect both the teacher's and students' motivation, engagement, and cognition (Fathi et al., 2021).

Definitions of Key Terms

Autonomy-Supporting Motivating Style

Autonomy-supporting motivating style is a student-centered approach to teaching that is sensitive to students' individualized needs through the use of differentiation (Zou et al., 2024).

Culture

Culture is the habits of the teacher and the students within a learning environment that define the climate of the setting and can influence student outcomes if it is prohibitive (Hunter et al., 2023).

Instructional Practices

Instructional practices are the routines that teachers embrace to deliver content and to reinforce concepts, which in turn, build students' self-confidence to engage in the learning process and trust in teachers (Kupers et al., 2023).

Low Efficacy in Delivering Writing Instruction

Low efficacy in delivering writing instruction is the teachers' lack of confidence in their ability to teach content to students (Athans, 2022).

Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being is emotional stability; both the student and the instructor's psychological well-being need to be intact to successfully and effectively fulfill the duties of their role (Tang & Zhu, 2024).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a level of assertiveness and confidence to meet a standard or to complete a task. (Athans, 2022; Tang & Zhu, 2024).

Student Engagement Strategies

Student engagement strategies are teachers' instructional practices that center on increasing student participation and motivation to engage in the learning process (Aldaghri, 2022).

Student Motivation

Student motivation is a student's drive to want to be engaged in the classroom and the desire to want to learn, which is driven by teachers' efforts to motivate students to learn (Zou et al., 2024).

Students' Sense of Agency

Students' sense of agency is students' receptiveness, initiative, and level of accountability for their actions as a learner, which produces empowerment and confidence to take on new tasks (Lesley et al., 2021).

Teacher Empowerment

Teacher empowerment is the act of providing teachers with exposure to training and the perspectives of other instructors to increase their confidence. Teacher empowerment is needed to fortify instructors' skillsets in delivering writing instruction (Athans, 2022; Kreamer & Breaux, 2025).

Teacher Preparation Programs

Teacher preparation programs are professional learning opportunities that develop teachers' skillsets before they enter the classroom and throughout their term as an instructor. (Kramer-Vida et al., 2021).

Teacher-Student Relationships

Teacher-student relationships are the interactions between a student and an instructor within the classroom setting that are influenced by the teachers' practices and the culture established within the learning environment. (Zou et al., 2024).

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning is a type of personalized learning that is a part of an instructor's daily instructional routine to support students individually, addressing students' unique learning challenges and diverse learning needs (Reeve & Cheon, 2021).

Writing Motivation

Writing motivation is students' willingness to engage in writing tasks, which is coupled with the understanding that more exposure to writing will help to improve one's writing performance (Wang & Troia, 2023).

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of secondary English teachers with low efficacy levels in delivering writing instruction. Examining these teachers' experiences provided insight into the support that is needed in the classroom to fortify students' efficacy in writing and overall writing performance. In the end, the lack of motivation to participate in learning that involves writing instruction in some secondary English classes thwarts students' improvement in their writing skillsets (Athans, 2022).

With increased awareness, MD school leaders can take the knowledge to assess the effectiveness of their present teacher training programming to ensure that professional development opportunities in writing are prevalent and are efficacious for teachers in order to prepare them to deliver high-level instruction to students in writing. The literature review for this study presented research on issues concerning teacher preparation for delivering in writing instruction, the connection present between teachers' self-efficacy and their instructional practices, teachers' attitudes toward delivering writing content and students' attitudes toward

engaging in writing activities, and strategies to increase student engagement in writing instruction to improve teacher and student self-agency and self-efficacy around writing.

The resources used included seminal works and peer-reviewed research studies retrieved from National University's Roadrunner database, which has multiple research databases connected, facilitating the process of finding many resources on a specific topic for each search conducted. The search strategy that was embraced included the following keywords and phrases: *teacher preparation and writing instruction, teachers' attitudes toward writing, teacher empowerment and writing instruction, teacher motivation and secondary student performance, teacher self-efficacy and teaching writing, fostering agency in students and high school only, teacher-student relationships, student motivation, and writing performance, writing pedagogy and high school, and writing instruction, student engagement, and motivation.* The Roadrunner feature to find related peer-reviewed articles for each of the above-searched keywords or phrases was used to find additional resources with similar perspectives and findings. Research on the state of MD's teacher preparation programming and writing proficiency data was retrieved from the MD State Department of Education's websites, *Teach MD* and *2023 MD School Report Card*.

Secondary English Teacher Preparation for Writing Instruction

Teacher preparedness programming in MD includes both traditional and alternative routes to gain certification to teach (MSDE, 2024a). More specifically, the *Teach MD* options include a series of courses offered at designated higher education institutions in MD. Each series includes courses that meet the content requirements. Both pre-service and in-service secondary teachers are faced with the challenges of professional development offerings that provide little to no support in the area of teaching writing to students (Kramer-Vida et al., 2021). Consequently,

the lack of exposure to adequate training results in teachers abandoning writing instruction or teaching it in a superficial manner that is void of deep learning about writing structure and that lacks the teachers' creativity (Xiyun et al., 2022). Research indicates that the lack of preparedness experienced by teachers weighs on their psychological well-being. As influential figures in the learning environment, teachers' emotions impact students' emotions (Fathi et al., 2021). Thus, if teachers are preoccupied with their inability to effectively teach writing, then, students sense this and become reluctant to want to engage in the writing activities (Haji Vosoogh et al., 2021).

Insight into Teacher Preparation Practices in MD

According to MD State Department of Education's (MSDE) multi-year Strategic Plan, published in June 2023, the state of MD is comprised of 24 local school systems (LSS), serving more than 889,000 pre-K to high school students (MSDE, 2024b). In 1991, teacher education became regulated in MD with MSDE's establishment of the Professional Standards and Teacher Education Advisory Board (PSTEB) (MSDE, 2024c). The PSTEB's mission is to define quality standards of training for educators to ensure that a high caliber education is provided to students. The purpose of the board's efforts is to guarantee that students have access to a pre-K through grade 12 learning experience that will equip them with the knowledge and skillsets that will prepare students for lifelong success (MSDE, 2024e). While the MD State Department put this governing body in place, its oversight is not restrictive, allowing LSSs, i.e., public school districts, the flexibility to define their school-based annual professional development programming for new and veteran teachers (Herrman & Grossman, 2021).

In MD, an LSS's educator preparation training for new and returning teachers must center on research-based instructional strategies that create high-quality learning environments

(MSDE, 2024d). However, there is leeway for each of the LSSs in MD to establish its own school-based professional development programming for teachers in isolation with outcomes to support the state's overarching professional learning goals for each educator subgroup, i.e., new and veteran instructors. The LSSs' professional development sessions' foci for each individual school within a school district may vary. The training for teachers aligns with each school-specific vision that school communities' have set for their distinct school (Herrman and Grossman, 2021). As the school's vision influences its professional development programming, the training sessions are often broad in scope, not offering teachers support for their specific instructional needs (Lesley et al., 2021).

As an effort to be inclusive of newly hired teachers' support needs, LSSs often assign new educators a series of trainings sessions to engage that cater to individuals who are new to the profession and the LSS, which often focus on LSSs' access or administrative procedures and expectations regarding professional responsibilities, and the like, but, notably, in MD, minimal professional development that centers on delivering academic writing instruction to students (Lesley et al., 2021). Likewise, the professional development that is offered to veteran teachers does not include opportunities to expand their skillset in delivering writing instruction (Herrman and Grossman, 2021).

Teachers' Perspectives and Preparation for Teaching Writing

Athans (2022) details a case study involving a National Writing Project, a collaborative experience that centered on writing instruction. During this experience, teachers shared first-hand experiences regarding delivering writing to students with other teachers. Within this space, the educators exchanged preoccupations, best practices, and forged bonds with a network of educators (Athans, 2022). A common sentiment was the lack of preparedness that instructors felt

in delivering, evaluating, and providing individualized support in writing (Kreamer & Breaux, 2025). The educators' experience of feeling that they are deficient in an ability to serve their students permeates the climate of the classroom, and, in turn, is detected by students, who begin to question the instructional capabilities of the instructor (Bandura, 1977).

Teachers who participated in the National Writing Project indicated that more professional development opportunities that center on writing solely would benefit teachers (Athans, 2022). Since the current professional development programming is void of any writing instruction support, teachers have no guidance on how to effectively teach writing to students. District-wide training that brings all teachers together at one location and does not maximize on the opportunity to share strategies with instructors for teaching writing are overlooking prime environments where exchange in best practices can benefit both (Kreamer & Breaux, 2025).

Teachers' Low Efficacy in Teaching Writing and Its Effects on their Confidence

Bandura (1977) asserted that individuals' level confidence in their ability to complete a task successfully results in one having a positive outlook about their pending performance. Likewise in Education, teachers' sense of confidence influences the engagement of students within the classroom (Fathi et al., 2021). In other words, students' motivation to learn and their behaviors are connected to the energy that teachers exert in the learning environment and the climate that is established (Fathi et al., 2021). Teachers' preoccupations about their instructional ability also restrict their efforts to deliver the content in an engaging and creative way (Xiyun et al., 2022), which is a factor that will determine if the instruction delivered is appealing enough to capture and retain the interest of students.

To model ideal behavior for students, teachers must demonstrate confidence in how they teach, speak, and interact with students regarding writing content (Kupers et al., 2023). As the

leader of the classroom, teachers' behavior is often mimicked by their students. Thus, teachers who have self-efficacy produce students with self-efficacy (Athans, 2022). It is the responsibility of the educator to nurture the tendencies of students to guide them into more refined behaviors or ways of thinking that will enable them to see their own worth as a learner, developing a sense of agency about their own learning (Athans, 2022). Students with a sense of self-agency are aware of the stakes involved with learning new concepts and make more of an effort to learn new concepts and to grow as an independent thinker (Lesley et al., 2021). Educators' view of their own capabilities is integral when it comes to motivating students to engage in learning. Teachers' emotions could have adverse effects on students' behavior (Fathi et al., 2021) within the classroom setting, which could prevent students' chances to acquire knowledge (Tang & Zhu, 2024).

Teachers' Psychological Well-being

Similar in nature to preparing students for upcoming assessments, a school district is responsible for providing teachers with training that will fill their skill gaps so that the teachers can provide students with the best educational experience in preparation for life success (MSDE, 2024c). Research on teachers' psychological well-being highlights the role that teachers' preparedness plays in the pressures that impact teachers' mental stability in an adverse way (Kansizoglu, 2023). The more equipped teachers are with the necessary exposure to writing strategies and opportunities to exchange best practices in writing instruction with other secondary English teachers, the less apprehensive and less guarded the teachers will be in teaching writing to students (Kramer-Vida et al., 2021).

Teachers' Psychological Well-being and Instructional Practices

Teachers' mental stability intertwined with their commitment to help students achieve growth in their learning capacity. Challenges that educators face become more complex with the growing numbers of students who are deficient in writing in MD according to trends shown in year-end state standardized testing results for students in Grade 10 (MD State Report, 2023). Teachers' identities in the classroom related to writing, i.e., their system of beliefs writing and its necessity in the learning environment informs the practice classroom practices and instructional tendencies that teachers employ to deliver writing instruction (Goldsmith, 2023).

Teachers' Instructional Identities in Writing and its Influence

The past professional experiences in education and, particularly, the classroom interactions that teachers have had are carried with them to each new learning environment that they enter (Zou et al., 2024). That said, the climate of a school and the emphasis on writing instruction in the classroom and the instructional strategies introduced to teachers through professional development in addition to their own personal perceptions about the significance of writing engagement in the classroom all comprise a teachers' instructional identity (Kansizoglu, 2023). Teachers' instructional identities inform the culture of a classroom through the daily routines that are established as a part of the day's schedule -- the exposure that students have to improve their overall performance as a writer (Fathi et al., 2021), and individualized writing support that is provided to students (Reeve & Cheon, 2021).

Teachers' confidence, a part of their identity, should be a factor that guides their instructional practices in the classroom (Goldsmith, 2023). As a result of teachers' own developed self-efficacy around teaching writing, their proactive approach to institute habitual writing experiences that are both collaborative and discursive, where the classroom evolves into

a community of writers who are inclined to naturally think about, speak about, and investigate writing (Perry & McMurtry, 2022). It is the teacher's writing identity that establishes the classroom landscape for writing exploration that facilitates students' motivation to engage (Wang & Troia, 2023).

Teacher-Student Relationships

Teacher-student relationships are the interactions between teachers and students within a learning environment that shape the classroom experience for both parties (Zou et al., 2024). These relationships between educators and the students with whom they teach can range from conflict-ridden, attachment, intimacy, and avoidance – each relationship type involves a varying range of affinity that the student has for the instructor (Havjosky et al., 2024). As leader of the class, the behavior that is demonstrated by the instructor elicits similar behavior from students (Tang & Zhu, 2024).

Both conflict-ridden and avoidance would fall into the category of negative teacher-student relationships; the former relationship is marked by major communication issues between the teacher and the student while avoidance is when the student would prefer not to engage the teacher at all (Xu et al., 2025). On the other hand, the more positive teacher-student relationships – attachment and intimacy – include clear signs of student's affinity for the teacher. The attachment relationship is less conducive to the growth of the student as there is a hyper dependency upon the teacher and the absence of initiative while intimacy is the ideal teacher-student relationship, where both parties expect one another's independence and feed off of the energy that one another brings to the relationship (Lazarides et al., 2023). Studies show that positive teacher-student relationships increase students' self-efficacy and motivation to engage in the learning process (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2021).

Developing a Classroom Culture through Relationships

The types of relationships developed between the teacher and the students within a learning environment establish the classroom culture of expectations, habits, and procedures that regularly take place in the setting (Havjosky et al., 2024). The teacher's inclination to provide differentiated support to facilitate each child's learning as an of a classroom culture that if prevalent realizes a student-centered instructional approach (Zou et al., 2024). As an instructor, a key role is to support students to ensure that they reach their distinct level of success, allowing students to become more appreciative of the instructor's efforts and emotionally secure in the learning environment (Tang & Zhu, 2024). Ultimately, students develop confidence and an increased willingness to engage in the learning process when instructors hear their voice and support their individual needs as a learner, resulting in an atmosphere of trust and engagement (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2021; Lazarides et al., 2023).

Teacher-Student Relationships and Developing Self-Agency about Writing in Students

Students who are performing below level in writing often lack the interest to engage in writing activities, or when they do engage in writing tasks, the experience is full of hesitancy and uncertainty (Xu et al., 2025). To reduce students' apprehension when writing, teachers must make efforts to motivate students while providing students with the strategies to be proficient writers (Perry & McMurtry, 2022). Developing a sense of self-agency in writing in students encourages them to approach writing tasks with confidence and accountability, accepting the idea that their learning will be gradual and welcoming feedback, which will inform their writing growth (Butterfuss et al., 2022).

Students with a strong self-agency about writing develop a level of grit to tackle various writing assignments (Athans, 2022). Students' confidence and affinity towards writing will, in

turn, support students' psychological well-being (Tang & Zhu, 2024). As a result, students will have a more enjoyable learning experience that is conducive to improved writing performance because of the increase exposure to writing that the student now has (Perry & McMurtry, 2022).

Autonomy-Supporting Instructional Approaches

The efforts that teachers take to increase their awareness of their students' interests or the learning support that they need within the classroom are autonomy-supporting instructional approaches (Zou et al., 2024). In terms of writing support, because some teachers lack the confidence in their own writing ability, are deficient in their knowledge of how to produce effective writing samples or to offer suggestions for improvement (Kansizoglu, 2023), many teachers will be hesitant to offer students individualized support that will elicit the need to speak precisely about writing strategies to support students' specific learning needs (Butterfuss et al., 2022). It is the teacher's responsibility to assess students' performance in writing to determine the differentiated approach that would work the best for each student's learning needs within the classroom (Tang & Zhu, 2024).

According to Reeve & Cheon (2021) to ensure that all students have a meaningful learning experience that addresses their individual needs as a learner, teachers should provide personalized learning experiences for students. As a result of teachers' attention to students' gaps in understanding, teachers will be able to design lessons that promote the student voice and allow choice in how students demonstrate their understanding of writing concepts (Perry & McMurtry, 2022). Hunter et al. (2023) asserts that when teachers are more proactive in establishing a culture that is supportive, students will face less challenges in meeting learning goals.

Teacher's Role in the Classroom to Support Student Learning

As student advocates, teachers are responsible for assessing students' learning needs and devising a plan to address those needs in the most effective way (Haji Vosoogh et al., 2021) to ensure that students meet learning outcomes. Teachers must be proactive and intentional to ensure that each learner's experience is equitable (Spiker, 2023) by making certain that each student can access the content that is being taught (Athans, 2022). A student's ability to access the content goes hand in hand with their motivation to engage the content, so teachers must employ engagement strategies that are differentiated to support all student types, meeting them where they are academically (Tang & Zhu, 2024).

Thus, teachers must adopt an autonomy-supporting approach to teaching that is also motivating in nature (Zou et al., 2024). The pairing of specialized support and motivation are both advantageous to students, helping to fortify teacher-student relations within the class. Resulting from the teacher's efforts to provide support, the student understands that the teacher has an interest in their individual success as a learner and becomes more invested in their own success as well (Kupers et al., 2023).

Differentiated Instruction and its Impact on Student Learning and Engagement

In today's educational landscape, to reach students, it is important to recognize the shift to online learning that has come to the forefront of ways to learn (Gregg & Shin, 2021). Differentiated instruction is no longer centered on classroom instruction, but it now also involves multi-modal instruction. In other words, in addition to face-to-face instruction, to be inclusive in one's teaching practices, teachers should also consider ways to offer content digitally or virtually as online learning is now an accepted platform for learning (Aldaghri, 2022).

Differentiated instruction in writing can be achieved with multiple instructional approaches. Research has revealed the benefits of community writing experiences (Graham et al., 2023), where students are given a prompt to discuss in an open dialog approach. In this open dialog, students share their perspectives in writing. Through this exercise, students are able to observe different writing patterns of their peers to gain insight into new forms of expression or new vocabulary (Alied et al., 2022). Teachers who employ support that is specific to students' needs will develop better relationships with students and increased motivation to engage in the learning process will result (Reeve & Cheon, 2021).

Student Engagement leads to Student Motivation to Engage in Writing

Teachers must be intentional to design writing lessons that are both stimulating and accessible. Students will not show improvements in their writing skill without efforts taken to motivate them to engage in the writing process (Wang & Troia, 2023). In detail, findings from a study found that students with higher writing motivation and more willingness to engage in writing tasks had a higher writing performance than those with a low motivation and less desire to write (Aldaghri, 2022).

Other ways to engage students includes meeting them where they are. Whether it is through the use of students' code language in a writing assignment or offering students a variety of topics to write on to appeal to their interests, maintaining engagement is crucial to students' continued exposure to writing and, ultimately, their writing improvement (Perry & McMurtry, 2022). Students' increased proficiency in writing will result in an increase in students' affinity to engage in writing tasks moving forward (Zou et al., 2024).

Incorporating Technology into Writing Instruction Appeals to Students

The post-COVID educational landscape developed new parameters for learning outside the traditional classroom (Gregg & Shin, 2021). Several case studies have proven the benefit of having students engage in blog-centered writing activities to allow students to naturally engage in written communication with their peers (Perumal & Ajit, 2022). The use of blogs in the classroom is an instructional approach to expose students to writing in a less painstaking manner (Alied et al., 2022).

Integrating technology into writing instruction will increase students' enthusiasm to engage in writing tasks (Salam et al., 2025). The excitement to participate in blogging exercises elicits students' motivation to engage in writing. Blogging is a quintessential writing tool for student engagement and writing practice (Alied et al., 2022; Perumal & Ajit, 2022).

Regularly Scheduled Writing Tasks increase Students Affinity to Writing

Teachers' intentionality comes to the forefront again when planning writing activities for students. It is imperative that students have regular exposure to writing tasks. Teachers should establish a routine where students can reflect upon their writing and receive feedback (Perry & McMurtry, 2022). Students will grow more comfortable articulating their thoughts in writing and more sophisticated in incorporating instructor's feedback – skillsets that are transferrable and will be beneficial in the higher education arena (Kramer-Vida et al., 2021).

A learning environment that is enthusiastic about writing and that embeds writing as a daily practice is one where students will become acclimated to the process of writing, resulting in increased motivation to write (Salam et al., 2025). Students' willingness to write will result in improvements in their writing performance, especially when teachers define learning goals and provide writing exemplars for students (Graham et al., 2023). In detail, when teachers make a

conscious effort to provide autonomy-supported instruction (Zou et al., 2024), students are more inclined to engage in writing assignments and develop a greater appreciation for the instructor for being intentional about the support provided by on students' individual needs (Reeve & Cheon, 2021; Zou et al, 2024). According to Tang and Zhu (2024), teachers have a distinct role to provide interventions to facilitate a student's acquisition of knowledge, cultivating self-efficacy and grit, which will promote the psychological well-being of students.

The Impact of Increased Exposure to Different Types of Writing

Studies show that students should be provided with exemplars of varying types to avoid adversely impacting students' motivation to write (Cho, 2023). As students' emotional state is a factor in their academic success, students' self-efficacy in writing may be negatively impacted if they are only given nearly perfect exemplars as a reference point when completing a writing assignment (Cho, 2023). Exposure to writing samples with varying amounts of flaws will allow the student writer to consider the task conquerable, i.e., a task for which the student possesses the skill set to successfully complete (Tang & Zhu, 2024). With increased awareness of the expectations for an assignment from being provided with exemplars, students' motivation to engage in the learning process is positively impacted (Wang & Troia, 2023).

Students' Increased Affinity to Write and Improvements in Performance

Students with a strong self-agency in writing possess accountability for their own learning (Athans, 2022). These confident learners welcome writing tasks because the student understands that writing development is a benefit that results from being engaged regularly in writing (Zou et al., 2024). Students with an affinity for writing bring their past experiences with writing to inform their new writing experience (Athans, 2022). These students are receptive to

feedback, accountable for their actions during the learning process, and strategic in the way that they learn from their mistakes from prior writing experiences (Tang & Zhu, 2024).

Lazarides et al. (2023) details that student's motivation to want to engage in the learning process is influenced by the established teacher-student relationship. This relationship creates an atmosphere of trust (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2021), where both parties, the student and the teacher are able to develop a higher level of self-efficacy. Zou et al. (2024) asserts that positive teacher-student relationships have been proven to increase students' intrinsic value and, in turn, their learning motivation.

The Benefit of Including Students' Identity in Writing Assignments

Inclusion of students' identity within writing assignments is an instructional approach that can be embraced by teachers to increase students' motivation to engage in the learning process (Jacobson, 2024). When students can connect and see themselves in a task, they are able to easily engage and be more expressive. Thus, writing assignments that require students to reflect upon aspects of their life are tasks that will encourage more student participation in writing.

Similarly, Perry & McMurtry (2022) assert that teachers should recognize varieties of English as remnants of the students' culture if goals are to increase students' engagement and connection to the instructional content. Consequently, efforts should be made by the instructor to find ways to incorporate this language variety in writing assignments as an instructional method to garner student interest in a given writing task (Perry & McMurtry, 2022). This approach to writing instruction is one that is equitable, allowing all students access and a chance to see themselves in the learning content (Spiker, 2023). Language diversity within the learning environment will be advantages to both the learner and the instructor. The student will feel more

accepted and seen while the instructor will gain more exposure to a variety of languages that will position the teacher to be more empathetic to learners who are multilingual.

Student Motivation derived from a Stimulating Learning Environment

Alied et al. (2022) assert that teachers who develop an interactive and stimulating learning environment are those who will ignite students' desire to engage in learning. These types of learning environments allow space for students to socialize, question, and be creative. Socializing is an aspect of an environment that welcomes students to build community amongst themselves. Tang & Zhu (2024) indicate that students' psychological well-being influences their overall satisfaction and acclimation to the classroom environment. In other words, a classroom setting that students consider a safe space is a location where learners will feel more inclined to engage in learning and will encourage their peers to become involved as well (Zou et al., 2023).

Classroom protocols created to promote student community-building while engaged in writing activities have a positive effect on student motivation (Fathi et al., 2021). Students develop a higher motivation and are more willing to be an active participant in the learning process. Increased involvement in writing activities will give students the needed exposure to improve their writing performance (Hunter et al., 2020).

Intervention as a Catalyst that Promotes Student Engagement

Tang & Zhu (2024) state that teachers have a responsibility to ensure that all learners within their classroom can access the content being taught. When teachers are reflective about their practice, their instruction and the support that they provide is more intentional and catered to students' unique needs. This student-centered style of teaching results in improved teacher-student relations and a greater sense of emotional security for students (Reeve & Cheon, 2021).

When students know that their teachers have their interest at heart, then they, too, become invested in their own success (Zhang et al. 2020). This investment comes in the form of increased student self-efficacy and accountability for their own learning (Zou et al., 2023). Students feel supported and heard in such environments. Thus, the supportive culture that teachers create in the classroom through their actions to intervene and provide the necessary supports to address students' individual needs will increase engagement and their chances for improvements in their writing ability (Perry & McMurtry, 2022).

In-service & Pre-service Professional Development with a Writing Delivery Focus

Professional development programming should be designed to ensure that instructors are prepared to deliver content effectively. Athans (2022) asserts that the teachers teaching teachers training model is the most beneficial approach to take to reach teachers. Whether the training happens at the start of the educator's career or after they have become a veteran, learning should take place in a communal fashion that is both reflective and based on the best practices of effective teachers (Fisher, 2022). Learning communities centered around writing instruction delivery and individualized student support will provide teachers – new or veteran – with the needed exposure to strategies that can enhance their impact on their students' success (Fisher, 2022).

Ethical Assurances

Before the data collection process and any recruitment of participants begins, the study was submitted for approval from National University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Approval from the school leaders at the individual schools where data was collected was also obtained. Regarding the researcher's positionality, the research participants were secondary English instructors from different schools within the same school district. The researcher was

open and disclosed prior instructional and training experiences with participants in an introductory email (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The researcher first connected with the principal of the schools to inform them of the study being conducted so that they were informed and to gain approval for their respective schools to be included in the study.

The Belmont Report, a framework of ethics in research that is used widely, is intended to protect the rights of research participants (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). To ensure that each of the necessary ethical requirements, i.e., informed consent, assent, confidentiality, and anonymity are addressed in this research study the following steps were taken. Concerning informed consent, an informed consent form was created to inform the potential participants about the study (see Appendix E). The letter included a description of the study, insight into participation activities, reassurance statement that participation is voluntary, risks of the study, benefits, a notice of confidentiality, the researcher's name and contact information for questions, an offer to receive a summary of the study's findings (Mertler, 2019).

For anonymity and confidentiality, the following strategies were employed in the research study. The study's semi structured interview questions were emailed to the participating English teachers to collect qualitative data about their lived experiences in the teaching writing in the high school setting. As a means to reduce bias, the participants were sent a copy of their responses to the interview to review the accuracy of the information collected. For confidentiality, the data in the form of their responses to the interview questions will be kept confidential for 3 years stored in a secure folder in Google Drive, an online file storage that will be password protected (Mertler, 2019) and will be discarded once that time period expires.

The role of the researcher in the study was to increase the accuracy and credibility of the data collected through the use of data triangulation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018), that is, by employing semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and member checking. Other efforts taken to ensure the accuracy of the collected data included member checking, where the responses to the interview questions and the transcript from the focus group were shared with participants for review to ensure that the perspectives captured were their own. A journal was maintained to track the researcher's thoughts and experiences as an active participant in the study. Interactions were documented along with the researcher's perspective as a professional in the field of English; these actions were taken to avoid bias. In the study, the role of researcher also required a level of acceptance to flexibility and openness to change (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of secondary English teachers with low efficacy levels in delivering writing instruction. Examining these teachers' experiences provided insight into the support that they can give in the classroom to fortify students' efficacy in writing and overall writing performance. This study assessed how the absence of confidence in teachers to deliver writing content to students in high school English classes, due to their inadequate pre-service and in-service training in writing instruction, limits student motivation to engage in writing activities. In the end, the lack of motivation to participate in learning process within these secondary English classes thwarted students' improvement in writing performance (Athans, 2022). From the data collection in this study, the instructional practices of secondary English teachers in teaching writing were revealed. The aim was to increase the awareness of the inadequacies in pre-service and in-service professional development in writing offered to high school English teachers in

MD, which affect teachers' confidence in delivering writing instruction, which, in turn, negatively impacts students' motivation and engagement (Zou et al., 2024).

Section 2: Methodology and Design

The problem addressed by this research study was secondary English teachers' low efficacy in delivering writing instruction, which results in the deficient writing performance of students in Maryland public high schools. Student improvement in performance, namely, writing, is dependent upon teachers having a specialized skillset to inspire a sense of self agency in students, which, in turn, will fortify their self-efficacy in writing. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of secondary English teachers with low efficacy levels in delivering writing instruction. Examining these teachers' experiences provided insight into the writing support strategies that they used in the classroom to fortify students' efficacy in writing and overall writing performance. This chapter provides an overview of the appropriateness of the chosen design that examines the impact of teachers' efficacy levels on students' engagement in writing instruction and on their overall writing performance.

Qualitative methodology is an approach that seeks to explore a problem in a natural setting (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). In the case of this research study, the setting was the secondary English classroom, and the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of secondary English teachers with low efficacy levels in delivering writing instruction. Given that the research study examined a phenomenon to understand it more, it was characteristic of the qualitative methodology. Historically, research studies that explored the lived experiences of study participants called for the use of qualitative methodology and phenomenology as a design (Van Manen, 2014). That said, this qualitative study examined the lived experiences of secondary English teachers with a low efficacy level in delivering writing instruction. With such a study, its major parts, i.e., problem, purpose, and

research questions, must align with one another to ensure that the data collected answered the study's questions, addresses its problem, and connected with the study's purpose (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

Design and Method

This qualitative study employed a phenomenology design to explore the lived experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018) of secondary English teachers in their natural setting. Open-ended research questions were the focal point for the research which delved into the experiences of the English teacher to learn more about their supportive interactions with students and the training that they have engaged to fortify their instructional delivery of writing instruction. To learn more about student-teacher relationships, the culture of the class and the types of engagement that are present within the setting that influence the impact that instructors have on student growth were examined. Likewise, the study provided insight into the teacher preparation and the training that influences teachers' levels of self-efficacy to fulfill the duties of their position (Kupers et al., 2023). The methods that were used in the study included semi-structure interviews, a focus group, and member checking.

The above details provide justification for the chosen research methodology, design and methods for this research study. The two designs that did not fit this research study were: grounded theory and narrative inquiry. Grounded theory assumes that there is little to no prior research on the phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Additionally, ground theory's purpose is to generate a theory (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018), which is not the purpose of the study, which only seeks to learn more about the lived experiences of the research participants. Lastly, narrative inquiry is centered on the use of storytelling to bring meaning to the experience. The requirement that the participants record narratives is not realistic for teachers who have

limited time in their workday because of the demand of their instructional responsibilities and other school-based responsibilities, e.g., lunch duty, hall duty, hall sweep, collaborative planning meetings, etc.

In embracing the qualitative tradition as a methodology for this study, an intentional effort was taken to ensure that the research methods aligned to safeguard the quality of the study (Mertler, 2019). How the researcher interacts with the study's participants and its data were determined by the distinct methodology that governed the decision-making underpinnings of the research study (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2018). Thus, the research methods selected for the study elicited narrative, non-numerical data about a phenomenon in its natural setting (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2018), which is characteristic of qualitative research.

Quantitative methodology would not have been the appropriate methodology because of the end goal of the approach. The quantitative methodology, which has a goal of identifying relationships among variables, would not provide the thick description that was elicited from the qualitative methodology used (Stahl & King, 2026). Additionally, both the designs and methods associated with quantitative research noted above would not have resulted in the narrative-rich responses that are symbolic to the qualitative methodology (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Mertler, 2019). Rinaldo & Guhin (2022) indicates that quantitative interviews do not provide the underlying meaning behind the event. The qualitative interview is guided by the researcher, who poses specific questions to bring forth specific information (Rinaldo & Guhin, 2022).

Population and Sample

The target population was secondary English teachers. Purposeful sampling, i.e., intentional sampling (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018), was employed to select the study participants. Focusing on the lived experiences of English instructors and how their efficacy level in

delivering writing instruction to students in the high school setting, the study used homogeneous sampling to select individuals within a given setting that have similar characteristics (Mertler, 2019).

The homogeneous research sample included secondary English teachers with more than one full school year of teaching, which the participants revealed during the initial interview stage. Each teacher has also taught secondary-level English to general education students in grades 10 - 12. Teachers with less than one year of teaching experience at the secondary level will not have gained the exposure or classroom experiences needed to effectively articulate their perspective on their instructional practices in writing and other relationship-centered classroom experiences pertinent to this research study (Kramer-Vida et al., 2021). As asserted by Mertler (2019), the researcher must be intentional in their selection of participants who will be knowledgeable and experienced enough to provide an explanation and description of the phenomenon that will be studied. The study utilized one research site, a public school district in Maryland, focusing on three high schools within that district. The location of the study, i.e., the public school district used as the research site and their teaching English at the secondary level are similar characteristics that each member of the homogenous research sample has in common.

Regarding the research population, the research participants included secondary English teachers from high schools within the same school district. Seven participants were selected as the sample size. This number of participants was chosen to ensure that the number was large enough so that if a few participants decided to discontinue their participation in the study, then these departures would not cause the research study to come to a complete halt due to the absence of participants (Subedi, 2023).

The research site, a public school district, was located in MD. Multiple secondary schools from this school district in MD were included in this research study. This state was chosen because the data trends over multiple subsequent school years, i.e., school years 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 of secondary students performing below proficiency in writing as evidenced by the MD State Report Card English writing proficiency data (see Appendices A & B). Schools that were not chosen for the study include elementary, private, and charter schools. Additionally, schools located outside of the state of Maryland were not included. Schools that were selected were public secondary schools in Maryland.

Materials/Instrumentation

Appendix C showcases the interview questions that were used in the semi structured interview. Rinaldo and Guhin (2022) assert that interview can be used to capture the essence of a culture when researching groups, i.e., both the spoken word and the mannerisms that a subject elicits during an interview can be used to support building a thick description (Stahl & King, 2026) to make findings of the study clearer and more understandable. The questions for the interview were field tested to ensure that the questions are clearly worded and to ascertain that they are worded in a way that elicits the information that is sought for the research study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The teachers that were used in the field study were not the same teachers who are in the study's sample. The educators in the field study had similar characteristics to the educators in the study: secondary teachers who teach English, possess more than 1 year of teaching secondary English, and teaching grades 10 – 12. An email communication with the interview questions was sent to educators within the target population, that is, English instructors. Their identity was kept confidential; the following label was used to identify each respondent: Educator 1, Educator 2, etc. On the field test form, respondents

received the guidance to place an X in the column entitled “acceptable” of questions that were clear and not misleading or to place an X in the column entitled “Needs Revision” for questions with clarity issues or that were leading.

The other instrument that was used to gather narrative data was the set of questions developed for the focus group. For convenience, the focus group was held virtually at a time that was agreeable to all participants. The questions posed gave insight into the lived experience of secondary educators, centering on their instructional practices in writing and professional development provided by their school district to support their writing instruction. There were five questions posed that were derived from themes of the data gained from the individual interviews. The session was recorded to facilitate the process of transcribing the participants’ responses, which helped to maintain the validity and reliability of the data collected (Adler, 2022).

Data Collection and Analysis

No actions were taken to recruit participants for the study nor to collect data until IRB approval is granted. IRB determination was obtained by creating an account in IRB Manager and submitting an IRB application. The required supplemental documents, including the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) certificate of completion and the consent form, i.e., letter of consent (see Appendix E), were submitted as a part of the IRB application.

After IRB approval was granted, research participant recruitment was conducted by email, including the consent letter and a link to a registration form created using SurveyMonkey to gain immediate Yes/No responses regarding their interest to participate from the pool of secondary teachers within the target population, i.e., secondary English teachers, teaching grades 10 -12, with more than 1 year of experience. The teachers’ email addresses were obtained from

the school district's employee directory. The consent letter revealed the purpose of the research, specified the eligibility requirements for participation and indicated that participation is voluntary. The foreseeable risks or discomforts were outlined along with how the data would remain confidentially stored. Lastly, how the findings of the study will be used was detailed in the letter of consent.

The method of collecting data included semi structured interviews and a focus group; the accuracy of the data was verified through the member checking process. Throughout the process of collecting data, the researcher's data report of interpretations of the research participants' responses was shared with teachers. These member checking steps were taken to ensure the accuracy of interpretations and to gain clarity when necessary (Stahl & King, 2026).

The data collection process for the study provided insight into the actions that were taken by both the researcher as the data collector and the research participants as respondents. The semi structured interviews were comprised of 10 open-ended interview questions (see Appendix D); there were 7 original questions and 3 of the original questions had a follow-up question to gain more perspective regarding that research question's respective topic. The interview questions were field tested prior using a small sample of the target population, including subject-matter experts, in this case, secondary English teachers, to ensure that the interview questions are clear, thorough, and flawless (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The field test is needed to ensure that the questions are clear and are not misleading to ensure the data collected is appropriate for the research study of concern. Participants remained anonymous as they were assigned the label of Participant 1, 2, 3, etc., which was substituted for their names to secure their identity. Participants' responses were shared with them by email for the purpose of member checking.

The focus group was scheduled based on the participants' schedule. The focus group was voluntary and took place virtually. To prevent group thinking, participants were reminded that their participation in the focus group will not result in punitive actions and the purpose is to collect data that will contribute to educational practice. The transcript, captured by Zoom's AI Companion, was downloaded and shared with teachers for the purposes of member checking. Since prior approval was obtained to conduct the study at the research site, school leaders were already informed of the intent of the study. The identity of the participants remains confidential. The transcripts are being stored confidentially in a password-protected online directory.

Regarding data analysis, qualitative research data is in the narrative, non-numerical format and requires the creation of coding schemes to organize and reduce the data into manageable themes of content (Haq Kakar et al., 2023). As a starting point before evaluating the data, a coding scheme based on deductive analysis, using preconceived notions, was created using the topics in the research questions as a guide, using the a priori method of developing a code (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Data collection continued until saturation, which meant no new themes or insights emerged from the data at time when enough research was gathered to understand the phenomenon being studied (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2018). Once an abundance of data was collected from the data sources, i.e., interviews, member checking, and focus group feedback, of the research study that information was continually analyzed to identify big ideas or to pinpoint information that is of significance to this research study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

The process to analyze the data was inductive, including three stages. The first stage was an analysis lines of the interview transcript using the interview questions as a guide through a process known as open coding. Next, categorization of the information based on similarities was

conducted identify codes. Lastly, in the last stage, the categories were formed to identify themes that emerged.

Assumptions

Assumptions center around the research participants' participation. It is assumed that the teachers' acceptance to participate in the study is an indication of their intent to provide truthful responses to the questions posed during the study. Additionally, it was assumed that the participants had a functioning laptop with access to respond to the interview questions and the focus group session that was held virtually. A final assumption is that each participant was familiar with how to open attachments in an email communication.

Limitations

The study was limited to English teachers of grades 10 – 12 with more than one year of teaching English as the secondary level. The study's findings may not be completely relevant if teachers of different disciplines were included because they would not be able to effectively express their experience with delivering writing instruction as it is not a practice in their content area. Also, teachers with years of experience teaching a different subject other than English would not be knowledgeable of procedures of providing writing instruction to students. Teachers with only one year of experience have a limited perspective of how to provide writing instruction, so teachers with more years of experience were included in the study.

Delimitations

A delimitation of this study was to include only 10th – 12th grade teachers with more than one year of teaching English at the secondary level. Grade 9 is a nuanced instructional experience for the teacher and learning experience for both the teacher and the student as students are entering a new educational setting as a freshman, so there may be many factors that

impact student performance that may distort the study's findings. Upper classmen are more aware of the landscape and expectations of high school. Also, teachers with more than one year of teaching at the secondary level were able to provide an abundance of insight into the interview questions because of the number of years that they have taught in the secondary educational environment.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of secondary English teachers with low efficacy levels in delivering writing instruction. Examining these teachers' experiences provided insight into the support that they provide in the classroom to fortify students' efficacy in writing and overall writing performance. The participants were selected from a public school district in the state of MD. The study was conducted using semi-structured interviews and a focus group. Themes were derived from the data collected and were coded after being analyzed. Member checking was conducted to verify the accuracy of the data collected from the research participants. Section 3 presents the study's research findings from the triangulated data collection methods, including semi structured interviews, a focus group, and member checking.

Section 3: Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of secondary English teachers with low efficacy levels in delivering writing instruction. Students' learning is impacted by several factors, including teachers' emotions, which can be influenced by their preparedness or lack thereof to deliver instruction about writing to students (Fathi et al., 2021). Studies indicated that even after engaging in pre-service and in-service professional development teachers' confidence in teaching writing effectively was still considerably low (Kramer-Vida et al., 2021). This research highlighted the shortcomings in Maryland's teacher preparation programming and the in-service professional development offerings in alignment with Kramer-Vida et al. (2021), indicating that certain aspects of teacher training should be tailored toward preparing teachers to deliver writing instruction effectively.

The problem addressed by this research study was secondary English teachers' low efficacy in delivering writing instruction, which results in the deficient writing performance of students in Maryland public high schools. Athans' (2022) research explores this discrepancy in teacher preparation, indicating that in most English Departments at the secondary level the focus of training centers on reading instruction rather than writing instruction. The tendency for teacher training to primarily target preparing educators to teach students reading strategies results in teachers' lack of preparation to deliver writing instruction and to provide students with needed individualized writing support (Tang & Zhu, 2024).

There were several limitations that may have influenced the interpretation of the study's results. First, only teachers from within school district in Maryland, which was the study's approved research site, were included in the study (see Appendices F and G). The inclusion of teachers from other school districts throughout Maryland would have allowed for more diversity

in the research participants. Second, the eligibility requirement for participants excluded first-year English teachers. Despite their novice level, first-year English would have valuable insight to offer regarding their pre-service training and preparation for delivering writing instruction. Third, the focus on teachers with primarily low efficacy during the data collection process may have resulted in overlooking the source of writing instruction preparation for English teachers who indicated that their efficacy level was high, but that did not attribute that confidence to the professional development programming offered by any Maryland school district. A fourth limitation was the formatting of the National University email address. With the prevalence of phishing email concerns, during the recruitment phase of the study, due to the former configuration of the National University's email address, s.wright5437@o365.ncu.edu, several recruitment emails sent to English teachers did not receive a response, but this did not impact the study's data results.

Findings

The practices engaged to ensure the study's trustworthiness are outlined in this section of the study. Demographics of the research participants and the results according to each of the study's research questions are also presented. The IRB Committee approved the study on February 12, 2025. The data for this qualitative phenomenological study was collected from secondary English teachers employed within a Maryland public school district. The population consisted of seven high school English teachers from three different schools within the same school district. All teachers had more than one year of experience teaching grades 10 – 12. To recruit participants by email, the purposeful sampling method was used to recruit secondary English teachers to develop a homogeneous research sample (Mertler, 2019).

Before recruitment for research participant was initiated, research site approval was sought from the Maryland public school district. The effort to seek site approval from the school district to use them as the research site for the study began in April 2025. The process required that the study be registered within a third-party research portal. The IRB study approval, the study's consent form to be used during recruitment, all data collection tools, including, the semi-structured interview questions, the focus group questions, and a study proposal summary of the research study were uploaded for review. Details on how the study would benefit the school district were required to be added to the proposal summary.

If the researcher is an employee of this school district in Maryland, additional steps are required to be completed during the application process for site approval. For researchers who are also employees of the school district used as the research site, the principal of the base school where the researcher is employed had to submit an electronically signed acknowledgement form to indicate awareness of the study being conducted. This acknowledgement form was added to the research portal as a part of review process for approval. Once all required components were submitted in the research portal, a research investigator employed by employed within the school district's Office of Research and Evaluation was assigned to the site approval request. According to the guidance provided in the research portal, the review process could take up to six weeks. Communication between the researcher and the school district-assigned investigator was conducted via email during the review period.

After site approval for the initial data collection period, school year of 2024-2025, was granted, the clerk of the Office of Research and Evaluation sent an official letter of site approval along with Principal Permission Forms for each high school within the school district, and date-stamped approved consent and data collection tools, e.g., semi-structured interview questions

and focus group questions. The Principal Permission Form was a secondary layer of approval that had to be gained from each high school leader before contacting instructors at that school to participate in the study. The permission forms were time-bound with a start and end date for data collection. Specifically, for the initial site approval, the data collection period was to begin April 11, 2025, and was to stop June 30, 2025.

The recruitment process involved gaining the permission of principals first by securing their signature and approval on a Principal Permission Form. A copy of the site approval letter along with the time-bound Principal Permission Form was sent to all of the high school principals by email. Principals' email addresses were retrieved from the employee directory of the school district. The school leaders returned this completed and signed form in PDF format via email as an attachment. After approval was granted from a principal, the same employee directory was used to contact the English teachers. The study's consent form was sent to teachers by email after their contact information was secured from the directory. Additionally, to ensure that the teachers were aware that their respective school's principal had granted permission for the school to be included in the study, a copy of the signed Principal Permission Form submitted by their school's principal was attached to that same recruitment email communication.

The study tapped into the lived experiences of secondary English teachers in their efforts to deliver writing instruction in the high school classroom. Seven teachers participated in the semi-structured interviews, which was the first phase of the data collection. Four of the seven teachers engaged in the focus group. The demographics of all participants are shown below (see Table 1). Participants were asked questions that delved into the pre-service and in-service professional development opportunities in writing instruction provided by the Maryland school

district being used as the research site. The study also inquired about the teachers' efficacy level in delivering writing content and support to students.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Participant (P)	Gender	Grades Taught	Years of Experience	Semi-structured Interview Participant	Focus Group Participant
P1	Female	9, 10, 11, 12	20	Yes	Yes
P2	Female	10, 11, 12	22	Yes	Yes
P3	Male	9, 10, 11	25	Yes	Yes
P4	Male	10, 11	8	Yes	No
P5	Female	10, 11, 12	11	Yes	No
P6	Male	9, 10, 11, 12	24	Yes	Yes
P7	Female	10, 11, 12	21	Yes	No

The data analysis method used for the study was the inductive method. Using this method, patterns in the data collected were identified during the coding process. Subsequently, the coded data was organized into categories. From those categories emerged themes that align with three research questions of this study.

Trustworthiness

Intentional efforts were made to ensure the trustworthiness of the study's findings. Data collected during the interviews and focus groups was instantly available to the participants for review through member checking (Stahl & King, 2026). This process allowed for the accuracy of the data to be confirmed, ensuring that it was a true representation of the secondary English teacher's lived experience in the high school setting, requires the participants active involvement

in the verification of the accuracy of the transcripts and interpretations of the researcher. Controlling bias within a study is just as paramount as verifying the accuracy of the data (Haq Kakar et al., 2023). As a current employee of the school district that is being used as the research site, as the researcher, reflexive practices were embraced to track my thinking and actions throughout the process. These reflexive practices worked to minimize any present bias, and open-ended questions were also used to manage any pre-existing assumptions (Adler, 2022).

Through the use of triangulation, credibility was established (Anselmo & Eaton, 2025). Multiple methods of collecting and verifying data were used in the study. The initial collection of data was via interview questions. Participants who responded to the interview questions were invited to participate in a second phase of data collection via a focus group. The number of participants who engaged in this second stage was fewer than those who responded to the interview questions during the first stage of the data collection process. Four of the seven participants who completed the interview also participated in the focus group. These teachers were from the same high school. During the focus group, the participants' responses were transcribed using Zoom's AI Companion feature.

As is characteristic of qualitative research studies, thick descriptive responses were collected from the open-ended questions posed to the participants during the data collection process (Stahl & King, 2026). Both the interview and the focus group included questions that required participants to elaborate upon their responses, including follow-up questions to gain more depth and to provide clarity on the participant's experience as an English instructor in the high school setting.

A strategy that was employed to achieve dependability in the study centered on the practice of reflexive journaling (Haq Kakar et al., 2023). Tracking one's thinking to ensure it is

separated from the facts of the study is key to developing the dependability of the study (Adler, 2022). This intellectual audit is crucial to documenting decisions made and procedures executed during the research process. As the researcher was a current employee of the school district that was the research site for the study, it was imperative that no special access or privileges were sought. Reflecting to ensure that personal bias was minimized was embraced throughout the study.

Dependability and confirmability of data go hand in hand. The process of verifying the accuracy of data and minimizing bias is confirmability (Stahl & King, 2026). The use of a reflexive journal and maintaining an audit trail were used to ensure confirmability. The transcript of each participant's responses was sent to the individually by email. Guidance was given in the email message for participants to review and confirm the accuracy of their responses.

Thematic analysis was conducted using the NVivo 15 software. This tool is used to analyze qualitative data, helping researchers to create a system of organization for data collected during the study. Once the data is collected and stored in NVivo, the coding process can take place, where the data is categorized based on the method of collections for the study being semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Based on trends in the data collected as a whole, the following themes (see Table 2) were derived from participants' responses to questions that centered on teacher preparation, professional development for writing instruction delivery, and the lived experience of the English teacher within the secondary classroom.

Table 2*Themes Generated from Data*

Theme	Theme Title
Theme 1	Culture of Learning
Theme 2	Strategies to Deliver Writing Instruction
Theme 3	Teacher Preparation

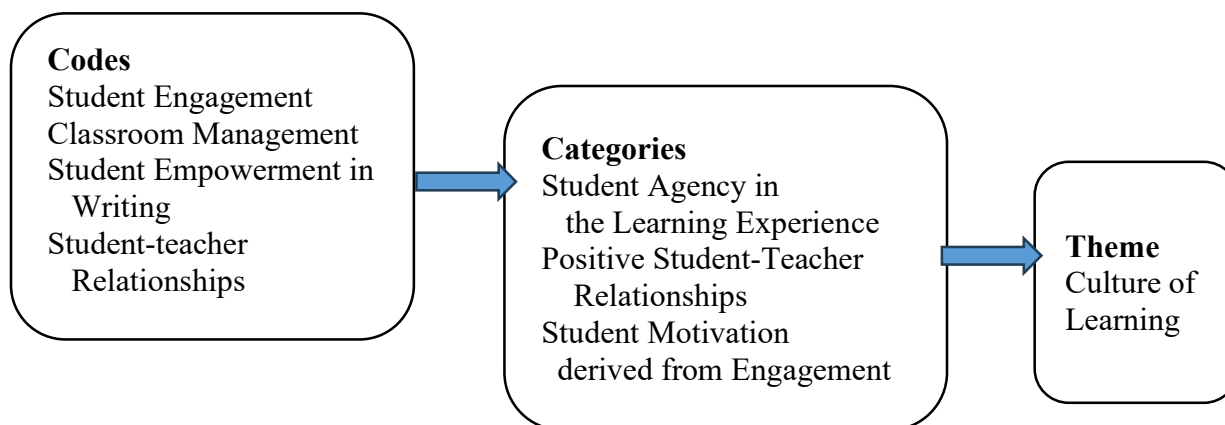
To illustrate the interconnectedness of a teacher's preparation to teach and how it can influence the impact that the teacher has on students, the research questions were discussed in nonsequential order, starting with research question 3, which concerns professional development in delivering writing instruction. The study explored the focus of training opportunities before teachers entered the position also known as pre-service training.

Research Question 1

Research question (RQ1) asks: What are the lived experiences of secondary English teachers with low efficacy in delivering writing instruction to students? This question was intended to elicit responses that would reveal the daily practices of teachers around writing in the classroom where the teacher possessed low efficacy in delivering writing instruction. All research participants indicated that their efficacy level was mid to high confidence. To derive to the theme associated with the question the data was analyzed, resulting in four codes, three categories, the emergent theme of culture of learning (see Figure 1). Initial codes created during data analysis were refined and reduced into categories through the axial coding process. The topic of the theme aligns with research question 1, which centers on the lived experiences of secondary teachers and the delivery of writing instruction to students.

Figure 1

RQ1: Emergent Theme from the Reduction of Codes and Categories

**Table 3**

Categories associated with the Theme for RQ1

Culture of Learning	Files	References
Student Agency in the Learning Experience	2	4
Positive Student-Teacher Relationships	9	11
Student Motivation derived from Engagement	1	4

The student agency in the learning experience category presents data revealing how students were empowered to be accountable and participatory learners during writing activities. Teachers shared different strategies that they employed to create a learning environment conducive to student engagement and growth. Participant 1 indicated “In addition to the support that I provide, students engage in peer reviews to have exposure to others’ writing and to be empowered to analyze writing to identify strengths and weaknesses.” This same participant recommended to “give students choice to choose the topics that they would like to write about

from time to time for practice activities.” Placing students in the driver’s seat of their learning will increase students’ confidence and motivation to learn more about writing (Tang & Zhu, 2024). Likewise, Participant 3 shared a strategy involving students as leaders in the classroom, stating, “Students are in charge of presenting different sections of the lesson. The student leaders engage in a quick huddle to give them guidance on their assignments for the day.” Teachers are able to engage in more monitoring and guidance tasks when students assist with delivering content. Building a sense of self agency in students makes them more inclined to want to engage in writing activities (Athans, 2022).

The category positive student-teacher relationships revealed other intentional efforts that the secondary teachers took to ensure that students were front and center in the learning process. The relationships that students and teachers have are key to students’ motivation to learn (Xu, et al., 2025). Participant 6 shared strategies where students analyzed writing by using a karaoke microphone. Just the addition of the microphone to the lesson increased student involvement. This participant noted, “Students loved the microphone, so participation is not an issue.” Removing students’ anxiety and fear of writing by making the lesson more appealing is a win-win situation for both the teacher and the students. Participant 2 spoke about the positive disposition that she brings to teaching every day, revealing, “My scholars see my energy and confidence in a manner that says they know I believe in the content and in them.” Participant 6 shares a similar comment, saying, “I believe in my students and they know this, so they are more inclined to participate in class writing activities.” The bond between the teacher and students influences students’ desire to engage in the classroom (Zou et al., 2024). Participant 7 spoke regarding the gratitude that students show for the time that it takes to facilitate demonstrations and one-on-one guidance, so “they appreciate this and mimic what is taught.”

The student motivation derived from the engagement category centers on the aspect of showing students that they have the capacity to do and the confidence that is the byproduct of that engagement. Participant 1 explained how embracing the gradual release strategy, also known as, the I do, We do, You do Strategy, stating “students benefit from the modeling.” Alied et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of a learning environment that is interactive and stimulating, which is necessary for learning to happen.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asks: How do the classroom practices and strategies of secondary English teachers with a low efficacy level in delivering writing instruction provide support to students to improve their writing performance? This question explores the instructional and support strategies utilized by teachers to affect and realize positive changes in students’ writing performance. After data analysis, five codes, two categories, and one emergent theme of strategies to deliver writing instruction. Using axial coding, the categories were derived from the codes shown (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

RQ2: Emergent Theme from the Reduction of Codes and Categories

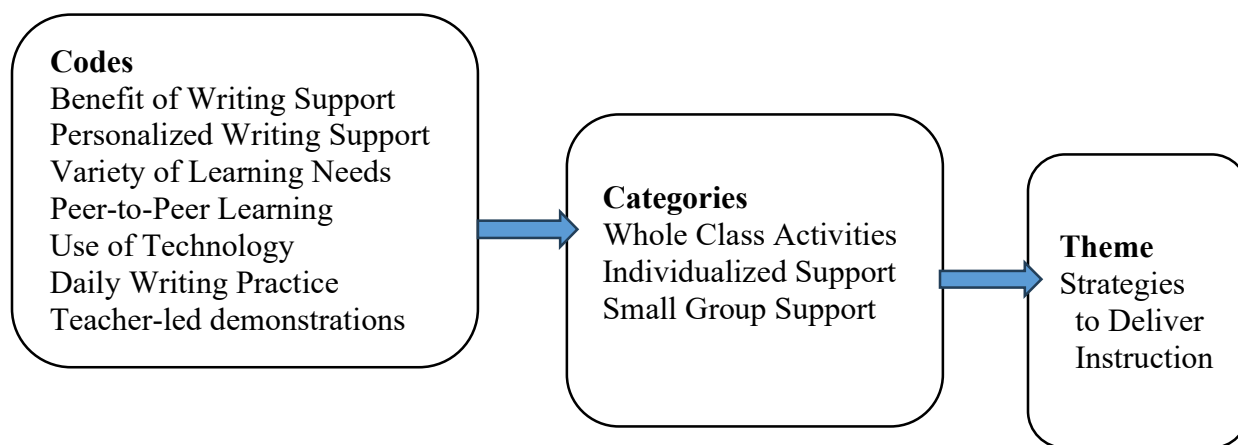


Table 4*Categories associated with the Theme for RQ2*

Strategies to Deliver Writing Instruction	Files	References
Whole Class Activities	11	30
Individualized Support	5	6
Small Group Support	4	5

The category whole-class activities gives insight into the teacher-led whole class learning experiences that participants shared that they used to deliver writing instruction. It is important to note that the study aimed to explore the strategies used by teachers with low efficacy in teaching writing. However, the participants indicated that they are mid to high confidence. That said, this section of the study details the types of engagements used by the participating educators. Participant 6 indicated, “My experience involves providing students with scaffolded lessons” that are used during whole-class instruction to meet students where they are. This instructor recognizes that students may require individualized support. This direct attention will motivate students and allow them to feel seen and heard during the learning process, which will result in a greater effort to engage in the writing tasks (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). Participant 2 reveals the benefits of leading students in a Think Aloud activity to examine the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing.

The individualized support category presents the specialized support that the high school teachers provide to their students. Participant 2 reveals that students have been specific ways to look for error patterns in their writing, indicating “I have helped students create approaches to proofread and annotate writing.” Participant 1 highlights the effectiveness of providing

“developmentally appropriate” writing assignments. The intentional efforts to facilitate the process of students engaging in the lesson are essential for learning (Tang & Zhu, 2024).

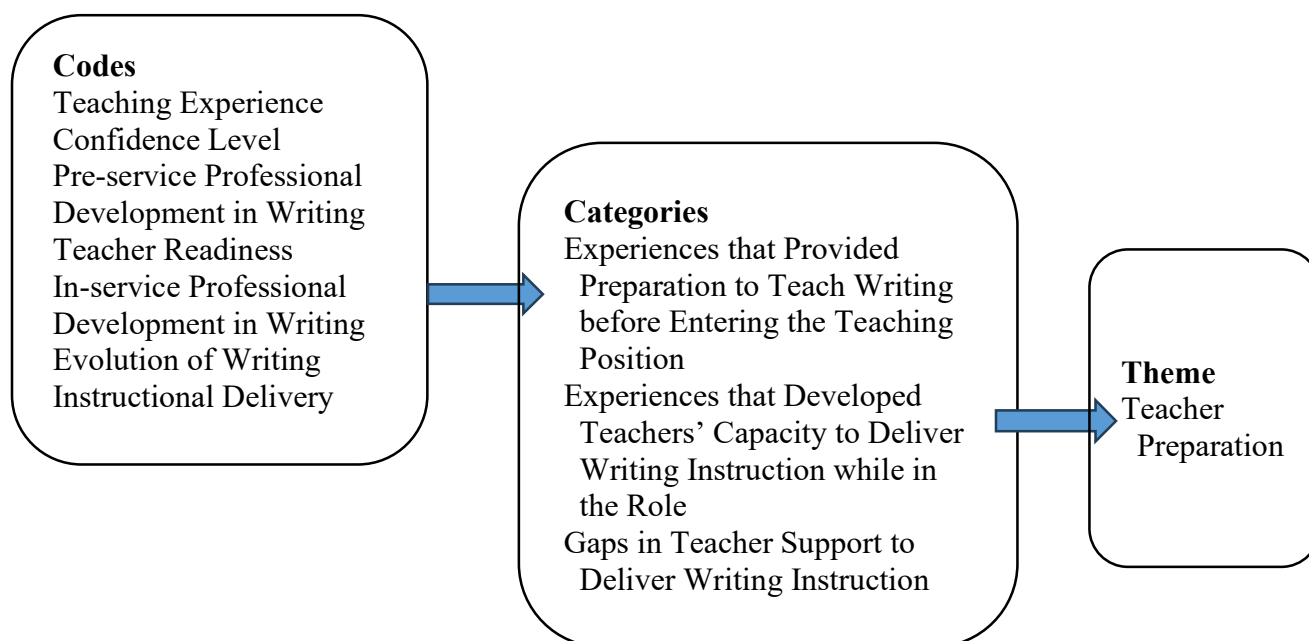
The small group category showcases the peer learning opportunities that are made available to students in the secondary English classroom according to the study’s participants. Participant 6 shared how small groups can be used to flip the classroom, allowing students to “gain knowledge from a pre-recorded video” while the teacher can provide support to other learners. Participant 3 shared that the peer review process is a staple strategy within the secondary English classroom. Through this process, students are able to engage with their peers regarding their essay. Participant 2 agrees with Participant 3, stating, “Students can see other writings to inform their performance.” Creating an atmosphere where students are encouraged to critique and converse about writing will motivate students to want to participate in more writing activities (Perry & McMurtry, 2022).

Research Question 3

The last research question asks: What professional development experiences should secondary English teachers engage in to gain a better understanding of their efficacy level in delivering writing instruction to improve student performance at the secondary level? This question sought to learn more about the training experiences offered to high school teachers during pre-service and in-service periods that were helpful to improve student performance. There were six codes that were derived during data analysis for patterns and trends. Through axial coding categories were defined from the codes. The emergent theme is teacher preparation.

Figure 3

RQ3: Emergent Theme from the Reduction of Codes and Categories

**Table 5**

Categories associated with the Theme for RQ3

Teacher Preparedness	Files	References
Experiences that Provided Preparation to Teach Writing before Entering the Teaching Position	9	13
Experiences that Developed Teachers' Capacity to Deliver Writing Instruction while in the Role	11	39
Gaps in Teacher Support to Deliver Writing Instruction	7	11

The category experiences that provided preparation to teach writing before entering the teaching position aimed to showcase the professional development opportunities that were offered to teachers before day one of teaching. The trends in the data for this category indicated

that there was no writing instruction-centered professional development offered to incoming secondary English teachers. Participant 4 indicated:

“I am coming from the counseling field. I missed the days of professional development provided to teachers for in-service. I was a late hire. Minimal training was provided, but it only centered on how to access the work email and the grading platform, but there was no professional development in writing instruction.”

Both Participants 1 and 3 stated plainly, “No writing instruction training was provided.”

Participant 2 details training provided during pre-service, indicating, “The training centered on classroom management and lesson planning.” Participant 6 expressed a similar story of training that centered on reading and not writing, stating, “For the most part, training, before I entered the role, focused on reading strategies.” The lack of preparation to deliver writing instruction is a clear oversight on the part of the school district. If secondary English teachers are not prepared to effectively do their job, then they will begin to develop doubt in their ability, which will adversely affect their instructional tendencies (Athans, 2022).

Teacher preparation before they enter the classroom is only one aspect of teacher preparedness, the category experiences that developed teachers’ capacity to deliver writing instruction while in the role highlights the training offered to the secondary English teacher while an instructor in the classroom. Participant 7 revealed that writing instruction delivered to students is based on what “I gained...from my years at an undergraduate college.” Participant 2 details that instructional support provided during the school year, which “mainly centered on how to help students pull meaning from a text like text analysis-focused training.” This training does not provide the tools to teach writing, but it will help students gain better understanding of a reading selection. Essentially, the training in writing instruction for secondary English teachers

once they get into the teaching position is nonexistent and a shortcoming that needs to be addressed if student writing performance is to be improved (Fisher, 2022).

The category gaps in teacher support to deliver writing instruction presents the deficiencies present in the participants' instructional capacities that may ultimately impact students' ability to acquire writing skills. Participant 2 indicates that "training received at the beginning of my career, like during the onboarding process, mainly focused on how to manage behavior in the classroom and how to develop lessons." This same teacher continues sharing areas of improvement needed in her ability to teach writing, "I struggle with engagement and explaining prompts." Participant 1 indicated that "writing training was very superficial if it was provided—no deep dives into the content." Participant 6 admitted, "I do not recall any training that centered on writing, except for how to score short essay responses for high-stakes testing." Participant 1 expressed concerns regarding readiness to teach writing, indicating, "I was more prepared to teach students how to pass standardized tests than I was to teach writing instruction." Studies show how, even after participating in pre-service and in-service professional development provided by some school districts, teachers are often still ill-prepared to fulfill the duties of their position when it comes to delivering writing instruction, which impacts the overall confidence as professional (Kramer-Vida et al., 2021).

Evaluation of the Outcomes

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of secondary English teachers with low efficacy levels in delivering writing instruction. Students' learning is impacted by several factors, including teachers' emotions, which can be influenced by their preparedness or lack thereof to deliver instruction about writing to students (Xiyun et al., 2022). The pre-service and in-service professional development's

shortcomings adversely influence teachers' confidence in teaching writing effectively (Kramer-Vida et al., 2021). These concerns revealed shortcomings in Maryland in the teacher preparation programs and the in-service professional development offerings in alignment with Kreamer & Breaux (2025), indicating the professional development programming should be revisited and adjusted to ensure that secondary teachers are being adequately prepared to deliver instruction in writing to students.

Self-efficacy is synonymous with confidence (Hodges et al., 2021). The confidence of secondary English high school teachers' level of efficacy in teaching writing to students was examined in this study. Despite the participants' claim to possess a high level of efficacy in delivering writing instruction, the students' low scores on the English 10 MCAP, an end-of-the-year assessment that measures students' ability to produce an effective essay supported by textual evidence.

According to Zou et al. (2024), intrinsic motivation is the natural completion of task for the experience itself. Students' motivation to engage in writing instructions is tied to teachers' motivation to want to deliver the content. Teachers' lack of preparation impacts their sense of well-being (Tang & Zhu, 2024). If teachers feel that they are not prepared to engage in a task, then students can sense this. Students' motivation is dependent upon teachers' enthusiasm within the learning environment (Wang & Troia, 2023). Thus, the student-teacher relationship is integral to students developing motivation to engage in the learning process (Lazarides et al., 2023).

Ultimately, teachers and students bring their individual experiences to the learning environment, so both play a role in establishing an atmosphere that is conducive to success for both the learners and the teachers (Athans, 2022). The teachers have a responsibility to provide

the necessary individualized support and interventions to enable students to develop a sense of agency over their learning. Teachers who provide writing instruction that is student-centered are those who embrace the autonomy-supporting approach that provides targeted support aligned to students' specific needs (Zou et al., 2024). However, this individualized support in writing cannot be delivered to students if educators in the secondary English classroom are not trained to provide it in an effective manner.

As the landscape of Education continues to evolve, teachers must also take into consideration how writing performance is articulated on online high stakes testing. The incorporation of lessons geared toward technical competency will give learners an advantage, preparing them to apply their writing skills honed during class activities in the online testing environment (Anselmo & Eaton, 2025). Providing opportunities to students to engage in simulations of online testing practices and allowing them the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the online testing tools and layout of the online testing platform will help to promote students' readiness to achieve success when engaging in online high stakes testing (Reddy et al., 2021).

School system leaders have a role in preparing new and veteran teachers for the teaching profession to have the greatest impact on learners. Through the implementation of more reflective and communal professional development opportunities that center on delivering writing instruction and providing individualized writing support to students, school leaders will establish forums for open exchange of best practices among English teachers (Athans, 2022; Perry & McMurtry, 2022). These trainings can be spaces for teachers to share their apprehensions, successes, questions around writing instruction (Fisher, 2022), which, in turn, will provide teachers with heightened levels of self-efficacy to take on their responsibility of

teaching students how to write with more confidence (Fathi et al., 2021). This renewed sense of confidence in the delivery of writing instruction will encourage student motivation and engagement in the writing process. Students' increase in engagement will result in improved writing performance through more practice and exposure to more creative and stimulating methods to deliver writing instruction content.

Research Question 1

This question was used to explore the lived experiences of teachers with low efficacy in delivering writing instruction. The theme that emerged from the data was culture of learning. The secondary English teachers who all participated in the study indicated that they were to some extent confident in delivering writing instruction. Though all the teachers claimed to have self-assurance in their ability to teach writing, there is a discrepancy in the delivery of the content because high school students' performance on the English 10 Writing Assessment of MCAP is not reflective of effective teaching.

While teachers may be knowledgeable about strategies to teach writing, they must also be equipped to prepare for the MCAP by teaching them testing taking strategies and how to perform well under the time constraints of high-stakes testing (Anselmo & Eaton, 2025). Otherwise, the knowledge and skills that students acquired in the classroom about writing will not be articulated in their performance on the high-stakes assessment. Simply, teaching students about writing is not sufficient, they must also be exposed to how take a standardized writing assessment with time limitations and within an online portal that comes with its own limitations to the writing space (Reddy et al., 2021).

Research Question 2

This question sought to learn more about the training experiences offered to high school teachers during pre-service and in-service periods that were helpful to improve student performance. The theme that emerged from the data was strategies to deliver writing instruction. The findings indicated that some teachers at the secondary level who participated in the research study provided a variety of opportunities to students to learn how to write, namely, Think Alouds using writing samples, peer reviews, and writing conferences. The problem addressed by this research study was secondary English teachers' low efficacy in delivering writing instruction, which results in the deficient writing performance of students in Maryland public high schools. Though each of these in-class activities provide students with the exposure needed to be informed about these writing strategies, the present caliber of writing instruction and the student individualized writing support are not enough to move the needle of students' achievement of writing proficiency on the MCAP.

Similarly, while students can earn favorable grades on in-class writing assignments and paper-based writing assessments with the help of the teacher-led, small group, and individualized support provided to students, this support cannot obscure students' deficiencies in computer competency and online test taking skills (Anselmo & Eaton, 2025). That said, secondary teachers must set aside time to expose students to mock MCAP testing simulations that will acclimate students to the nuances of online test competency. Xu (2022) revealed that outside of knowledge of concepts, students' success on online academic assessments can improve by way of test familiarization. In other words, becoming familiar with the timing, online test tools, typing limitations, and other features of the online testing platform before test day can result in

improvement in a student's performance on the high-stakes testing, resulting in less stress and more awareness (Reddy et al., 2021).

Research Question 3

This question centered on the types of professional development that teachers should partake in to gauge their readiness to deliver writing instruction that will improve students' writing performance. The theme that emerged from the data was teacher preparation. For this section of the study, training in writing instruction provided to teachers before entering the role as an educator and training made available teachers during their tenure as an instructor were examined. The inadequacies in teacher support in delivering writing instruction were also studied.

The findings indicated that both pre-service and in-service professional development opportunities do not offer adequate support to prepare teachers to deliver writing (Kramer-Vida et al., 2021). While the school district's pre-service training aligned more with onboarding initiatives rather than content delivery, participants indicated that external training, e.g., prior collegiate writing experience and writing training gained through a vendor not associated with the school system, equipped them with knowledge to teach writing strategies to some extent. In-service training in delivering writing instruction provided the school district also was not adequate. Participants mentioned the superficial coverage of writing concepts like decoding prompts.

Studies show that teachers' emotions impact those of their students (Xiyun, et al., 2022). That said, teachers' level of preparedness or the lack thereof can have an influence on teachers' psychological well-being, which in turn will hinder the instructional tendencies (Tang & Zhu, 2024). The findings of the study reveal that teachers lack the depth of knowledge about writing

instruction delivery because of the gaps in the school district's professional development programming in writing. It is recommended that the school district takes a step back to assess the deficiencies in teacher preparation in writing instruction delivery to ensure that teachers are fully prepared to fulfill the duties of their position as an English teacher of, not only reading, but writing as well.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The implications of the study reveal the need for the re-examination of the onboarding process for secondary English teachers regarding the mandatory trainings that will provide teachers with essential foundational skills to support all types of student writers. Additionally, the findings do not take away from the successes that some instructors have had in moving the needle to show growth in students' writing performance but encourages the school system to investigate other approaches for preparing teachers to teach writing that are more communal in design and give voice to teachers' and the successful experiences that can be emulated by their peers (Fisher, 2022). More specifically, district leaders can take a closer look at the strategies of the successful teachers within school district to ensure that those practices are modeled for other teachers in an open forum, such as summer institutes, that will allow for discussion, application knowledge and immediate peer feedback from other teachers of writing (Kreamer & Breaux, 2025). Lastly, leaders can provide opportunities for secondary English teachers to develop communities of learners where best practices to teach writing can be exchanged, reflection and journaling can take place, and it is safe space where teachers can share their vulnerabilities in relation to delivering writing instruction (Fisher, 2022).

Delving deeper into the true readiness of English teachers in the secondary classroom involves more than their ability to teach the content. It also calls on the psychological wellness of

educators, which is impacted by their preparedness to effectively support students' varying needs and realize growth in the writing performance of students within their classroom (Zou et al., 2024). The disposition toward writing that teachers bring to the learning environment is sensed and mimicked by students (Xiyun et al., 2022). In detail, an affinity for writing exemplified by the instructor facilitates an atmosphere that is conducive to learning and that facilitates students' engagement in the writing activities. When school districts provide training opportunities to thoroughly prepare teaching personnel with strategies that promote self-agency in students and more accountability in one's own learning writing techniques results, then improvement in student writing performance will be realized (Tang & Zhu, 2024).

Recommendations for Future Research

In considering future research, the following recommendations are given. These points of consideration would delve deeper into how successful instructors realize growth in the writing performance of students. Also, there is a recommendation to include student exemplars to demonstrate students' growth over time.

Recommendation 1

For future research, it is recommended that the research revisit the questions on the semi-interview to have the educators describe examples of success or growth in their students' writing performance. Teachers naturally do not want to self-incriminate, so their response to "Are you confident in delivering writing instruction?" is that they possess a high-level of efficacy. However, if teachers had to provide proof of the impact that their teaching has had on the writing performance of their students over time, then the claim of being confident may vary. If teachers are not able to prove their influence on improving students' writing, then, their self-rating of the level efficacy to deliver writing content would include more responses across scale of efficacy.

Recommendation 2

In future study, the researcher should tap deeper into the strategies that successful teachers within the school district use. These strategies could be used within the focus group as part of one of the questions to assess whether other participants employ them. Knowledge of the strategies would equip teachers with new activities that could be embraced to reach more students after the study concludes.

Recommendation 3

Examining teachers' perspectives regarding their readiness to deliver writing instruction is one measure. However, bias can be within one's own assessment of their ability to execute a task. Exploring students' artifacts that show growth should be included in any future study on this topic. The data collection would simply be student portfolios that teachers will maintain for select students, so there will be no need to interact with any students directly during the study.

Recommendation 4

Familiarity with online tests is a factor in students' success on them (Anselmo & Eaton, 2025). For future research, an interview question that should be posed to the participants is "How do you prepare your students to take online timed writing assessments from a technology standpoint?" This question would elicit information that would reveal if the teachers go the extra mile to ensure that students not only are aware of writing content and techniques, but that they are also taught how to perform strategically in digital space, transferring that knowledge of writing gained in the classroom onto online high-stakes testing platforms.

Conclusions

Ultimately, the study concludes that despite the teachers' self-assessment of the level of confidence in delivering writing instructions as being high, there is an apparent disconnect in

how students receive and apply the content and strategies being shared as evidenced in students' underperformance on the end-of-year high-stakes test, MCAP. All participants identified instructional strategies that they employ to support writing instruction. There was minimal data collected from teachers that revealed the professional development offerings during pre-service or in-service periods, that support the growth and refinement of teachers' ability to teach writing effectively in the high school setting.

The study exposes the gaps in the school district's professional development programming that prepares new educators to do the arduous task of preparing students for success and that addresses the deficiencies in writing instruction support available to teachers while actively in the position. These shortcomings in the school's systems training for teachers in how to deliver writing instruction to students leave an area of vulnerability where students' writing support needs are not being met. Possessing confidence in teaching writing is not enough, improvement in teachers' ability to deliver writing instruction requires a constant reflection on and adjustment of practice, especially when students' performance and acquisition of skills for current and future success are at stake. Additionally, preparing students to demonstrate effective writing skills on high-stakes online tests requires teachers to acclimate students with the layout and design of the assessment to minimize test anxiety due to issues with computer competency and test structure unfamiliarity.

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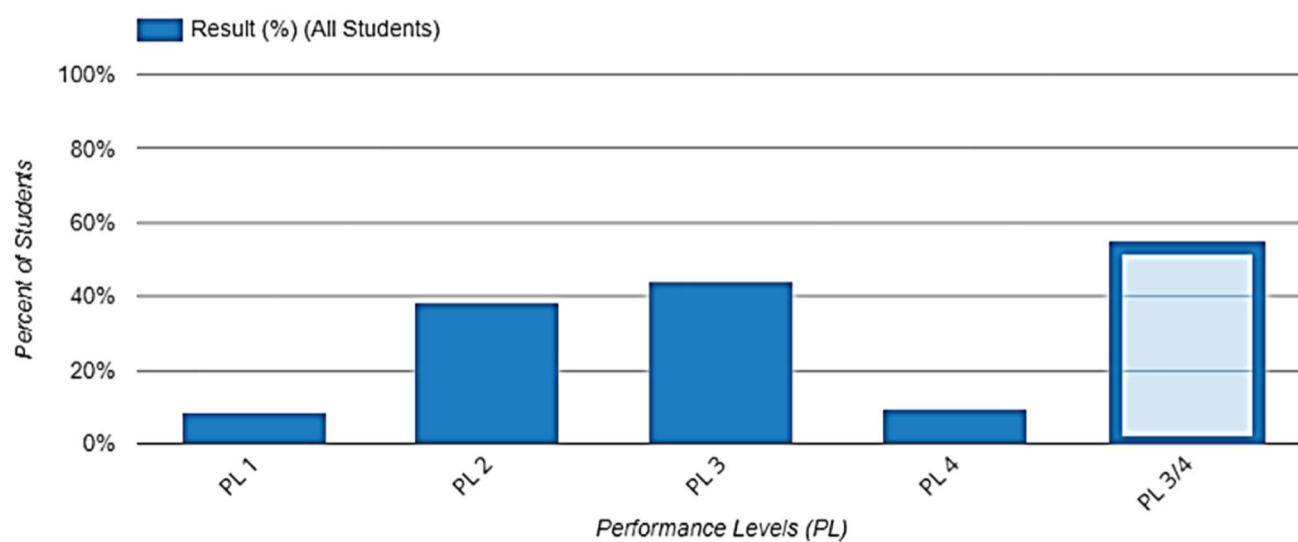
Appendices

Appendix A
2022 MD State Report Card – MCAP Data
for English 10 Writing Assessment

English Language Arts Data (2022)

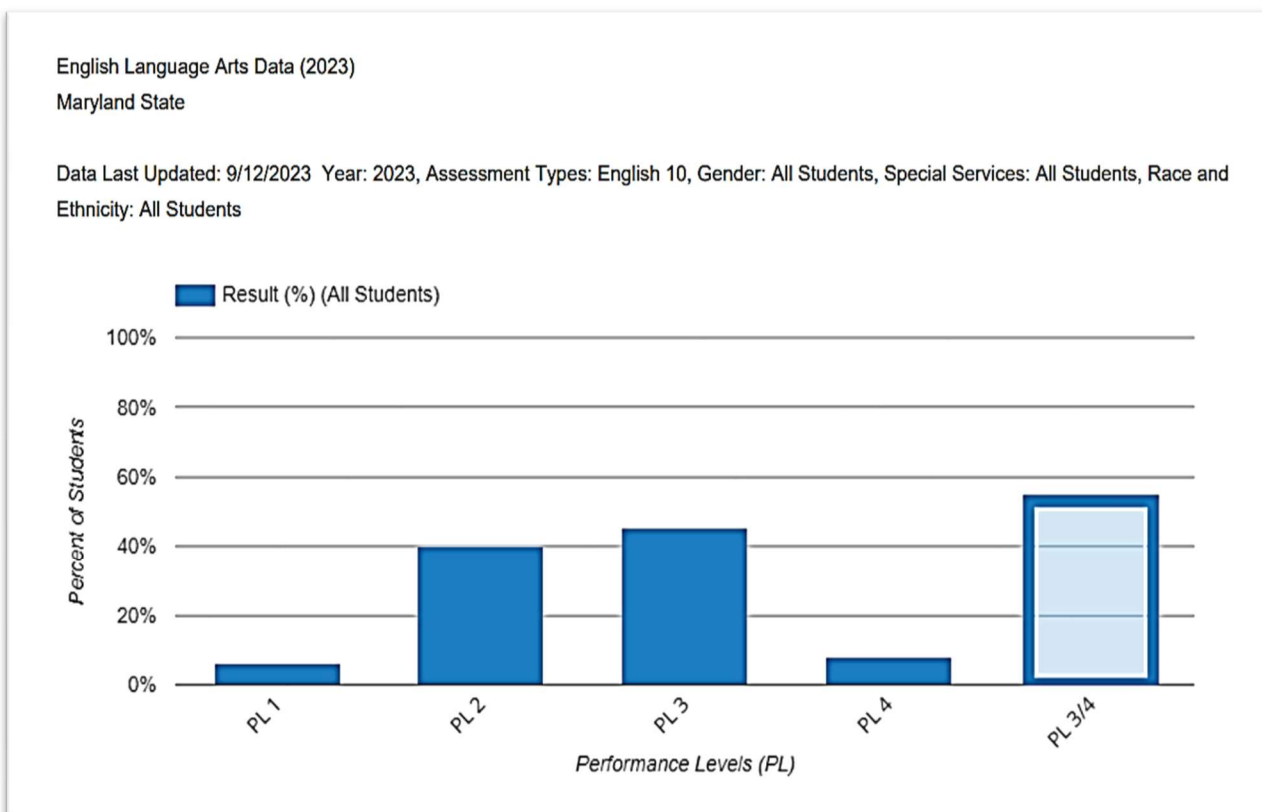
Maryland State

Data Last Updated: 9/12/2023 Year: 2022, Assessment Types: English 10, Gender: All Students, Special Services: All Students, Race and Ethnicity: All Students



Year	Performance Level	Result (%)
2022	PL 1	8.5
2022	PL 2	38.2
2022	PL 3	44.1
2022	PL 4	9.3
2022	PL 3/4	53.4

Appendix B
2023 MD State Report Card – MCAP Data
for English 10 Writing Assessment



Year	Performance Level	Result (%)
2023	PL 1	6.2
2023	PL 2	40.2
2023	PL 3	45.4
2023	PL 4	8.1
2023	PL 3/4	53.5

Appendix C

IRB Committee Approval Letter



9388 Lightwave Ave.
San Diego, CA 92123
irb@nu.edu

Notice of Exemption

February 12, 2025

To: ShaVon Wright

Project Title: The Consequences of Secondary Teachers' Low Efficacy in Delivering Writing Instruction: A Phenomenological Study

NU IRB Number: IRB-FY24-25-596

Determination: Exempt from further review 45 CFR 46.101 Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

Status: Active - Research activities may begin as of February 12, 2025

Dear ShaVon Wright:

The study referenced above has been reviewed by the National University IRB. The IRB has determined your research is exempt from further review under 45 CFR 46.104, which means you will not need to renew your study and may begin your study effective immediately. However, if you find the need to change your study in any way, you will need to submit a modification to the IRB prior to implementing the changes. This will allow the IRB to determine whether or not the study still meets exemption criteria.

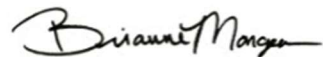
Please review your Post Approval Responsibilities here: [Approved Documents Guidelines](#)

For any questions regarding your protocol, please reach out to the IRB at irb@nu.edu.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joseph M. Marron".

Dr. Joseph Marron, IRB Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brianna Mongeon".

Dr. Brianna Mongeon, Director, HRPP & IRB

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jenessa Eberhardt".

Jenessa Eberhardt, Associate Director, HRPP & IRB

Appendix D

Semi Structured Interview Questions



National University IRB

9338 Lightwave Ave., San Diego, CA 92123

irb@nu.edu

Semi Structured Interview Questions

Participant's Identification Code: _____ / _____

Date of Session:

Time of Session:

School Name:

Hello, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. My name is Shavon Wright, and I am a doctoral student at Northcentral University conducting my dissertation research.

This interview is expected to last 30 minutes. I will be recording our discussion and taking notes to make sure I have complete information. Your responses will be held in confidence.

During the Zoom session, which will be recorded, your camera will remain off. Each interviewee will be assigned a participant code that will be sent by email before the interview session starts. This code will take the place of the participant's name in their Zoom profile. This code will allow the researcher to associate the responses given to an interview session, allowing the responses collected to be associated with the proper participant for the member checking process. The member checking process will provide each participant the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the statements captured during the interview.

Do you have any questions before the interview starts?

Interview Questions	Respondent's Answers (Verbal Communication)	Non-Verbal Communication
1. How many years have you taught English at the secondary level?		
2. Which grade levels have you taught?		

3. Follow-up: Which grade level do you prefer to teach writing between grades 10 - 12? Why?		
4. Describe the type of professional development in writing instruction that you engaged in prior to entering the classroom as a teacher as preparation?		
5. Follow-up to Question 4: Share details about how you learned of the professional development opportunity?		
6. Describe the types of training in writing instruction that you engaged in while in your role as an instructor?		
7. Follow-up to Question 6: What is the benefit of engaging in this training?		
8. Rate your efficacy or level of confidence in delivering writing instruction 0 (no confidence), 5 (some), 10 (complete).		
9. Share any best practices in instructional strategies that you have used this school year when teaching writing to your student.		
10. Share your experience with teacher-student relationships and their impact on writing instruction.		

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today and to share your perspectives/experiences on the consequences of secondary teachers' low efficacy in delivering writing instruction.

Debriefing Questions

1. Do you have any questions or concerns?
2. Is there anything you would like to add or clarify about the consequences of secondary teachers' low efficacy when delivering writing instruction?

Supporting Resources

The following resources share more perspectives on teacher efficacy and writing instruction:

- Athans, K. (2022). The Mystique of the National Writing Project. *Texas Journal of Literacy Education*, 9(2), 58–76.
- Locke, T. (2015). The Impact of Intensive Writing Workshop Professional Development on a Cross-Curricular Group of Secondary Teachers. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 50(1), 137–151.

Norman, K. A., & Spencer, B. H. (2005). Our Lives as Writers: Examining Preservice Teachers' Experiences and Beliefs about the Nature of Writing and Writing Instruction. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 32(1), 25–40.

Next Steps:

There will be a member checking process to ensure that all perspectives and ideas captured are accurate. A copy of the transcript with your responses will be emailed to you 1 week after the interview to verify the accuracy of the statements transcribed.

As a reminder, for your participation, you will receive four (4) free 1-hour instructional support sessions for developing differentiated writing lesson plans for classes with multiple proficiency levels. The support sessions can be in-person or virtual.

Appendix E

Consent Form



National University IRB

9338 Lightwave Ave., San Diego, CA 92123
irb@nu.edu

My name is Shavon Wright, and I am a doctoral student at National University (NU).

I'm asking you to take part in a research study about experiences that impact teachers' ability to effectively deliver writing instruction to students in the high school setting. The name of this research is "Teachers' Efficacy Level in Delivering Writing Instruction and Its Effect on Student Motivation and Skill Acquisition in High School English Courses."

You may participate in this research if you meet all of the following criteria:

1. You are age 18 or older.
2. You are a high school English instructor.
3. You have taught English in the high school setting more than 1 year.

I hope to include 10 people in this research.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What you will be asked to do: If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

1. Participate in an online interview via Zoom for 30 minutes.
2. Review and provide any feedback to an interview summary by email for 10 minutes.

During these activities, you will be asked questions about the following:

- Your pre-service training in writing instruction
- In-service training in writing instruction sponsored by your school district during your term as an instructor
- External training in writing instruction that you have engaged during your term as an instructor
- Any barriers you have experienced in delivering writing instruction
- Instructional strategies that you use to deliver writing instruction

- Your experience with student-teacher relationships in the high school setting

Risks: There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this research. You can still skip any question you do not wish to answer, skip any activity, or stop participation at any time.

Benefits: If you participate, there are no direct benefits to you. This research may increase the body of knowledge in the subject area of this research.

Recording: I would like to video record your responses to questions with Zoom during the interview. You can disable the video function of the online meeting platform at any time.

Compensation: After you complete the interview, you will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card via email.

Mandated Reporting: My professional role outside of NU requires me to report suspicion of child or elderly abuse, suspicion of possible harm to self or others, and committed crimes to the appropriate authorities.

Confidentiality: I will keep the records of this study private and take reasonable measures to protect the security of all your personal information. In any report I make public, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. I will securely store your data for 2 years. Then, I will delete electronic data and destroy paper data.

Taking part is voluntary: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may quit at any time.

If you have questions: Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at s.wright5437@o365.ncu.edu or at 240-997-8375. The Dissertation Chair is Dr. David Thomas.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) via email at irb@nu.edu.

Appendix F
Research Site Approval Letter



April 11, 2025

Shavon Wright
[REDACTED]

Dear Ms. Wright:

The review of your request to conduct the research entitled, “The Consequences of Secondary Teachers’ Low Efficacy in Delivering Writing Instruction: A Phenomenological Study” has been completed. Based on the examination, I am pleased to inform you that the Department of Testing, Research and Evaluation (DTRE) has granted authorization for you to proceed with your study.

This approval applies to the 2024-2025 school year. We reserve the right to withdraw approval at any time or decline to extend the approval if the implementation of your study adversely impacts any of the school district’s activities. If you are not able to complete your data collection during this period, you must submit a request for an extension through the online tool located on our website. You will be required to submit a status report of your study, any changes to your procedures and methods, and all appropriate consent forms and instruments.

Regarding the recruitment materials please be aware that only approved copies (stamped ‘APPROVED’) can be distributed to your target subjects or distributed in schools from which you plan to recruit research subjects. The wording of the consent forms must be exactly as the version submitted to our office. Should you change the procedure or materials, any revisions must be approved by this office before being used in this study. Please be aware that participation in your project is on a strictly voluntary basis. An abstract and one copy of your study’s final report should be forwarded to the Department of Testing, Research and Evaluation within one month of successful completion of your study. Do not hesitate to contact the Research and Evaluation office if you have any questions. I wish you success with your study.

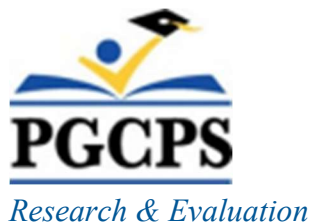
Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carole Portas Keane".

Carole Portas Keane, Ph.D.
Supervisor, Office of Research & Evaluation

Appendix G

Request for Extension for Research Site Approval Letter



July 18, 2025

Shavon Wright
 [REDACTED]

Dear Ms. Wright:

I am pleased to inform you that your request for an extension for the research titled “The Consequences of Secondary Teachers’ Low Efficacy in Delivering Writing Instruction: A Phenomenological Study” has been approved subject to the conditions contained in your original approval letter of April 11, 2025. This approval extends the period for your data collection through the 2025-2026 school year. If you are not able to complete your data collection during this period, you must submit a request for an extension using our online tool that can be found

here: https://my.reviewr.com/s2/site/pgcps_external_research_2526

As with prior years, you are required to secure written approval of the principal of each school where you plan to conduct your research. The attached Principal Permission to Conduct Research Study form should be presented for principals to sign. Signed copies of these forms should be forwarded to my attention and a copy given to the respective principal. Please be aware that only approved copies (stamped ‘**APPROVED**’) of consent/assent forms can be distributed to your target subjects. Should you revise the consent/assent forms, or any other document submitted with your application, the revised documents must be approved by this office before being used in your study. The district will only release archival data of students for whom you have signed Parent/Guardian Consent and Student Assent forms. All requests for student data should be forwarded to my attention. The turnaround time for data requests is six to eight weeks. Although we strive to keep this timeline, [ORE](#)’s obligations are a priority.

An abstract and one copy of the final report should be forwarded to ORE within one month of its completion. Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. I can be reached at 301-749-5226 ext. 40020 or by e-mail at carole.keane@pgcps.org. I wish you success with your study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carole Portas Keane".

Carole Portas Keane, Ph.D.
 Supervisor, Office of Research & Evaluation