A Systematic Review Of The EFL Writing Module Development And Implementation

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Abstract

A growing number of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) modules have used various methods to develop their tool. However, there is little research assessing the empirical evidence of EFL writing learning module development to researchers and EFL instructors. This article aims to review how the writing module was developed and how it worked in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. A systematic review method is used to analyze the key research conducted and published from 2018 to April 2022, in order to reveal the problems existing in the current EFL writing pedagogy, the main concerns in EFL writing module development, and the factors affecting the implementation of the writing module. This paper selects the most highly relevant 9 modules for analysis. The results show that: (1) the main problems in EFL writing from K12 to university level are still the lack of language proficiency and writing skills; (2) research and development methods are generally used to develop writing modules; (3) reflective reports, self-evaluation and focus group discussions are increasingly applied in class to meet the expectations for improving learners' competence, performance and skills. When conducting SEM, there are many issues that should be addressed. Overlooking these issues may invalidate findings. The results of this review provide a reference for EFL writing Syllabus designers, writing module developers and teachers and pave the way for researchers to adopt this method in their studies.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language, EFL writing module, L2 writing module, TESOL writing module, ESL writing module

1. Introduction

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing is a complex cognitive activity, involving language skills, such as vocabulary, sentences, grammar, and paragraphs (Ramadhan, Indriyani, et al., 2020; Yundayani & Ardiasih, 2021) Discourse ability, such as paragraph development, coherence and cohesion (Apsari, 2018; Debaghine & Ais, 2021). In addition, there also a needs the competence in critical thinking (Abdelmohsen, 2022; Bharati & Lestari, 2019; Esmaeil Nejad et al., 2022; Pui et al., 2020), discovery learning (Asri et al., 2019; Ellizar et al., 2018; Ramadhan, Asri, et al., 2020), self-regulated learning (Abdelhalim, 2022; Sun et al., 2022; Xu, 2021; Zhou & Hiver, 2022, 2022), collaborative learning (Meletiadou & Tsagari, 2022; Perry et al., 2020; Samah, 2020; Zeng, 2020) competences in the process of writing learning. At the same time, instructors and researchers also hope to improve learners' interest, motivation, engagement, and creativity and reduce their writing anxiety (Liu, 2022; Rasuan & Wati, 2021; Wang, 2021; Zhou & Hiver, 2022). Module development has become a more intuitive and flexible way in order to achieve various purposes, due to different concerns of instructors and researchers in all kinds of contexts. The learning module consists of optional teaching materials and a series of learning activities, which can help learners reach their specific goals, and provide learners with the opportunity to learn independently with or without instructors. With the characteristics of information clarity, a substitution for the role of the instructors,

systematic patterns and evaluation tools (Ahmad, 2017), EFL researchers have developed writing learning modules based on learners' learning objectives and expected learning outcomes in different contexts, giving full play to the identity of teacher facilitators and motivators to help learners improve their writing competence.

The development of the writing learning module opens up new possibilities for linking the progress of writing performance with other competence of learners. In particular, under different contexts, the newly developed learning module can combine the variables of learners' factors with writing skills, writing strategies and writing ability in a specific learning environment, and has reported its educational benefits from different perspectives (Armstrong et al., 2012; Indriyani & Ramadhan, 2017; Lubis et al., 2015; Murugiah, 2013; Putri & Soegiyanto, 2017; Tarashchin et al., 2016). As new EFL writing learning modules have been developed continuously in recent years, it is very necessary to systematically review them within a certain range to help check the heterogeneity of different research results, find the universality in the development process of EFL Writing modules, improve the understanding and guide practice, and policy decisions (MacMillan et al., 2018).

The purpose of this study is to systematically analyze the development of writing modules in the past five years. The purpose of this systematic review is to introduce the empirical evidence of EFL writing learning module development to researchers and EFL instructors, to help instructors and researchers to design suitable

writing learning modules applied in their class or research that would further intervene in EFL learners' writing process, and finally facilitate their writing learning and cultivate other comprehensive competence.

This study also attempts to answer two research questions:

a. What are the problems existing in EFL writing pedagogy?

b. How have researchers been developing the EFL writing module?

c. How has the developed writing module been evaluated?

1.1. Learning module

A learning module is a competency-based tool, which usually puts together a group of themes with related topics, similar contents and certain internal relations. It focuses on what learners will know or be able to do after using the module, including learning outcomes, activities aimed at achieving objectives and procedures for evaluation. It Provides or proposes to meet the needs of specific learners and is directly related to the achievement of the outcomes (Ricard & Collins, 1990). Syam (2020) described a learning module as a special unit, which systematically arranges and guides learners to use, and provides teachers with operation guidance. A learning module contains materials aimed at enabling learners to learn independently or under the guidance of teachers, as well as systematic and interesting assessment methods aimed at achieving abilities and learning goals.

Compared with traditional teaching settings, the learning module has its obvious advantages in the breadth of knowledge, the depth of content, the internal relevance of each topic, the integrity presented and the outcomes. It is also more conducive to the common improvement of learners' knowledge, ability and competence. According to Ricard & Collins (1990), a learning module has the advantages of improving the quality of the course and the ability of learners, in adapting to a variety of learning methods, in encouraging self-regulation and creativity.
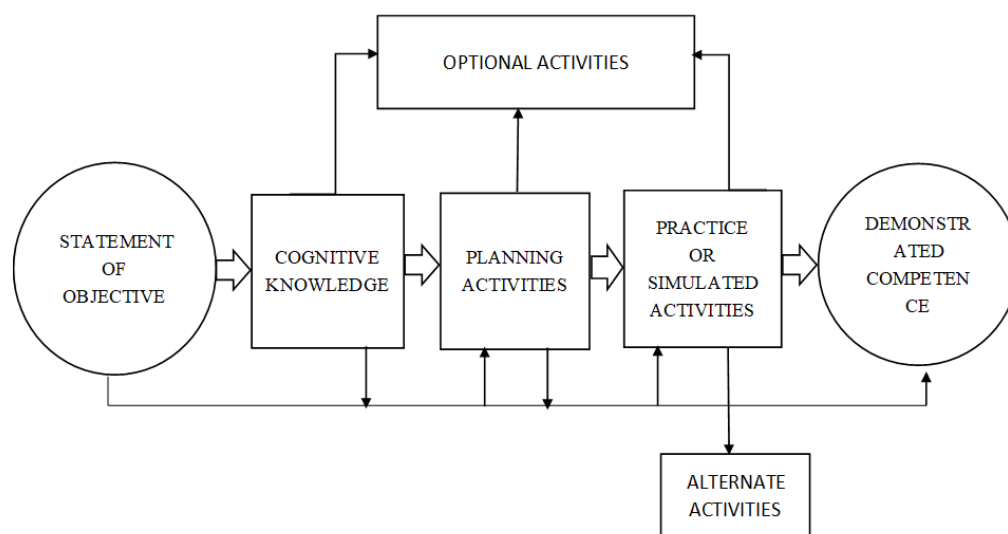

Figure 1 Typical instructional sequence, adapted from Quinn et al.(1977)

Quinn et al.(1977) stated that a learning module is designed to help learners to perform the overall competence covered by it. To reach the goal, the learning module should contain certain components within its series of learning experiences: background knowledge related to the competence, opportunities to practice or apply the competence, and demonstration of the competence clearly. The typical instructional sequence of the learning module is shown in Figure 1.

Ricard & Collins (1990) demonstrated 6 recognized components for a learning module, namely a statement of purpose, an introduction to the use of the module, learning outcomes, learning activities, learning resources and evaluation procedures. Hashim (1999) recommended 7 main elements for a well-designed learning module, including rationale, instructional objectives, entry test, multimedia materials, learning activities, self-test and post-test.

1.2 Module development model

For improving the possibility of successful development of learning modules, experts suggest dividing the procedures of module development into several stages and establishing various models to support the development of modules. The module design model provides conceptual tools for visualizing, guiding and managing the process of creating high-quality teaching materials. The module design model is a valuable resource to match the correct creative process with the correct design situation, and it is also an effective framework for instructional design research. Branch & Kopcha (2014) considered the module development model as the conceptual tool and at the same time the operational tool because the model helps to describe both the relationships and the specified actions between entities. The process of instructional design is both descriptive and prescriptive.

Each model differs in the steps, elements and characteristics of module development. Dick et al. (2006) proposed a systematic method of designing teaching units or modules with 9 procedural steps, including identifying an instructional goal, conducting an instructional analysis, identifying entry behaviors & characteristics, writing performance objectives, developing criterion-referenced test items, developing an instructional strategy, develop and/or select instructional materials, design and conduct the formative evaluation, revise instruction. Aytekin (2011) designed an Isman model is based on instructional system theory with a five-step systematic planning process, namely input, process, output, feedback, and learning. The new design model is claimed to be based on the theory of behaviorism, cognitivism and constructivism, which would foster learners' active learning in their experiences.

Quinn et al.(1977) put forward an ideal sequence map (Figure 2), which provides a theoretical basis for the relationship between levels, learning outcomes, evaluation criteria, and teaching methods. Level descriptors and the aim of the module guided the preparation of learning outcomes. The aim of the module provided the basic principle or direction for

the module. Instructional strategies, relevant to the assessment process, provided the necessary support to enable learners to successfully meet the thresholds set out in the assessment criteria. Learning outcomes imply the assessment criteria. Assessment criteria can be formulated according to learning outcomes or assessment methods or

tasks, but in any case, it should be related to learning outcomes. Quinn et al. stressed that the map was not only used for the development process, it also directed developers to check the coherence and consistency of the elements within the module.
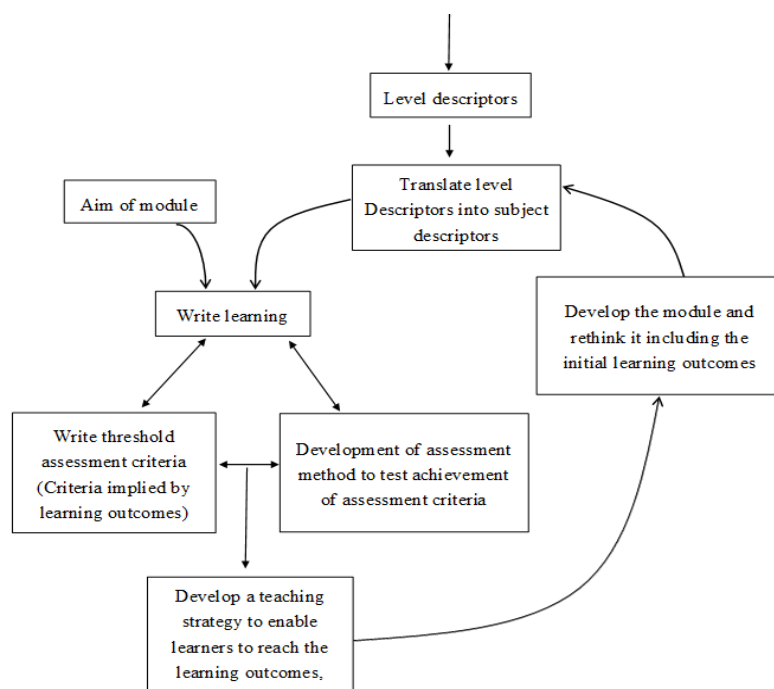
Figure 2 Basic map of module development, adapted from Quinn et al.(1977)

Branch & Kopcha (2014) noted that all module design processes consisted of at least five main steps: a. Analysis of the environment and learners' needs; b. Design a set of specifications for effective, efficient and relevant learning settings; c. Development of all learning and management materials; d. Implementation of learning strategies; e. Formative and summative assessment of expected outcomings. They also acknowledged that although the specific combination of procedures often varies with different design models, most models include the design,

development, implementation and evaluation stages.

The early stage of module development mainly determined the needs of learners, clarified the necessity and feasibility of module development, and at the same time, identified or verified whom to teach, what to teach, how to teach and how to evaluate (Aytekin, 2011). The following issues should be noted during the development process. First, the structure and content of learning modules should be designed preliminarily. The organization of the learning module needs to be analyzed by its framework, preset overall goals, and basic structure. The

content of each constituent topic should be developed in-depth after when the overall organization is roughly determined. Finally, expert evaluation and pilot study (field try-out) shall be conducted for the later necessary improvement or remedial measures.

2. Research design

MacMillan et al.(2018) stated that systematic evaluation, as a kind of trustworthy and robust means, should clearly define the inclusion and exclusion criteria, conduct an extensive search, identify all relevant literature, and use clear and reproducible selection criteria for the included research, strictly evaluate the potential deviation in the included research, and systematically integrate the findings of the included research. Based on the construction of research questions, this study selects resources published between 2018 and 2022 from Google scholars for scoping search.

The search terms are English writing module, EFL writing module, L2 writing module, TESOL writing module, and ESL writing module. The retrieval date is July 21, 2022. This study did not include dissertations in the search scope, as Rose et al. (2018) mentioned that when the problem of systematic review is methodological and conceptual in nature, rather than focusing on research results, it is reasonable to limit the review to indexed journals. Each study must meet all the inclusion criteria in Table 1, and none of the exclusion criteria became part of this systematic review. A total of 235 studies were identified through google scholar database searching. After duplicates were removed, 129 studies were excluded before the screening based on their title and abstract and 106 records were remained for three steps of screening. At last, 9 studies were included in to investigate for the EFL module development in this study (Figure 3).

Table 1 inclusion/ exclusion criteria

inclusion criteria	exclusion criteria
1. articles written in the English language;	1. Conference proceedings journal articles and dissertations
2. articles related to the development of the writing module;	2. review articles or summary of expert opinions
3. participants are learners in formal education settings;	3. articles on EFL learning instead of on EFL writing learning
4. articles related to ESL, EFL, TESOL, and L2;	4. articles on a module that related to English tests, such as IELTS
5. module has been completely developed.	5. articles on part of module development, such as needs analysis, module effectiveness
	6. articles on a module that related to the assessment of writing

Identification of studies via databases and registers

Identification

Records identified from: resources published between 2018 and 2022 from Google scholars for scoping search.

Databases (n = 235)

Records removed before screening:
- Duplicate records removed conference proceedings journal articles and dissertations (n= 52)
- Records marked as ineligible by automation tools (n = 69)
- Records removed for other reasons (n = 8)

Screening

Records screened (n = 106)

Records excluded by researchers: articles on EFL learning instead of on EFL writing learning (n = 38)

Reports sought for retrieval (n = 68)

Reports not retrieved because of articles on a module that related to English tests, such as IELTS (n = 45)

Reports assessed for eligibility (n = 23)

Reports excluded:
- Reason 1: articles on part of module development, such as needs analysis, module effectiveness (n = 7)
- Reason 2: articles on a module that related to the assessment of writing (n = 5)

Included

Studies included in review (n =9)
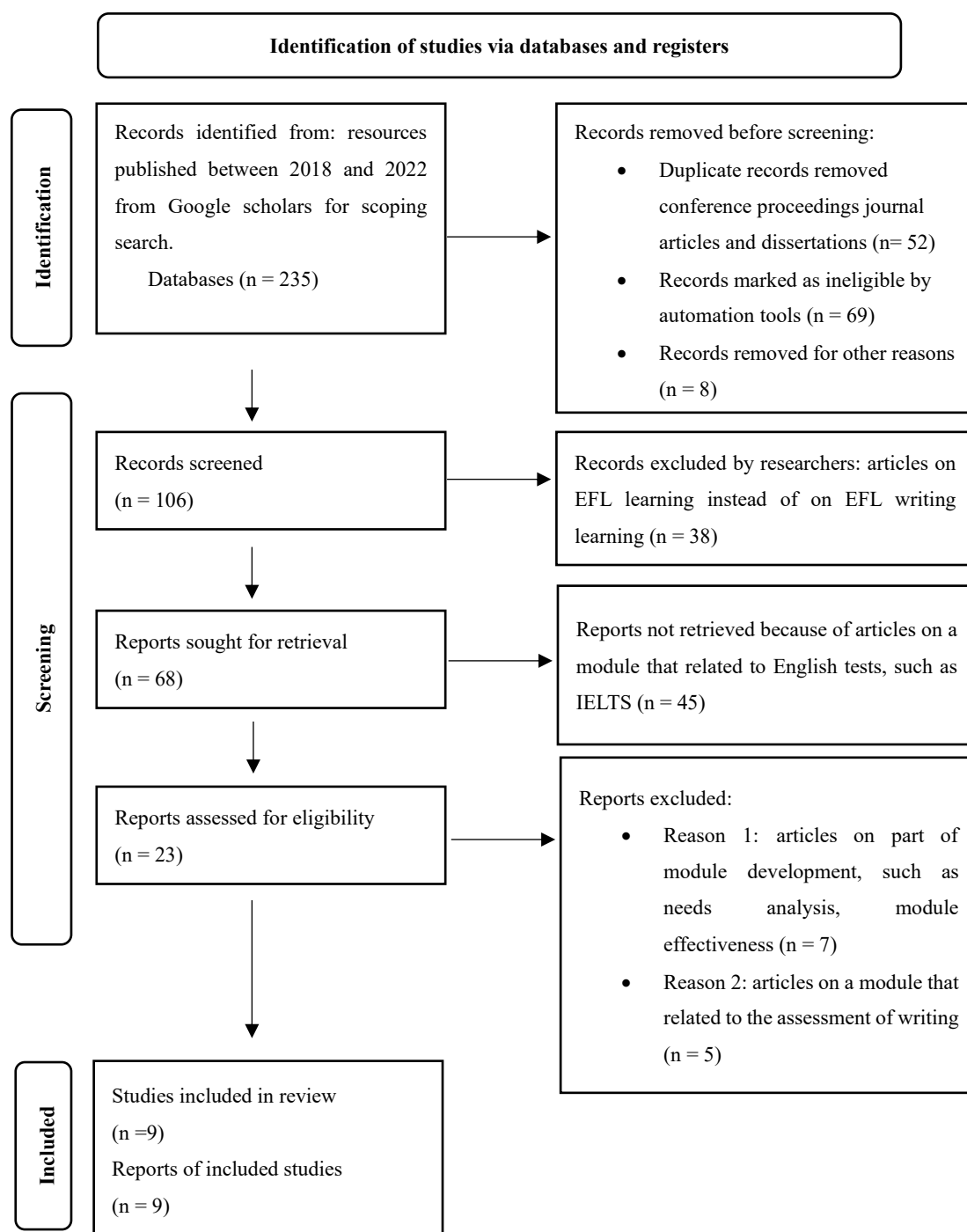Reports of included studies (n = 9)

Figure 3 Flow diagram of literature search and study selection

After the title, abstract and full-text screening, nine modules with a complete process from development to evaluation were finally selected to be included in this study. The basic characteristics of the included literature are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 basic characteristics of the included literature

STUDY	FOCUS	CONTEXT	METHODOLOGY	MODULE DEVELOPING MODEL	RELIABILITY & VALIDITY MEASURES	ASSESSMENT/ EVALUATION MEASURES	APPROACH
(Abdelmohsen, 2020)	Critical Thinking, Collaboration (2Cs)	Tertiary private college students in Oman	a mixed-method approach	ADDIE model	36 items checklist (N=5) Pilot test (N=20)	a pre-test and posttest	Process-oriented approach
(Juin et al., 2021)	Self-regulation Strategies Development	K12 Secondary School Students in Malaysia	Research and Development	Kemp model	a 5 items validation protocol (N=3T+2SISC+)		writing process approach
(Puspa et al., 2018)	Writing a Report	Vocational high school students prepared Competences Competition in Indonesia	Research and Development	(1) investigation of problem identification, (2) developing materials, (3) experts' validation, (4) product try-out, (5) final product	the evaluation sheet (N=2) Product Try Out (N=28)	semi-unstructured interview	writing process approach
(Rofii et al., 2018)	academic writing	Tertiary College students in Indonesia	a mixed-method approach	R & D cycle	a pilot study (N=9) expert judgment test	observational checklist (34 descriptors and 9 subtopics) Interview (N=2T+16S) questionnaire pre-test and post-test data analysis	contextual teaching-learning approach (CTL)
(Singh et al., 2018)	Higher Order Thinking Skills	K12 Weak ESL Learners	a multiple exploratory case	ADDIE model	A checklist (N=3)	observation	

(HOT)	in Malaysia	study			Pilot test (in two different schools)	interview Pre-test and Post-test (snowball sampling, N=2T+45S)	
(Suryani & Apriani, 2021)	Quotations in Academic Writing	Tertiary English majors in a state university in Indonesia	Research and Development	Plomp's model	Formative assessments validity and practicality (N=T+3S+9S)	Interviews writing tests (N= 2T+28S)	
(Syam, 2020)	writing skills	Tertiary English majors in Indonesia	Research and Development	the ADDIE model	expert judgment Field Try-out (N=30)	questionnaires (N=40)	
(Sari & Aini, 2019)	Writing Academic	Tertiary PBI students in Indonesia	Research and Development	ADDIE models	Limited product testing (N=10) Validator Assessment (N=5)		Blended Learning
(Wardiah & Armariena, 2021)	literary writing skills	Tertiary Language Education Study Program in Indonesia	Research and Development	Rowntree development model	Try out (N=26)	Observation Questionnaires Tests (N=35)	

3. Findings

3.1 Overall picture

The background of the nine modules is all in Asia. One module is developed in Oman for private college students. Two modules are designed for K12 students in Malaysia. Six modules are developed in Indonesia with five at the Tertiary level and one for Vocational high school students who are prepared for a national examination.

These modules are selected to focus on the field of EFL writing learning, especially on EFL learners' writing performance and writing skills. Yet, each module has its unique emphasis on such aspects of learners' growth and development as academic writing (n=4) and literary writing (n=1) in terms of writing subdivision, critical thinking (n=1) and high-order thinking skills (n =1) in the aspect of thinking cultivation, the development of learners' self-regulation (n=1) in the field of metacognition, collaborative learning (n=1) in the social field.

Six modules were assessed at the stage of validity and/or reliability (practicability) in the pilot study or field tryout. Five modules applied pre-test and post-test in the measurement of evaluation or effectiveness. Four modules did not clearly report the number of participants because they focused more on the description and exploration of the newly developed module. Three modules are based on the writing process approach and one module is based on a genre-based writing approach.

3.2 Challenges faced in EFL writing learning

There do exist challenges that have to be faced and solved in EFL writing teaching. At the K12 level, EFL writing learners are more likely to lack language skills (Puspa et al., 2018), and are prone to produce monotonous and even anxiety when experiencing complex and regular writing processes (Puspa et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2018). Especially it is difficult for those who are with limited English proficiency to generate and arrange ideas. Even though they have had a lot of thoughts in mind, it is difficult to interpret these ideas into readable texts. As a result, the compositions they wrote are difficult to read. Worse still, some of them would make a desperate attempt to copy the works of their peers (Juin et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2018). Meanwhile, faced with insufficient teaching time and large classes in those countries, it is a great challenge for instructors to find a suitable time to implement high-level thinking skills, self-regulation skills and collaborative writing principles and mechanisms (Juin et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2018).

The obstacles will still have a negative impact on EFL Writing in higher education when the problems are not well solved in the K12 phase. Syam (2020) noted that most learners face serious problems in developing writing skills with two aspects. The first aspect is the internal factor, and English proficiency has become a difficulty for EFL learners' writing. For example, Rofii et al.(2018) found that the writing difficulties encountered by EFL learners in the tertiary phase include different levels of written

language use, such as word selection (wording), sentence structure, paragraph development, writing development and grammar rules. Abdelmohsen (2020) mentioned that learners in basic writing courses lacked coherence and clarity, writing purpose and theme. Syam (2020) even concluded that most learners still cannot use vocabulary and punctuation properly and write good sentences in university. The other aspect is the external factors, such as the lack of learning motivation, and dissatisfaction with the materials (Rofii et al., 2018; Syam, 2020). The lack of creativity is also a problem that EFL students must face when learning to write (Sari & Aini, 2019; Wardiah & Armariena, 2021).

3.3 Module development and evaluation

6 modules adapted the Research and Development methods to develop the writing module. Under the R&D framework, module developers chose different design models to conduct their research. The applied models included Kemp model (n = 1), Plomp's model (n = 1), Rowntree development model (n = 1), R & D cycle (n = 1) and ADDIE model (n = 4).

ADDIE refers to five steps, namely analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation in module design. It is a useful tool to ensure that the module development includes the whole teaching design process rather than only one or more basic elements (Branch & Kopcha, 2014), so it is often used in teaching design or module development. Such researchers as Abdelmohsen, Singh et al., Syam and Sari &

Aini all developed their modules following the steps suggested by ADDIE. Kemp model is a comprehensive model with nonlinear characteristics, and it contains specific development steps, which are friendly to developers. Juin et al. (2021) adapted the Kemp model and expanded it from 4 steps to 9 steps, namely identifying teaching problems, learners and situations; analyzing tasks, determining teaching objectives, sequencing content, teaching strategies, designing information, and developing evaluation tools.

Suryani & Apriani (2021) adopted the model developed by Plomp. The model includes three stages: preliminary research, development or prototype design, and evaluation. Unlike other models, each stage of module development includes the formative assessment. To this end, Suryani & Apriani designed five different evaluation methods in each stage of model development, including a. the use of important characteristics or design specifications checklist to make self-evaluation or screening; b. expert review (n=5); c. One-to-one evaluation (n=3) by interviews; d. Small-Group Evaluation (n=9) with questionnaires; e. field test. Each evaluation is accompanied by a supplement and revision of the content to ensure the effectiveness and practicality of the module.

The development steps of Puspa et al (2018), Wardiah & Armariena (2021) and Rofii et al (2018) are essentially the same. The first stage is preliminary research on the investigation of the problem, student needs and situations, and it is followed by initial model design planning and materials

development. Then, the module's validation is evaluated or measured by product trials/try-out, and experts' validation/assessment. Finally, it is the production of the final product and/or implementation.

The components included in all modules include module introduction, learning outcomes, learning activities and assessment questions (checklist). Learning outcomes, sometimes also called learning outcomings or learning objectives, are designed for students to achieve the certain proficiency set in the module. They are generally placed at the front of the module unit so that learners can quickly understand the core of the unit. For example, Abdelmohsen (2020) divided the learning outcomings into three parts: collaboration, writing and critical thinking. Each part clearly informed the users about what can be achieved after learning the module. The collaboration outcomings included providing and receiving feedback from colleagues or other team members, providing constructive feedback, recognizing and appreciating the skills, experiences, contributions and creativity of others, Listening and acknowledging the opinions and ideas of others, and expanding the concept of peers or team members, etc. The writing outcomings achieved the three characteristics of the learning paragraph and learnt how to define paragraphs, and maintain consistency and unity of paragraphs in exercises. The critical thinking outcomings included organizing and logically editing ideas, and learning and developing debate skills of supporting reasons, reasons, focus, organization and

intervention, etc. Singh et al. (2018) clearly stated in the part of Outcomes to improve learners' ability to use high-order thinking in various situations and cultivate their effective writing competence.

It is worth mentioning that the module of Juin et al. contained the user's guide, which is very important because this part is actually the guidance for instructors and learners to correctly use and adjust the module. Most modules included exercises, writing tasks, and assessment questions to help learners reflect and evaluate their performance. Only a few modules contain reference answers.

For the measure of module validity or reliability, researchers have also used a variety of methods. Expert evaluation is essential. At the stage of expert evaluation, module developers generally use the Likert scale to evaluate the surface validity of the module and revise it according to the feedback from the evaluation. In addition, researchers generally chose to conduct field try out or pilot experiments for evaluation. This is generally small-scale and is carried out in one unit of the module or one or two class hours. Researchers obtain data through questionnaires, interviews, observations and other methods, and make final revisions to the module.

After the completion of the module development, some research has entered the implementation stage, generally in the form of experiments. In the process of the experiment, data is collected from a reflective journal and observation. After the experiment, relevant data are obtained by questionnaire or interview. Before and after

the experiment, pre-test and post-test are also conducted to obtain quantitative data to determine the effectiveness of the module. The writing test of the pre-test and post-test are generally equivalent to those of the IELTS test or the national authoritative test, and the evaluation standards are basically corresponding to the test standards. Writing is a complex process, which involves learners' cognition, thinking mode, language ability and writing skills. Writing tests alone cannot fully reflect the learners' writing performance. Therefore, recently, some scholars have developed some writing assessment modules, taking writing activities as a process and conducting both process evaluation and summative evaluation (Al-Ghrafy, 2018; Hidayat et al., 2019; Lestari et al., 2018).

4.   Conclusion

By reviewing the developed EFL Writing modules, three research questions were addressed. The study clarifies various problems existing in the current EFL writing teaching, and the concerns of researchers, and identified how to develop and evaluate modules. The advantage of the development module is that it is developed based on analyzing the needs of lecturers and learners. It focuses on the material interaction with the direct environment of students and the development according to the characteristics of students. It stimulates learners' interests and initiative and enthusiasm in writing learning (Fauzi et al., 2018; Mallillin, 2019; Visser & Sukavatee, 2020). Theoretically, it connects the relationship between instructional design theory, instructional

theory and instructional practice (Moller et al., 2009). Therefore, the development of modules also solves the problem that some teaching models lack effective empirical data. The description of the design process combined with the evaluation methods in this study will help the module developers find their own development models and evaluation methods.

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