

Challenges Faced by English Language Teaching and Learning in Acquiring Writing Skills Through Online Distance Learning: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract:

In the wake of the global pandemic, the educational landscape has undergone a transformative shift, with online distance learning emerging as the prevailing norm. This transition to virtual education has imparted a profound impact on English Language Teaching and Learning, with a particular emphasis on the acquisition of writing skills. Among the diverse cohort of learners, English as a Second Language (ESL) students find themselves confronting distinctive challenges in the cultivation of their writing abilities. The advent of online learning environments has further intensified these challenges, introducing a plethora of novel obstacles for ESL students to navigate. Considering this evolving educational paradigm, this systematic review is poised to delve into the intricacies of English Teaching and Learning, specifically focusing on the challenges encountered in the pursuit of writing skills through the conduit of online distance learning and the self-regulating learning strategies. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, understanding the nuances of these challenges becomes paramount for educators, institutions, and policymakers striving to facilitate a seamless and effective transition to online learning environments for ESL students. Through a meticulous exploration and synthesis of existing research, this review seeks to unravel the multifaceted nature of the hurdles faced by ESL students in their quest to master writing skills in the dynamic realm of online education.

Keywords: English language teaching and learning, ESL, Online Distance Learning, Self-regulating learning, writing skills.

Introduction:

There has been a gradual increase in the demand for individuals to attain proficiency in the English language (Berns, 2019; Mauranen, 2018). When it comes to the instruction and acquisition of English as a second language, there are four primary skills that need to be emphasized: speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Shifting towards virtual education platforms has brought both opportunities and challenges, particularly for English Second Language (ESL) students, who are striving to acquire proficient writing skills. ESL students, individuals for whom English is not their first language, often face a unique set of difficulties in the acquisition of writing skills. These challenges may be

exacerbated in the context of online distance learning, which introduces a new set of dynamics, instructional methods, and technological demands.

Acquiring proficiency in a language necessitates the adoption of an apt and efficient learning strategy. In the language learning journey, learners are encouraged to assume active roles and be equipped with strategies to regulate their learning process effectively (Griffiths, 2018). Nevertheless, the diversity in learners' approaches to language acquisition is evident, with different methods yielding varying degrees of success for individuals. Consequently, learners must be equipped with strategies tailored to their unique needs and preferences. The ability of students to oversee and manage their learning process is particularly pivotal in the context of online learning (Nikolaki et al., 2017).

One prominent learning theory that elucidates the mechanisms through which individuals exercise control over their learning is Self-Regulated Learning (SRL). Numerous theories expound upon the concept of self-regulation, with Zimmerman (1990) contributing significantly to this discourse. Zimmerman posits that self-regulated learners possess the ability to steer their learning trajectory while actively engaging in the pursuit of their academic objectives.

Writing proficiency is a fundamental aspect of language development, essential for academic success and effective communication. ESL students, however, frequently encounter multifaceted obstacles in their writing journey. These hurdles encompass language barriers, cultural differences, and varying educational backgrounds. The transition to online distance learning environments further complicates these challenges, as it necessitates the mastery of digital tools, self-regulation, and adaptation to asynchronous learning modalities.

Understanding the challenges ESL students confront in their endeavour to develop writing skills in online distance learning is paramount for educators, institutions, and policymakers. A systematic review of the existing literature is

essential to provide a comprehensive overview of these challenges, assess their impact, and examine potential strategies and interventions. By gaining a deeper understanding of these issues, educators and institutions can tailor their online writing instruction to better meet the needs of ESL students, ensuring that they receive equitable access to quality education.

The aim of this paper is to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges in learning writing skills faced by ESL tertiary students through online distance learning?
2. How self-regulated learning helps in learning writing skills by ESL tertiary students through online distance learning?

Methodology:

The process of gathering data for analysis in this study involved the utilization of library research, which can be elucidated as the systematic examination, analysis, and interpretation of research materials to extract relevant information from the existing body of literature, as outlined by Zed (2004). To conduct this research, an exploration academic journal articles was undertaken to locate summaries, descriptions, and overviews pertinent to the research questions at hand. The investigation delved into specific topics, aiming to unveil the significance and interconnections of ongoing research within a broader scope of study.

The primary objective of this research was to acquire information related to the challenges and self-regulating learning strategies, specifically in the context of developing writing skills in online learning environments. The methodical examination of literature served to furnish the reader with a foundational understanding of the topic, elucidating the principles and applications of the challenges and self-regulating learning strategies as it pertains to the enhancement of writing skills in the realm of online education.

Search Strategy:

A robust and methodical search were initiated across a spectrum of academic databases, with a

particular focus on influential repositories such as ERIC and Google Scholar. This search endeavor will employ a meticulously curated combination of keywords and phrases, including "English Second Language," "ESL," "online distance learning," "writing skills," and "challenges." This thoughtful selection of terms is aimed at ensuring the retrieval of literature that comprehensively addresses the multifaceted aspects of ESL students' challenges in acquiring writing skills through online distance learning.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

The studies deemed eligible for inclusion in this comprehensive review will be subjected to a set of

stringent criteria to uphold the integrity and relevance of the ensuing analysis. Inclusion criteria encompass factors such as publication in peer-reviewed journals, language specificity (English), a clear focus on ESL students, direct engagement with challenges pertaining to the acquisition of writing skills in online distance learning, and the presentation of clear methodologies supplemented by empirical data. Conversely, exclusion criteria will be diligently applied to studies that deviate from these specified parameters, including those that do not explicitly target ESL students, lack a dedicated focus on writing skills or online distance learning, are not published in English, or constitute conference abstracts, theses, or dissertations.

Inclusion Criteria	Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Peer-reviewed journal articles	Publication Type	Non-academic sources
Studies published between 2018 - 2023	Publication Date	Studies published before 2018
Empirical studies	Type of Studies	Non-empirical studies
Self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies and academic achievement in ODL.	Context	Non-self-regulated strategies and academic achievement in ODL.
University, college, or equivalent level students.	Participants	participants were not classified as higher education students
Focused on writing skills and SRL through online distance learning.	Focus	Not focused on writing skills and SRL through online distance learning.

Data Extraction:

The extraction of relevant data from the selected studies will be executed with meticulous attention to detail. This multifaceted process will involve capturing key information, including publication details, employed research methodologies, crucial findings, and any proposed strategies or interventions. To fortify the reliability of this extraction process, the task will be undertaken by two independent reviewers, ensuring a thorough and nuanced representation of the selected literature.

Quality Assessment:

The quality of each included study will undergo a comprehensive assessment, leveraging established tools such as the PRISMA guidelines and Cochrane risk of bias assessment. This evaluative process will be steadfast in its focus on appraising methodological rigor and identifying potential sources of bias within the selected studies, thereby fortifying the overall robustness of the ensuing review.

Data Synthesis:

Employing a narrative synthesis approach, the overarching goal is to furnish a comprehensive and nuanced summary of the findings derived from the selected studies. This synthesis will systematically unearth, categorize, and analyze emergent themes and patterns related to the myriad challenges faced by ESL students in the realm of online distance learning, particularly concerning the acquisition of writing skills. In finding the right articles, it is sorted and organized based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Figure 1 shows the PRISMA flow diagram in which it explains how articles are

identified according to relevant studies and commonly used for reporting. After journal articles are selected, researchers thoroughly analyzed the studies to gather the necessary information.

Initially, using specific keywords, 60 journal articles from the ERIC database and 30 journal articles from Google Scholar were extracted. Based on the exclusion criteria, a total of 45 articles remained. The titles, abstracts, keywords, and methodologies of each article are carefully reviewed to eliminate ones that are not focused. In the end, 10 journal articles were found to be suitable for this systematic review.

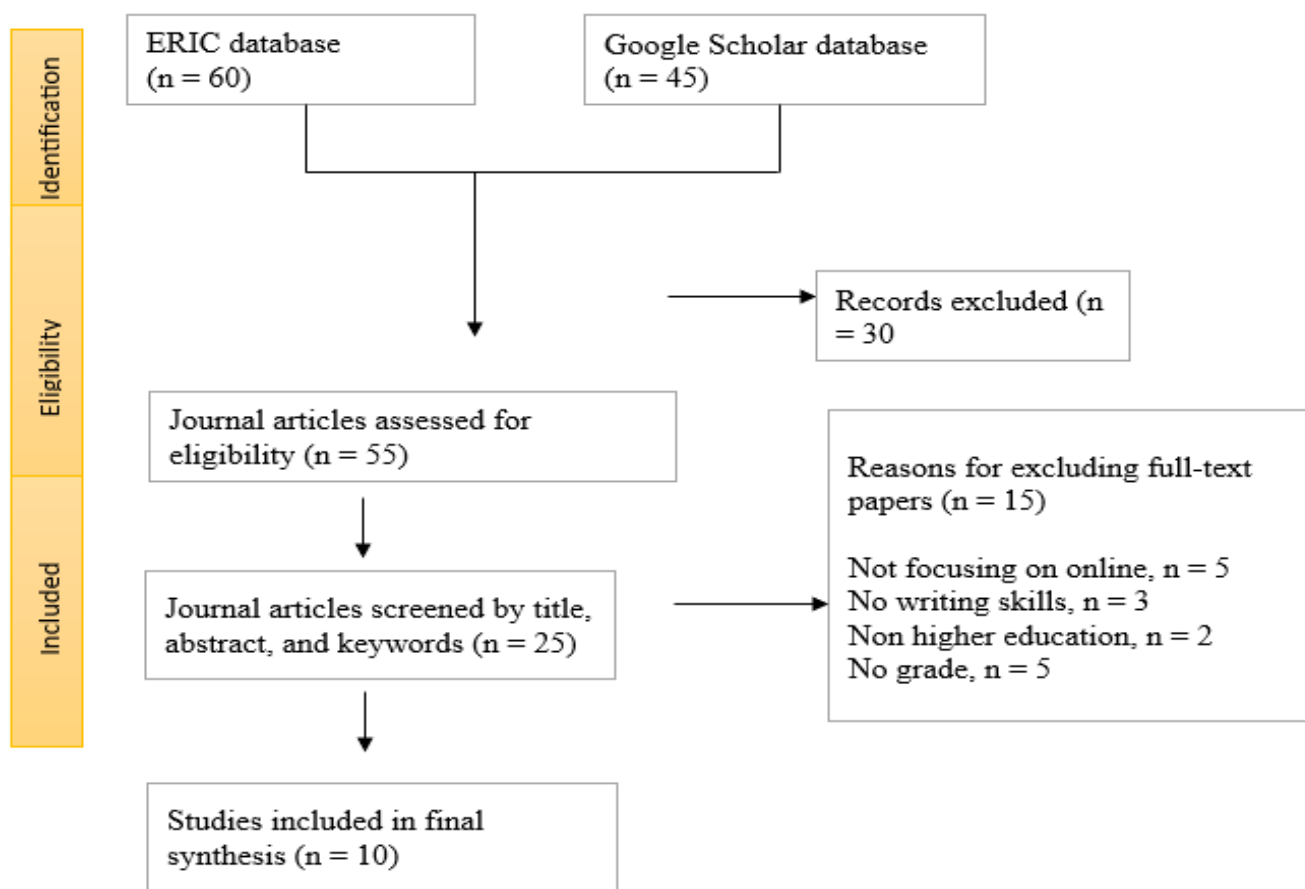


Figure 1 PRISMA Flow Diagram

Table 2 shows the included articles for the systematic literature review

Recommendations:

Building upon the synthesized findings, the ensuing phase involves crafting thorough and actionable recommendations tailored for educators, institutions, and policymakers. These recommendations aspire to furnish practical insights and viable strategies for improvement,

addressing with specificity the identified challenges encountered by ESL students navigating the intricate landscape of acquiring writing skills through the medium of online distance learning.

Findings:

Acquiring proficiency in writing involves more than just mastering grammar, vocabulary, and genre; it also necessitates the ability to self-regulate learning (Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997).

Adapting to the linguistic requirements involves strategic thinking, along with a grasp of vocabulary and grammar, making cognitive and metacognitive processes integral (Graham et al., 2007). This challenge extends beyond ESL (English as a Second Language) learners to include EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners who encounter difficulties in constructing sentences, paragraphs, or coherent texts. Problems arise in expressing ideas and thoughts, particularly among students who infrequently write in English, often due to fear of making errors and a lack of self-confidence in their writing abilities. Identifying these challenges is crucial for enhancing learning strategies.

Based on the research by Loan (2022) learning writing skills through online distance learning can be hard due to several reasons including, technical problems, lack of concentration, lack of interaction, time management, health problem, gaining knowledge, motivation, psychological problems, and lack of collaboration. These are some of the challenges faced by the students.

In the context of addressing these challenges, Zheng et al. (2016) propose Online Self-regulated Learning (OSEL) as a beneficial approach for learners in managing and coordinating information. The components of OSEL are categorized into five areas: goal planning, environment-structuring, task strategies, time management, help-assistance, and self-reflection. Goal planning involves how online learners align their actions with short and long-term targets. Environment-structuring encompasses learners' methods of creating an optimal online learning environment, reducing anxiety, and enhancing emotional and behavioral stability. Task strategies focus on learners' initiatives in handling interruptions, such as reading aloud or acquiring materials before starting a task. Time management strategies revolve around learners' ability to balance social and life activities while learning English online. Help-seeking strategies involve how learners seek assistance when they are unable to comprehend knowledge on their own. Self-reflection strategies center on

students' engagement in sharing knowledge to enhance their learning abilities.

The interconnected components, including students' behavior, emotions, environment, motivations, and thoughts, contribute to the self-regulation process during online English learning and are linked to academic achievement.

Drawing from previous research, several scholars have delved into the realm of self-regulation in online learning. The consensus is that the success of online learning is closely tied to students' academic motivation, as evidenced by findings from Artino and Stephens (2009). According to Wang and Baker (2018), students who possess grit and a clear intention to succeed face no impediments in online learning. Furthermore, success in online learning is associated with effective time management and elaboration strategies, as highlighted by Broadbent (2017). Setting goals, revisiting course content, and maintaining persistence are identified by Kizilcec et al. (2017) and Glazer & Murphy (2015) as crucial factors that prevent challenges in online learning.

RQ1: What are the challenges in learning writing skills faced by ESL tertiary students through online distance learning?

Motivation emerges as a critical factor, illustrating a positive association between learners' self-regulation and their involvement, as highlighted by Delen et al. (2014). Insufficient motivation presents a challenge in the context of learning writing through online distance education. According to Loan (2022), students often lack the motivation required for effective learning in online distance education compared to face-to-face instruction. The students noted that successful participation in online distance learning demands a substantial amount of self-motivation. Nevertheless, individuals with a strong determination to learn face no difficulties in adapting to online distance education.

Technical problems:

Based on Loan (2022) technical problems such as internet connection are one of the reasons for students to lack in acquiring writing skills through

online distance learning. Besides that, lack of devices is also one of the reasons resulting the students to be unequipped to have classes online. Moreover, there are several mediums of learning that confuse the students. In one of the past research, stated by Yeboah (2018) majority of instructors faced challenges too including lack of professional training on the best practices to be employed in online learning environment. Thus, technical problems are not only faced by students but also instructors.

Lack of concentration:

It is undeniable that concentration during online distance learning can be interrupted due to distractions and lack of facilities. Both instructors and students faced the same challenges in which there is no specific place for teaching and learning.

Lack of interaction:

Online distance learning affects the interaction between teachers and students, and students and their peers. As stated by Loan (2022) not interacting with the teachers and peers effected they're understanding of the lessons. As mentioned by Yeboah (2018) teachers lack technological skills due to limited training and difficulty in determining students understanding. The reason behind this is in online distance learning, there is lack of interaction due to several circumstances such as technical problems, thus, resulting it to be a challenge for both teachers and students. Asynchronous activities can also be the reason to have lack of interaction in the class. As mentioned by Nasihah & Senta (2022), instructors conducted asynchronous learning such as Google Classroom, Quizziz, Nearpod and Live worksheet.

Time management:

Deadline duration has become a significant problem when it comes to online distance learning. In which stated by Loan (2022) students believe that online learning takes more time compared to face-to-face due to self-regulating learning are required. Instructors also faced the same challenges in writing classes due to unable to check the students' work directly in which it takes longer

time for the students to do correction (Nasihah & Senta, 2022).

Health problems:

Online distance learning requires both teachers and students to sit and use the computer for a long time in which resulting both parties having vision problem and can get tired easily. Thus, this is one of the challenges of online learning that is faced by both teachers and students. As reported by Loan (2022) most of the students have a hard time attending classes due to easily getting tired.

Gaining knowledge:

The ability to gain knowledge was limited through online distance learning. Lack of understanding of lectures gives an implication for the students' academic performance (Loan, 2022). Moreover, Loan (2022) mentioned that this shows that students tend to be copied and pasted online materials as long as the assignment are submitted. In online distance learning, instructors faced the same problem in ensuring the originality of the students' work (Nasihah & Senta, 2022).

Motivation:

Motivation is one of the important aspects for the students in striving for success. Lack of motivation is one of the challenges faced by the students (Loan, 2022). This is due to instructors taking more time to check their work due to limited time in which it is found to be ineffective (Nasihah & Senta, 2022).

Psychological problems:

Students believed that online distance learning is uncomfortable in which they feel it is a social isolation. Loan (2022) mentioned that it was uncomfortable and unmotivating for the students to learn writing skills online.

Lack of collaboration:

In an online learning environment, collaborating with peers is one of the challenges faced by the students. It is believed that the feedback is slow from both teachers and peers (Loan, 2022). It is also stated that lack of communication skills development in online writing class. Contrarily, as mentioned by Nasihah & Senta (2022), teachers

believe that pair work can be a solution for a faster response compared to individual.

Most of the studies are aligned with Nguyen and Duong's (2021) findings in which most of the time the challenges faced by the students are due to external factors and learners' perceptions.

RQ2: How self-regulated learning helps in learning writing skills by ESL tertiary students through online distance learning?

Self-regulated learning is an initiative taken by the students to obtain their goals in a writing class. The self-regulated learning strategy in writing is characterized as self-directed activities employed by writers to achieve diverse literary objectives, including enhancing writing outcomes and skills (Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997).

Metacognitive training can help improve students' ability to gain better knowledge through online distance learning. As per Teng and Huang (2019), it is essential to provide learners with chances to develop metacognitive awareness. Those learners who possess a metacognitive strategy will gain increased independence, enabling them to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning processes.

Having a clear aim of what to write is a significant process for students to achieve the goal. Most of the time students are focused solely on completing the task rather than comprehending the task itself. Prior research has shown that goal-achiever students may achieve success in a specific activity by acquiring information, skills, and assessing their own previous performance (Bouffard et al., 1995). Nevertheless, in a research endeavor undertaken by Zainuddin (2004), it was demonstrated that offering feedback had a positive impact on enhancing students' writing abilities.

This aligns with a noteworthy investigation into the learning preferences of adult ESL learners conducted by Nunan (2000). The findings indicated that teacher error correction ranked among the most valued and desired classroom activities. Even though feedback is important but with the help of self-regulated learning it can enhance the student's ability to comprehend the lessons better.

Lacking self-regulated learning is not the reason to not be successful, the uses of internet can be a medium towards it (Yot-Dominguez & Marcelo, 2017). In the technological era, there are various ways to access knowledge. Even so, students tend to focus solely on completing the task rather than comprehending the materials. Students' performances vary depending on their aim. Furthermore, based on the discovery by Li et al. (2020), students with strong self-regulation abilities tend to surpass their less self-regulated peers in task completion.

Distractions are the frequent problems faced by students when completing assignments. One useful learning strategy is help-seeking. Help-seeking pertains to situations where students encounter academic difficulties and proactively seek help (Cheng & Tsai, 2011). It can be one of the ways to overcome the challenges as it encourages the students to do more practice. Xu (2021) found a positive and significant correlation between seeking feedback orientation in writing and cognitive, metacognitive, social behavior, and motivational online self-regulated learning strategies. Nevertheless, most students are still hesitant to seek assistance when encountering challenges.

Reflecting can also help in improving students' writing skills. Moreover, students and teachers are encouraged to learn about their learning experience. It assesses the strengths and weaknesses of students, enhances their cognitive and metacognitive capacities, helps them cultivate their learning preferences, enhances their personalities, and motivates them to be self-driven (Klimova, 2014). This approach opens up a door for the students to improve generally in writing skills including grammar and vocabulary. Self-improvement can also be witnessed during this process. Nevertheless, Fathi et al., (2019) mentioned that peer review overshadowed the self-review in completing writing assessments. The outcome could be clarified by the notion that the comments and assessments from peers provided support and a form of mediated guidance to the

participants, thought to enhance students' self-regulation. The importance of online self-regulating learning is that it can benefit students in achieving learning writing skills online. Hill and Hannafin (2001) suggested conceptual support to assist students in prioritizing knowledge. Learners can derive advantages from metacognitive assistance when assessing their progress. The utilization of materials can be eased through procedural support. Lastly, strategic support can offer alternative options for task completion. Hence, it can be asserted that the teacher's presence remains crucial and essential in aiding students' OSEL to enhance their writing skills in online learning.

Discussion:

This systematic review has provided valuable insights into the challenges encountered in the realm of English language teaching and learning, particularly concerning the acquisition of writing skills through online distance learning. The findings illuminate that the challenges faced by students are predominantly rooted in external factors, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of the obstacles in this educational context. Motivation emerges as a pivotal factor, playing a significant role in facilitating students' adoption of self-regulating strategies, thereby promoting academic achievement.

In the contemporary landscape, online distance learning has swiftly evolved into a new norm, experiencing rapid growth and reshaping the educational paradigm. The shift towards virtual education, accelerated by the modern era and further intensified by factors like the COVID-19 pandemic, has accentuated the need for a comprehensive understanding of the challenges students encounter in online distance learning and how self-regulating strategies can be effectively applied to overcome these challenges.

As the educational landscape continues to evolve, it becomes imperative to recognize the nuances of self-regulated learning in the online distance learning environment. While this systematic review has provided valuable insights, it also

underscores the necessity for further studies to delve deeper into the intricacies of challenges faced by students and how self-regulating strategies can be tailored to address these challenges more effectively. A nuanced exploration of these aspects will contribute significantly to the ongoing discourse on optimizing online distance learning experiences, ensuring that students are well-equipped to navigate the dynamic landscape of virtual education successfully.

Implications:

Given the central role of motivation in fostering the adoption of self-regulating strategies, educators and instructional designers should consider integrating motivational interventions into online distance learning courses. Strategies such as incorporating engaging content, providing real-world relevance, and offering intrinsic rewards can enhance students' motivation, contributing to the effective implementation of self-regulating strategies.

Recognizing the predominance of external factors influencing challenges, educational institutions should establish robust support systems. This includes implementing mentorship programs, counseling services, and peer support networks to address not only academic challenges but also the socioemotional aspects of online learning.

Institutions should invest in developing tailored training programs to explicitly teach self-regulating strategies to students engaged in online distance learning. This training can encompass modules on time management, goal setting, metacognition, and other key self-regulatory skills, equipping students with the tools they need for academic success.

Recommendations:

Encourage further research endeavors specifically focused on understanding the nuances of challenges faced by students in online distance learning. This includes investigations into the varied motivational factors influencing learners and the effectiveness of different self-regulating strategies across diverse student populations.

Promote pedagogical innovation in online distance learning by exploring new instructional methods and technologies that enhance student engagement and motivation. This might involve incorporating interactive learning platforms, gamification elements, or collaborative projects to create a dynamic and stimulating virtual learning environment.

Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their capacity to support students in adopting self-regulating strategies. This can include workshops, training sessions, and resources that empower instructors to create effective and supportive online learning experiences.

Establish a framework for the regular evaluation of online distance learning programs. Periodic assessments should not only focus on academic outcomes but also on the effectiveness of implemented self-regulating strategies. Based on these evaluations, institutions can adapt and refine their approaches to better meet the evolving needs of online learners.

By implementing these implications and recommendations, educational institutions can foster a more conducive and supportive environment for English language teaching and learning in the online distance learning context. This proactive approach will contribute to the ongoing improvement of virtual education experiences, ensuring that students can thrive academically and develop essential self-regulatory skills for lifelong learning.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this systematic review has offered a comprehensive exploration of the challenges encountered in English Language Teaching and Learning, specifically focusing on the acquisition of writing skills through online distance learning. The transformative shift to virtual education, accelerated by the global pandemic, has underscored the significance of understanding the nuanced obstacles faced by ESL students in this evolving educational landscape.

The findings illuminate that the challenges ESL students confront are predominantly rooted in external factors, with motivation emerging as a pivotal factor influencing the adoption of self-regulating strategies and, consequently, promoting academic achievement. The advent of online learning environments has introduced novel hurdles for ESL students, emphasizing the need for tailored strategies to address these challenges effectively.

As the educational paradigm continues to evolve, it is imperative to recognize the unique dynamics of English Teaching and Learning in the context of online distance education. The challenges identified in this review highlight the importance of ongoing research to delve deeper into the intricacies of ESL students' experiences and the application of self-regulating strategies. This deeper understanding will aid educators, institutions, and policymakers in refining their approaches to foster a seamless and effective transition to online learning for ESL students.

In essence, this review contributes to the broader discourse on optimizing online distance learning experiences, emphasizing the importance of tailored support mechanisms and self-regulating strategies for ESL students. The journey toward mastering writing skills in the online education landscape requires a concerted effort to address challenges systematically, ensuring that ESL students can navigate the dynamic educational environment successfully.

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