

Examining the relationship between speaking and writing performance: Evidence from Bahraini ESL college students

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ABSTRACT

Speaking and writing are essential productive skills in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts and play a crucial role in academic success and effective communication. These skills are often assumed to be interrelated and mutually supportive; however, empirical evidence regarding the nature and strength of this relationship remains inconclusive, particularly in Middle Eastern contexts. This study examines the relationship between speaking and writing performance among Bahraini ESL college students. A quantitative correlational research design was employed, involving 98 students selected through stratified random sampling. Students' performance in speaking and writing was assessed using standardised rubrics focusing on coherence, grammar, and vocabulary. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the two skills across these components. The findings revealed weak positive correlations between speaking and writing across coherence, grammar, vocabulary, and overall performance, none of which were statistically significant. These results suggest that speaking and writing develop largely independently and that proficiency in one skill does not necessarily predict proficiency in the other. The study concludes that ESL instruction should treat speaking and writing as distinct yet complementary skills, requiring targeted and skill-specific pedagogical approaches. These findings have important implications for language teaching, curriculum design, and assessment practices in ESL contexts, particularly in Bahrain.

Keywords: Bahraini ESL students; second language acquisition; Pearson correlation; speaking performance; writing performance

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INTRODUCTION

English as a Second Language (ESL) has become a cornerstone of higher education worldwide, driving academic and professional success in an increasingly interconnected world (Mahboob, 2018; Rose et al., 2021). Recognising this pivotal role, Bahraini universities have prioritised developing strong spoken and written English skills as demand for English proficiency intensifies due to globalisation (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2019). Despite the dual focus on speaking and writing in higher education, achieving balanced proficiency in these productive skills remains a

significant challenge for ESL learners (Nunan, 2020).

Developing English proficiency is not merely an academic pursuit but also a crucial gateway for Bahraini students to participate effectively in international academic and professional arenas (Alkooheji & Al-Hittami, 2021). The heightened emphasis on English proficiency reflects the importance of English-language communication skills for Bahraini graduates' employability and successful participation in the workplace (Alkooheji & Al-Hittami, 2021). However, proficiency gaps, particularly in higher-order language skills such as writing and speaking, prevent students from fully

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capitalising on these opportunities. Unlike receptive skills like reading and listening, which follow more clearly defined learning trajectories, productive skills often develop in fragmented, individualised patterns among learners (Huang et al., 2021). This uneven development is exacerbated by the interplay of educational, cultural, and cognitive factors that influence how Bahraini students acquire these skills (Alkooheji & Al-Hittami, 2021).

The complex and often vague relationship between speaking and writing is particularly pronounced among Bahraini ESL college students. Understanding how these two productive skills interact can provide critical insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers. Although both skills are vital for effective communication, they rely on distinct cognitive and linguistic processes. For instance, speaking is inherently interactive and demands real-time, spontaneous processing (Bygate, 1987), whereas writing allows reflection and revision and demands greater precision in grammar and structure (Kellogg, 1996).

Moreover, Bahraini learners face distinct challenges, including limited exposure to real-world conversational environments and insufficient integration of speaking and writing tasks in traditional curricula (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2019; Fang & Baker, 2018). Such gaps reflect deeper structural challenges within Bahrain's ESL framework, where teaching strategies often rely heavily on rote memorisation and standardised assessments, sidelining the nuanced demands of productive skills. As a result, Bahraini students may excel in language areas tested in isolation but struggle to apply these skills in integrated, dynamic settings. Therefore, targeted research is needed to uncover the underlying factors contributing to these skill gaps (Lee, 2024).

Although theoretical perspectives, such as the Interdependence Hypothesis, propose interrelated development of language skills, empirical studies have reported inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between speaking and writing performance. Some studies have found moderate to strong correlations between the two skills, suggesting shared underlying linguistic resources, while others report weak or non-significant relationships, indicating that the skills may develop independently depending on context and task demands (e.g., Hubert, 2013; Lu & Suzukida, 2026). These inconsistencies may be attributed to differences in research design, participant populations, proficiency levels, and the specific linguistic components being assessed.

In the Bahraini ESL context, this relationship remains largely unexplored, particularly regarding how key components such as coherence, grammar, and vocabulary function in both speaking and writing. This gap matters because understanding this relationship has direct implications for language

instruction, curriculum design, and assessment practices. Without such understanding, educators may assume that improvement in one skill will automatically transfer to the other, potentially leading to ineffective teaching strategies. Accordingly, this study examines the extent to which speaking and writing performance correlate among Bahraini ESL college students, focusing on coherence, grammar, and vocabulary to provide context-specific insights. The findings are particularly significant given the heightened emphasis on English proficiency in Bahrain's educational system, especially productive skills such as speaking and writing. These insights also apply to educational contexts across the Middle East and other ESL settings worldwide, where English drives academic and professional mobility.

This study examines the extent to which speaking and writing performance correlate among Bahraini ESL college students, focusing on coherence, grammar, and vocabulary. These components were selected because they represent core dimensions of language proficiency that are widely used in the assessment of both speaking and writing (e.g., Hyland, 2019; Biber et al., 1999) and thus allow for a systematic and comparable analysis of performance across the two productive skills. The study investigates the correlation between speaking and writing skills to determine the strength and significance of the relationship between speaking and writing performance amongst Bahraini ESL students. This allows evaluation of current pedagogical approaches and practices for teaching speaking and writing to Bahraini ESL college students.

In addition, the study offers evidence-based recommendations for teachers and curriculum developers to improve teaching and learning practices for speaking and writing skills among Bahraini college students. In short, this study explores the interplay between speaking and writing competencies to inform teaching strategies that support the overall development of English language skills among ELS learners. There are two main research questions (RQ) that this study seeks to answer:

1. What is the relationship between speaking and writing performance among Bahraini ESL college students?
2. Does being good at speaking lead to being good at writing and vice versa?

Based on the findings, the study offers evidence-based recommendations for teachers and curriculum developers to improve the teaching and learning of speaking and writing skills among Bahraini college students. These recommendations are interpretive insights derived from the overall findings rather than from direct data collection aimed at answering a separate research question.

Relationship between Speaking and Writing

Research on the correlation between speaking and writing in the ESL field has largely been framed through Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis (1981). This hypothesis posits that cognitive and academic skills in one language can support or create pathways for development in another language, suggesting a transferable relationship between skills such as speaking and writing. Cummins (2018) expanded this framework, emphasising cross-skill reinforcement as a crucial concept in understanding language instruction, particularly in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts.

Building on this framework, recent studies have explored the nuanced interplay between speaking and writing skills. For example, McDonough and Crawford (2018) note that while complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) are shared linguistic predictors for both modalities, their relative impact varies by task type and learner proficiency. Similarly, Lu and Suzukida (2026) argue that task complexity plays a pivotal role in shaping the relationship between these skills. Tasks that require integrated use of spoken and written language, such as oral presentations followed by reflective essays, tend to foster skill transfer, though unevenly. Similar findings were observed in Asian university contexts, where speaking and writing integration yielded mixed outcomes due to differing task demands and learner cognition (Zalbidea, 2017).

Similarly, de Jong et al. (2012) suggest that speaking fluency often develops faster than writing fluency because oral communication is interactive. However, their findings also caution against relying solely on oral fluency to predict writing proficiency, as writing requires distinct cognitive strategies such as planning and revising. Complementing this, Ortega (2009) emphasises that while both skills draw on shared linguistic resources, their acquisition pathways diverge because of contextual and cognitive differences in processing. Ortega's analysis highlights the importance of scaffolding strategies tailored to writing's specific demands, particularly for ESL learners.

The Interdependence Hypothesis underpins many contemporary ESL pedagogies, particularly those emphasising integrative approaches to language teaching. However, critics argue that it oversimplifies the relationship between skills by assuming uniform cognitive pathways. These critiques are echoed in the works of Kormos and Dörnyei (2004), who stress that the context-specific nature of speaking and writing often renders direct skill transfer ineffective. In line with this, Kellogg (1996) posits that while both skills utilise overlapping cognitive resources, such as working memory, their operational demands differ significantly. This differentiation has led to a

growing call for pedagogical strategies that treat speaking and writing as interconnected but distinct constructs within ESL education.

Proponents of the Interdependence Hypothesis argue that the cognitive processes underpinning language skills are interrelated, enabling abilities developed in one area, such as speaking, to facilitate growth in others, including writing (Cummins, 1979). This perspective is supported by research suggesting that speaking and writing share common cognitive processes, such as lexical retrieval, syntactic organisation, and coherence development (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Studies have shown that targeted intervention in one skill, such as focused speaking exercises, can improve overall language proficiency, including writing skills (Swain & Lapkin, 1995). These findings provide strong support for integrative teaching approaches in ESL, where speaking and writing are taught concurrently to maximise inter-skill benefits (Cummins, 2001). However, critics of the Interdependence Hypothesis contend that speaking and writing are fundamentally different skills, with distinct cognitive and linguistic demands. Writing typically requires higher levels of syntactic complexity, grammatical accuracy, and explicit organisation, whereas speaking is often characterised by spontaneity and interactivity. Kormos and Dörnyei (2004) caution that over-reliance on interdependence may obscure the unique challenges learners face in each skill domain, potentially leading to pedagogical approaches that fail to address these distinctions adequately.

Recent empirical studies have also emphasised instructional design's role in facilitating connections between speaking and writing. For instance, Li and Zhang (2021) found that structured small-group student talk used as collaborative pre-writing discussion facilitated Chinese university EFL learners' subsequent individual writing development, demonstrating the potential value of systematically linking oral interaction with writing activities. At the same time, research suggests that learners may benefit from appropriate instructional and metacognitive support when completing cognitively demanding integrated language tasks (Teng, 2021). These findings underscore the importance of examining how pedagogical approaches and instructional support may mediate the relationship between speaking and writing skills.

While some studies highlight the benefits of integrative approaches, others underscore the risks of conflating skill development. For example, Nation (2001) cautions against overestimating the impact of speaking interventions on writing outcomes, particularly in advanced language settings. His findings suggest that writing demands not only higher grammatical precision but also metacognitive awareness, which is less pronounced in spoken tasks. These findings have profound

implications for Bahraini ESL learners, as they emphasise the need for instructional methods tailored to each skill's distinct challenges.

Speaking involves multiple dimensions, including pronunciation, fluency, coherence, vocabulary, grammar, and interaction. Research highlights its critical role in language development; Alharbi (2015) notes that speaking enhances communicative competence and reinforces language structures and vocabulary. However, ESL learners worldwide, including those in Bahrain, face challenges such as speaking anxiety, limited exposure to native speakers, and limited practice opportunities. In contrast, the writing skill is more complex, requiring mastery of grammar, cohesion, coherence, and syntax. Writing in a second language demands significant cognitive engagement and metalinguistic awareness (Hyland, 2019). Hyland (2003) identifies writing as particularly challenging for ESL learners because rhetorical structures and conventions differ between their native and target languages. For Bahraini students, these difficulties are further compounded by challenges related to vocabulary, organisation, language use, and the structuring of academic texts (Fakhroo & Bulaila, 2021).

Few studies have explored the relationship between speaking and writing in second-language settings, particularly the strength and nature of the association between learners' performance in these two productive skills, including the extent to which they draw on shared linguistic resources. One recent study by Lu and Suzukida (2026) examined linguistic complexity and accuracy in L2 English speaking and writing. Their findings revealed relationships between linguistic features and functional adequacy across the two modalities, though the nature of these relationships varied by proficiency level and task type. These findings suggest that speaking and writing share certain underlying linguistic resources while also involving modality-specific demands. However, the strength and nature of the relationship between speaking and writing may vary according to learners' proficiency levels and the characteristics of the tasks they perform (Hubert, 2013; Lu & Suzukida, 2026). In the Middle Eastern context, research remains limited. Akki and Larouz (2021) examined EFL students at university. They found a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between speaking and writing performance in descriptive discourse ($r = .61$). Similarly, Naser et al. (2020) found a strong relationship between writing and speaking performance among Saudi EFL undergraduates at intermediate and advanced proficiency levels. However, greater variation between the two skills was observed among beginner learners. However, studies on Bahraini learners highlight unique patterns: while some students excel in speaking, they often struggle with

writing (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2020). This suggests that the speaking-writing relationship may vary depending on cultural, educational, and linguistic contexts, underscoring the need for further localised research.

Beyond linguistic and cognitive factors, recent research highlights the importance of metacognitive awareness and cultural influences in shaping language performance. Metacognitive awareness refers to learners' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their language use during task performance, which plays a crucial role in managing the distinct cognitive demands of speaking and writing. Learners with higher metacognitive awareness can better adapt their strategies to different modalities, such as real-time processing in speaking and reflective organisation in writing (Qin et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022).

Cultural and educational-context factors also influence how learners develop and perform speaking and writing skills. These factors include instructional practices, classroom interaction patterns, assessment traditions, and broader sociocultural norms that shape learners' engagement with different language modalities. Research in Gulf and Middle Eastern EFL contexts suggests that sociocultural and educational factors can significantly affect language learning outcomes, particularly in the development of writing and oral communication skills (Aldossary, 2024; Al-Hassaani & Al-Saalmi, 2022). Consequently, understanding these contextual influences is important for interpreting differences in speaking and writing performance and for designing pedagogically appropriate instructional approaches (Sun & Zhang, 2023). This consideration is particularly important in the Gulf higher education contexts, where English language learning occurs within distinctive sociocultural and educational environments that may shape learners' speaking and writing performance in different ways.

Bahraini ESL learners, particularly at the college level, represent a unique demographic. Although the educational system prioritises English, many students face significant barriers to fluency. These include cultural attitudes, limited resources, and inconsistent teaching methods that may not effectively integrate the four core language skills. Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2020) note that Bahraini learners often report difficulties in both speaking and writing, and that a lack of targeted strategies exacerbates these challenges. While the body of literature on ESL in the Middle East is expanding, studies examining the speaking-writing relationship among Bahraini students are scarce. Existing research highlights a need for more empirical investigations to inform evidence-based practices that address the interplay between these skills.

Given the theoretical and empirical support for skill interdependence, along with the distinct challenges faced by Bahraini ESL learners, this research seeks to address these gaps. By exploring the correlation between speaking and writing, this study aims to provide actionable insights to enhance language instruction in Bahrain, foster holistic skill development, and improve proficiency in both speaking and writing.

METHOD

This study adopts a correlational research design to examine the relationship between speaking and writing performance among Bahraini ESL college students. The study measures the strength and direction of the association between the two productive skills across three key components: coherence, grammar, and vocabulary. A correlational approach is appropriate because it allows statistical examination of relationships between variables without manipulating them.

Research Design

This study is grounded in theoretical perspectives that conceptualise language skills as either interdependent or independently developed. The framework draws primarily on the Interdependence Hypothesis (Cummins, 1981), which proposes that language skills share an underlying proficiency and that developing one skill may support performance in another. This perspective has been widely used to explain relationships among language domains. It suggests that learners who perform strongly in one productive skill may also perform well in another because they share linguistic resources such as vocabulary knowledge, grammatical competence, and discourse organisation.

In contrast, the Independence Hypothesis argues that language skills may develop separately because each skill requires distinct cognitive and communicative processes. From this perspective, speaking and writing involve different modes of language production and therefore may not necessarily exhibit strong relationships. Speaking typically requires real-time language processing, immediate response formulation, and spontaneous interaction, whereas writing allows for planning, monitoring, revision, and reflection. As a result, learners may perform differently in these two productive skills despite having similar overall language proficiency.

These theoretical perspectives were selected because they provide a useful framework for investigating the relationship between speaking and writing performance among Bahraini ESL college students. Specifically, they offer competing explanations regarding whether performance in one productive skill can predict performance in another. The present study examines this relationship through three key components of language

performance: coherence, grammar, and vocabulary. If speaking and writing are strongly related, learners who perform well in speaking would be expected to perform similarly in writing across these components. Conversely, weak or non-significant relationships would support the view that speaking and writing develop relatively independently because of their distinct cognitive and communicative demands. Accordingly, the conceptual framework guides the investigation of the extent to which speaking and writing performance are related and provides the theoretical basis for interpreting the study's findings.

Participants

This study includes 133 Bahraini ESL college students (90 males and 43 females) enrolled in their second compulsory English course for their degree program. To ensure proportional representation of both genders, stratified random sampling was used. The study therefore selected 98 students, including 48 males and 50 females. This sample size is acceptable because it provides reliable and generalisable results (Fraenkel et al., 2018).

The English course in which the participants are enrolled includes multidisciplinary undergraduate students, most of whom are in Business and Engineering. The participants were selected from a higher education institution in Bahrain. These students are in their first year of college and are required to complete four English courses as part of their bachelor's degree requirements. This course is the second of two English courses they usually take in their second year of college. The course focuses on speaking and writing, although reading and listening are also part of the learning outcomes.

The English proficiency level of the participants (48 male and 50 female) is B2 CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) according to the Entry Test (Oxford Online Placement Test) that the chosen university utilises for student admission and for placing students into the right program: the Foundation Program if their level is below B2 or Degree Program if their level is B2 or higher.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected from the course's actual speaking and writing assessment components; therefore, the course assessment plan was not affected, and no students were disadvantaged by the research procedure. The data collection process involved two sources: speaking and writing assessments. The course assessment plan consists of two assessments: Assessment 1 (Speaking and Writing) and Assessment 2 (Listening, Reading, and Writing). These assessments were part of the course's regular assessment system and were developed internally by

the English language program rather than being adapted from a published standardised test.

It is worth noting that, as with the creation of all the assessments of the course, the scoring rubrics that were used to mark both the speaking and writing assessments were collectively developed by the tutors teaching the course, and they were reviewed and validated by another experienced tutor as a moderator. These scoring rubrics have been reviewed and updated several times at the beginning and end of each semester, reflecting the collective work of experienced tutors who have taught the same course for several years.

Because this study examines the relationship between the two productive language skills (speaking and writing), the study collected and analysed participants' scores only in the rubric's speaking and writing categories to meet the research objectives. The speaking and writing assessments, along with their scoring rubrics, were adapted from those used for the same English course students complete. These were piloted before implementation to confirm their reliability and consistency. In conducting this study, the research strictly adhered to ethical principles. For example, participants' informed consent was secured by providing a detailed explanation of the aims, procedures, and potential impacts of the research. This was done both verbally and in writing. The consent forms informed participants that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequences. In addition, confidentiality was ensured by anonymising all participant data and storing it securely, accessible only to authorised personnel.

Speaking Performance

To capture participants' speaking proficiency, we collected and analysed their Speaking Assessment scores. The assessment was part of the course evaluation and was based on a structured rubric developed by the course instructors in alignment with the program's learning outcomes. In the Speaking Assessment, students are required to present a project they have been working on and submit a written reflection with it. In their presentation, students need to persuade the audience that their project is feasible using some of the persuasive techniques taught in the course. The rubric included multiple criteria, such as task achievement, organisation, coherence, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. However, for this study, we analysed only the scores for coherence, grammar, and vocabulary, as these components were consistently assessed in both speaking and writing and allowed direct comparison across the two skills. To ensure the validity of the speaking assessment, experienced instructors responsible for teaching the course developed the task and scoring rubric collaboratively and aligned them with the

course learning outcomes. The rubric was then reviewed by an experienced moderator to verify the relevance, clarity, and appropriateness of the assessment criteria. The rubric also assessed key dimensions of speaking performance, including task achievement, organisation, coherence, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, ensuring adequate coverage of the construct being measured. To ensure objectivity, two raters scored the speaking assessment and, when the first and second raters' marks differed, a third rater also scored it. To ensure consistency between raters, inter-rater reliability was assessed using Cohen's kappa ($\kappa = 0.82$), which indicated a high level of agreement between raters.

Writing Performance

To assess the participants' writing performance, their scores in coherence, grammar and vocabulary were collected from their actual Listening, Reading and Writing Assessment for their course. In this assessment, students listen to a recording that compares and contrasts two products. As they listen, they take notes and add them to notes they take from a reading text on the same topic. Then, they write a mini proposal recommending one product based on a given scenario. As shown, students in this assessment again attempt to persuade the audience of their product choice using persuasive techniques they have been taught over the semester. Therefore, in both the speaking and writing parts of the assessment, they use the same persuasive skills and techniques. As with the Speaking Assessment, two raters scored the participants' written texts and, when the first and second raters differed, a third rater was used. The writing scripts were evaluated using the same criteria, and inter-rater reliability procedures were applied to ensure consistent scoring.

This study uses a quantitative research method because it aims to examine the correlation between the two language productive skills, speaking and writing. The quantitative method is suitable because it focuses on experimental enquiry that examines relationships among variables and allows researchers to test a variable or hypothesis through experiments (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2025). This study examines the speaking and writing performance of Bahraini L2 college students. Table 1 provides a timeline of the procedures that were used to bring this research to completion.

Data Analysis

To answer RQ1, Pearson Correlation was used to analyse the collected data and empirically measure the correlation coefficient. Pearson Correlation was used because it provides a robust statistical method for measuring the strength and direction of the linear relationship between Bahraini ESL college students' speaking and writing performance. Pearson Correlation is especially applicable to this research

because it quantifies how changes in one variable relate to changes in another. It returns values from -1 to 1, where values close to -1 or 1 indicate strong

correlations, while values close to 0 indicate weak or no correlation.

Table 1
Research Procedures Timeline

Phase	Activities
Preparation (Weeks 1–3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conceptualised study design to explore the speaking-writing relationship. - Selected participants using stratified random sampling for 98 participants. - Reviewed and validated scoring rubrics (experienced teachers).
Obtaining Consent and Ethical Compliance (Week 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informed participants about objectives and procedures. - Obtained written informed consent. - Ensured confidentiality through anonymisation and secure data storage.
Data Collection (Weeks 5–8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Speaking Assessment: Project presentations scored by multiple raters. - Writing Assessment: Mini-proposal writing task scored using moderated and validated scoring rubrics.
Data Entry and Cleaning (Weeks 9–11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Data entered into SPSS. - Addressed inconsistencies or errors to ensure accuracy.
Data Analysis (Weeks 12–14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Used Pearson Correlation to analyse coherence, grammar, and vocabulary. - Generated descriptive statistics for performance distribution.
Results Interpretation and Report Writing (Weeks 15–20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interpreted analysis and findings related to research questions and objectives. - Prepared report with implications for teaching strategies and curriculum development.

For this study, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient helps determine whether speaking proficiency correlates with writing proficiency across the assessed components (coherence, grammar, and vocabulary). This statistical tool was chosen because it aligns with the study's objective of empirically exploring the interplay between the two productive language skills and providing evidence-based insights into how they develop separately or together. This approach also helps the researcher achieve objective, precise, and reproducible results, which is crucial for validating the findings and forming the basis for the recommendations.

The descriptive statistics were obtained using SPSS to answer RQ2. Following the analysis of the findings for RQ1 and RQ2, recommendations for

improving speaking and writing instruction are derived as interpretive insights rather than as findings from directly collected data aimed at a separate research question. The descriptive statistics were obtained using SPSS and were used to answer RQ2. Following the analysis of the findings for RQ1 and RQ2, recommendations for improving speaking and writing instruction are derived as interpretive insights rather than as findings from directly collected data aimed at a separate research question. The correlation coefficient and the relation or description were determined by using their interval value. The correlation coefficient shows the level of correlation between the tested variables. Table 2 explains the correlation coefficient value and the relationship between the variables.

Table 2
Coefficient Correlation Interval Value

Value	Meaning
cc = 0.00	No Correlation
0.00 < cc _ 0.20	Very low Correlation
0.20 < cc _ 0.40	Low/weak Correlation
0.40 < cc _ 0.70	Medium Correlation
0.70 < cc _ 0.90	Strong / High Correlation
0.90 < cc _ 1.00	A very high and strong correlation
cc = 1.00	Perfect correlation

FINDINGS

This study presents its findings aligned with the research questions to ensure clarity and coherence, presenting the findings related to Research Question 1 (RQ1), which examines the nature and strength of the relationship between speaking and writing performance and the findings for Research Question 2 (RQ2), focusing on whether students who perform well in one skill also perform well in the other. Overall, the findings reveal several important

patterns. First, the correlation analyses across all three components, coherence, grammar, and vocabulary, consistently showed weak positive correlations between speaking and writing performance, none of which were statistically significant. This suggests that speaking proficiency is not strongly associated with writing proficiency among the participants. Second, the descriptive statistics indicate that students consistently performed better in speaking than in writing across

all components, with speaking scores showing less variability and writing scores showing a wider range and greater dispersion. Third, the overall performance analysis confirmed these patterns, with a weak and non-significant correlation between total speaking and writing scores. Collectively, these findings suggest that speaking and writing develop largely independently in this context and that improvement in one skill does not necessarily translate to improvement in the other. These results have important implications for ESL pedagogy, curriculum design, and assessment practices, which will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

Table 3
Correlation between Speaking and Writing in Terms of Coherence

		Speaking Coherence Scores	Writing Coherence Scores
Speaking Coherence Scores	Pearson Correlation	1	.151
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.138
	N	98	98
Writing Coherence Scores	Pearson Correlation	.151	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.138	
	N	98	98

As shown in Table 3, the Pearson correlation coefficient between speaking and writing coherence scores is .151, indicating a weak positive correlation between Bahraini ESL college students' coherence performance in speaking and writing. However, this correlation is not statistically significant ($p = .138$). Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics for participants' speaking and writing coherence scores. Speaking coherence scores ranged from 60 to 100; the mean was 87.35 ($SD = 13.888$), indicating generally high performance with moderate variability. In contrast, writing coherence scores ranged from 20 to 100; the mean was 64.49 ($SD = 23.424$), indicating a much wider range and higher variability.

Grammar

For the second category (grammar), Table 5 presents the correlation between speaking and writing performance among Bahrain ESL college students.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics of Speaking and Writing Coherence Scores

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Speaking Coherence Scores	98	60	100	87.35	13.888
Writing Coherence Scores	98	20	100	64.49	23.424

Table 5
Correlation between Speaking and Writing in Terms of Grammar

		Speaking Grammar Scores	Writing Grammar Scores
Speaking Grammar Scores	Pearson Correlation	1	.090
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.376
	N	98	98
Writing Grammar Scores	Pearson Correlation	.090	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.376	
	N	98	98

Nature and Strength of the Relationship

To address RQ1, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between speaking and writing performance across coherence, grammar, vocabulary, and overall performance.

Coherence

The correlation between speaking and writing in terms of coherence was determined by analysing students' coherence scores on both the speaking and writing tests. As mentioned earlier, the analysis was conducted using Pearson correlation. Table 3 summarises these results.

As shown in Table 5, the Pearson correlation coefficient between speaking and writing in the grammar category is .090, indicating a weak positive correlation between the two variables. As with the coherence criterion, this correlation is not statistically significant ($p = .376$). Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics for participants' grammar scores in speaking and writing. The scores ranged from 20 to 100, with a mean of 90.20 and a standard deviation of 14.712. This indicates that students performed highly in speaking grammar but with only moderate variability. Writing grammar scores ranged from 0 to 100, with a mean of 68.98 and a standard deviation of 20.332. This indicates a relatively wide range and high variability.

Vocabulary

For the third category, which is vocabulary, the results are summarised in Table 7.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics of Speaking and Writing Grammar Scores

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Speaking Grammar Scores	98	20	100	90.20	14.712
Writing Grammar Scores	98	0	100	68.98	20.332

Table 7

Correlation between Speaking and Writing in Terms of Vocabulary

		Speaking Vocabulary Scores	Writing Vocabulary Scores
Speaking Vocabulary Scores	Pearson Correlation	1	.131
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.200
	N	98	98
Writing Vocabulary Scores	Pearson Correlation	.131	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.200	
	N	98	98

According to Table 7, the correlation coefficient of .131 suggests a very weak positive relationship between speaking and writing vocabulary, and it is not statistically significant because the p-value is 0.200. Table 8 summarises the descriptive statistics for students' vocabulary scores in speaking and writing, which ranged from 60 to 100, with a mean of 93.06 and a standard deviation of 10.785, indicating high performance and low variability. Vocabulary in writing scores

ranged from 20 to 100, with a mean of 78.16 and a standard deviation of 20.121, hence having a broader range and greater variability.

Overall Performance

The overall performance in both speaking and writing was analysed by using the total scores of the three categories (coherence, grammar and vocabulary) for each modality (speaking and writing). Table 9 presents the obtained results.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics of Speaking and Writing Vocabulary Scores

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Speaking Vocabulary Scores	98	60	100	93.06	10.785
Writing Vocabulary Scores	98	20	100	78.16	20.121

Table 9

Correlation of Overall Performance in Speaking and Writing

		Speaking Performance	Writing Performance
Speaking Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.116
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.254
	N	98	98
Writing Performance	Pearson Correlation	.116	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.254	
	N	98	98

Table 9 shows that the Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.116 indicates a very weak positive correlation between students' overall speaking and writing performance. However, this correlation is not statistically significant (p-value = .254).

The data indicate weak positive correlations between speaking and writing performance across the three measured categories (coherence, grammar, and vocabulary). The analysis shows no statistically significant correlation between speaking and writing in any of these categories. This suggests a limited relationship between speaking and writing performance amongst Bahraini ESL college

students. These results suggest that improving one skill (e.g., speaking) may not directly affect the other or lead to improvements in the other (e.g., writing), and vice versa.

Table 10 shows the overall speaking and writing performance for coherence, grammar and vocabulary. Overall speaking performance ranged from 60–100, with a mean of 89.63 and a standard deviation of 10.635, reflecting higher performance and lower variance. Writing performance scores ranged from 20 to 100, with a mean of 68.37 and a standard deviation of 18.266, indicating a broader range and greater variability.

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics of Overall Speaking and Writing Performance

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Speaking Performance	98	60	100	89.63	10.635
Writing Performance	98	20	100	68.37	18.266

Relationship Between Skill Performance

To address RQ2, a comparison of descriptive statistics across speaking and writing performance was conducted. This analysis examined whether students who performed well in one skill performed comparably in the other, or whether proficiency in one skill was associated with different performance levels in the other.

Performance Patterns Overview

The descriptive statistics reveal a consistent, notable pattern across all three assessed components,

coherence, grammar, and vocabulary, as well as overall performance. Students consistently achieved higher mean scores in speaking than in writing, with speaking scores showing less variability and writing scores showing a wider range and greater dispersion. Table 11 summarises the descriptive statistics for both skills across all components.

Coherence

In terms of coherence, the mean speaking score ($M = 87.35$, $SD = 13.888$) was substantially higher than the mean writing score ($M = 64.49$, $SD = 23.424$).

Table 11

Summary of Descriptive Statistics for Speaking and Writing Performance

Component	Skill	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Coherence	Speaking	98	60	100	87.35	13.888
Coherence	Writing	98	20	100	64.49	23.424
Grammar	Speaking	98	20	100	90.20	14.712
Grammar	Writing	98	0	100	68.98	20.332
Vocabulary	Speaking	98	60	100	93.06	10.785
Vocabulary	Writing	98	20	100	78.16	20.121
Overall	Speaking	98	60	100	89.63	10.635
Overall	Writing	98	20	100	68.37	18.266

This nearly 23-point difference indicates that students were considerably more proficient at maintaining coherence in spoken discourse than in written texts. More notably, the standard deviation for writing coherence scores was nearly twice that of speaking (23.424 vs. 13.888), indicating that while students' ability to organise ideas coherently in speaking was relatively consistent, their ability to do so in writing varied widely. The minimum writing score of 20, compared to the minimum speaking score of 60, further illustrates the greater challenges students face in written coherence.

Grammar

Similarly, in grammar, the mean speaking score ($M = 90.20$, $SD = 14.712$) far exceeded the mean writing score ($M = 68.98$, $SD = 20.332$) by over 21 points. Writing grammar scores also showed greater variability, with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 100, compared with speaking grammar scores ranging from 20 to 100. This wider range suggests that while some students could maintain grammatical accuracy in writing at a level comparable to their speaking, many students struggled considerably with written grammar. The higher standard deviation for writing (20.332 vs 14.712) confirms that grammatical proficiency in writing was less consistent among the student population.

Vocabulary

The pattern was similar for vocabulary. The mean speaking vocabulary score ($M = 93.06$, $SD = 10.785$) was substantially higher than the mean writing vocabulary score ($M = 78.16$, $SD = 20.121$). The nearly 15-point difference, combined with the

much larger standard deviation for writing, indicates that while students generally demonstrated strong vocabulary knowledge in speaking, their ability to deploy vocabulary effectively in writing varied considerably. The minimum writing vocabulary score of 20, compared to 60 for speaking, further underscores the disparity between the two skills.

Overall Performance

When examining overall performance (the combined scores across all three components), the same pattern emerged. The mean overall speaking score ($M = 89.63$, $SD = 10.635$) was significantly higher than the mean overall writing score ($M = 68.37$, $SD = 18.266$), representing a difference of over 21 points. The standard deviation for writing was nearly twice that of speaking, indicating far greater variability in students' overall writing performance.

Interpretation of Performance Patterns

The descriptive statistics provide several important insights into the relationship between speaking and writing performance among Bahraini ESL college students. First, students consistently scored higher on average in speaking than in writing across all assessed components. This pattern suggests that learners are generally more proficient in oral communication than in written expression. One possible explanation is that speaking benefits from immediate interaction, contextual support, and real-time negotiation of meaning, whereas writing requires more deliberate planning, organisation, and linguistic accuracy. Furthermore, learners may have more exposure to spoken communication in their daily academic and social environments, which can

strengthen oral performance (Bygate, 2020; Saito et al., 2021; Saito & Loewen, 2023).

A second notable finding is the greater variability observed in writing performance. Writing scores demonstrated larger standard deviations and wider score ranges than speaking scores across all components. This suggests writing ability was less consistent among students, with some learners demonstrating strong writing skills while others struggled. Such variation may be attributed to differences in writing experience, familiarity with academic conventions, and the higher cognitive demands associated with composing written texts. Unlike speaking, writing requires sustained attention to planning, revising, and monitoring language use, which can create additional challenges for second-language learners (Hyland, 2019).

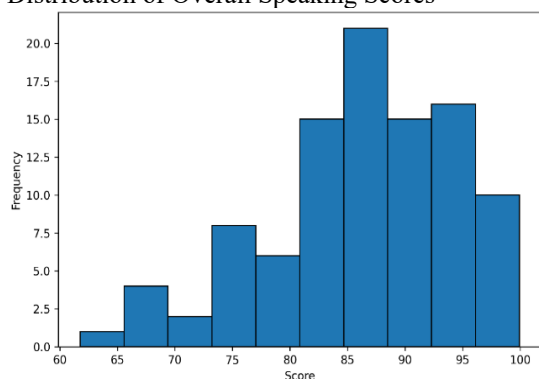
The findings also suggest that high achievement in one language skill does not necessarily correspond to high achievement in the

other. As reported in Section 4.1, correlations between speaking and writing performance were generally weak and not significant. Students with high speaking scores were spread across a wide range of writing scores, and some students with strong writing performance did not achieve equally high speaking scores. This pattern indicates that speaking and writing, although related productive language skills, may draw on different cognitive, linguistic, and contextual resources. Consequently, proficiency in one skill should not be assumed to guarantee proficiency in the other, highlighting the need for targeted instruction and assessment in both domains.

Distribution Analysis

To further examine the relationship between performance in the two skills, the distribution of scores was analysed. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the distribution of overall speaking and writing scores.

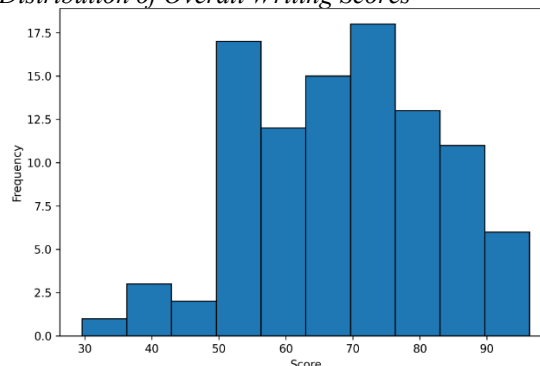
Figure 1
Distribution of Overall Speaking Scores



The distribution analysis reveals several notable patterns in students' speaking and writing performance. Speaking scores were concentrated toward the upper end of the scale, with most students achieving scores between 80 and 100. This negatively skewed distribution indicates that most participants demonstrated strong speaking proficiency, while only a small proportion scored relatively low. Such a pattern suggests that oral communication skills were generally well developed among the participants.

In contrast, writing scores were more evenly distributed across the performance range. The relatively flat distribution, with substantial numbers of students scoring in the low, middle, and high ranges, indicates greater diversity in writing ability. This pattern may reflect distinct learner groups: those who have developed effective writing skills and those who continue to struggle with written expression. The wider spread of writing scores further supports the view that writing is a more challenging and variable skill than speaking for many ESL learners.

Figure 2
Distribution of Overall Writing Scores



The analysis also highlights limited overlap between high-performing students in the two skills. Only a small proportion of students who achieved top-quartile writing scores also ranked in the top quartile for speaking. Conversely, many students who performed exceptionally well in speaking achieved writing scores near or below the overall mean. This finding reinforces the conclusion that strong speaking performance does not necessarily translate into strong writing performance, suggesting that the two productive language skills involve partly distinct competencies and developmental pathways.

Relationship Between Speaking and Writing Performance

According to the descriptive statistics and distribution analyses, the answer to Research Question 2 is clear: strong speaking performance does not necessarily correspond to strong writing performance, and vice versa. Although the findings indicate a weak positive tendency for students who perform well in one skill to achieve somewhat better

results in the other, this relationship is neither strong nor statistically meaningful. Consequently, performance in one productive language skill cannot reliably predict performance in the other.

The results demonstrate considerable variation in how students performed across the two skills. Some students who scored highly in speaking performed only moderately, or even poorly, in writing, while others who demonstrated strong writing ability did not necessarily reach comparable speaking proficiency. This pattern reinforces the conclusion that speaking and writing develop differently and may be influenced by distinct cognitive, linguistic, and contextual factors.

These findings suggest that speaking and writing are related but distinct language skills that require separate instructional attention and assessment. While both skills draw upon shared linguistic resources, such as vocabulary knowledge and grammatical competence, they place different demands on learners. Speaking relies heavily on real-time language processing and interaction, whereas writing requires planning, organisation, revision, and sustained attention to linguistic accuracy. As a result, proficiency in one skill does not automatically transfer to the other (Rahman, 2022; Sukying, 2025). This distinction has important implications for ESL pedagogy and supports the need for balanced instructional approaches that address the specific requirements of both speaking and writing.

Based on the study's overall findings, several implications can inform improvements to speaking and writing instruction for Bahraini ESL college students. The analysis reveals several important patterns in students' performance. Across all components (coherence, grammar, and vocabulary), students consistently achieved higher mean scores in speaking compared to writing. In addition, writing performance showed greater variability and a wider score range, indicating less consistency among students. Furthermore, the correlation analysis showed weak and non-significant relationships between speaking and writing performance across all components, suggesting that proficiency in one skill is not strongly associated with proficiency in the other. These patterns suggest that speaking and writing may develop differently and that students do not necessarily perform equally in both skills.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the relationship between speaking and writing performance among Bahraini ESL college students across coherence, grammar, vocabulary, and overall performance. Based on observed patterns in students' performance, the study offers interpretive insights and evidence-based recommendations for improving speaking and writing instruction. The findings revealed

consistently weak positive correlations between the two skills in all examined components, none of which were statistically significant. Additionally, students performed better in speaking and showed less variability than in writing across all categories. These results suggest that speaking and writing skills develop largely independently rather than in a strongly interrelated manner.

The findings indicate consistently weak, non-significant correlations between speaking and writing performance across coherence, grammar, and vocabulary. One possible explanation for this pattern is the difference in the cognitive and performance demands of the two skills. Speaking tasks in this study required real-time language production, with students responding immediately and limited time for planning or revision. In contrast, writing tasks allowed for greater time to organise ideas, revise content, and monitor language use. These differences may explain variation in students' performance across the two skills, as learners may compensate for linguistic limitations more effectively in writing than in speaking.

In addition, the descriptive statistics revealed that students performed consistently higher in speaking than in writing, while writing scores showed greater variability. This suggests that writing may pose greater challenges for learners, possibly because it demands greater organisation, accuracy, and extended discourse production.

The weak correlations observed between speaking and writing performance may be attributed to the different processing and production demands associated with the two modalities. Although speaking and writing draw on shared linguistic resources, learners may access and apply these resources differently across oral and written tasks. Speaking requires more immediate language processing and real-time production, whereas writing generally provides more opportunities to plan, organise, monitor, and revise language. Consequently, stronger performance in a particular linguistic component in one modality may not necessarily correspond to equally strong performance in the other. This interpretation aligns with Zalbidea (2017), who showed that task modality influences L2 performance differently: writing favours greater lexical complexity and accuracy, whereas speaking elicits greater syntactic complexity. These modality-specific differences may therefore help explain the weak correlations observed in the present study, suggesting that speaking and writing, while drawing on some shared linguistic resources, place different demands on learners' language processing and production.

Furthermore, the results align with recent insights from Bryfonski and McKay (2019), who conducted a meta-analysis of task-based language teaching (TBLT). They found that integrated tasks, such as collaborative discussions followed by

written summaries, improved both speaking and writing performance. More recent research also indicates that task-based instruction's effectiveness may vary by task characteristics and instructional conditions, including feedback provision (Abdi Tabari et al., 2025). However, their findings also highlight the need for task-specific feedback, particularly in contexts like Bahrain, where instructional practices may not yet fully integrate these approaches.

Additionally, Storch and Aldosari (2012) argue that collaborative writing exercises, in which learners discuss texts with peers before drafting, may help bridge the gap between spoken fluency and written accuracy. Incorporating such strategies into Bahraini ESL classrooms could potentially address the observed discrepancies in coherence and vocabulary scores between the two skills. Furthermore, collaborative speaking-writing tasks in Asian ESL settings showed limited cross-modal transfer without metacognitive guidance (Teng, 2021), reinforcing the importance of explicit instruction.

Similarly, Lu and Suzukida (2026) found that the relationships between linguistic features and functional adequacy differed across speaking and writing, indicating that performance in one modality may not necessarily correspond uniformly to performance in the other across different linguistic dimensions. In particular, the contribution of linguistic complexity and accuracy varied according to modality, proficiency level, and task type. This observation aligns with the present study's results, which demonstrate weak correlations between speaking and writing performance, further suggesting that proficiency in one productive skill does not necessarily translate directly into comparable performance in the other. Additionally, Hyland (2019) argues that the individualised nature of writing instruction plays a critical role in fostering learners' ability to manage syntax, coherence, and lexical complexity. This observation aligns with the study's results, which demonstrate weak correlations between the two skills, further affirming that proficiency in one domain does not directly translate to the other.

Moreover, Lee and Heinz (2016) propose that cultural factors, such as the oral-centric traditions prevalent in Middle Eastern education systems, may contribute to the observed discrepancies. Their findings underscore the need for context-sensitive pedagogies that bridge the gap between speaking and writing performance through targeted interventions. For instance, Bahraini students may benefit from integrated teaching methods that combine task-based learning with reflective writing exercises, as suggested by Swain (2000).

This study's findings reveal several key insights into the dynamics of speaking and writing proficiency. First, the weak positive correlations

across coherence, grammar, and vocabulary suggest that these two skills operate largely independently. This independence challenges traditional assumptions about skill transfer in language learning, particularly in contexts like Bahrain, where educational systems tend to emphasise integrative teaching approaches. For instance, the disparity in coherence scores between speaking and writing highlights the divergent cognitive processes involved in real-time verbal communication versus reflective text production. Similarly, the variability in grammar and vocabulary performance further underscores the necessity for skill-specific interventions.

Another critical observation is that performance is consistently higher in speaking tasks than in writing. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that spoken language benefits from interactive cues and immediate feedback, whereas writing requires a more structured and self-reliant cognitive effort (Bygate, 1987). Bahraini students' stronger performance in speaking tasks may also reflect cultural factors, such as the emphasis on oral traditions and conversational proficiency in their educational background. However, this oral-centric competence does not easily translate into written formats, requiring targeted efforts to bridge the gap.

The descriptive statistics show that speaking and writing scores for coherence, grammar, vocabulary, and overall performance vary significantly in both central tendency and dispersion among Bahraini ESL college students. Speaking scores were highest in all categories and less variable than writing scores.

Coherence

Speaking and writing coherence scores showed a weak positive correlation ($r = .151$, $p = .138$), indicating the relationship is not statistically significant. This suggests that coherence in speaking and writing may not develop in a strongly interrelated manner.

This interpretation is supported by recent research reporting inconsistent relationships between speaking and writing performance across contexts. For example, Lu and Suzukida (2026) showed that relationships between linguistic features and performance in speaking and writing can vary by task type. Similarly, Zalbidea (2017) reported that speaking and writing performance does not always align, particularly when assessed across different linguistic components.

In addition, differences in task conditions may help explain this pattern. Speaking tasks typically require real-time language production and immediate processing, whereas writing tasks allow more time for planning, organisation, and revision. These differences may contribute to the weaker relationship observed between speaking and writing

coherence in this study, a pattern also noted in recent research on task complexity and language performance (Lu & Suzukida, 2026; Zalbidea, 2017).

The descriptive statistics further support this interpretation. The average speaking coherence score ($M = 87.35$) was considerably higher than the average writing coherence score ($M = 64.49$). Moreover, the larger standard deviation in writing scores indicates greater variability in students' ability to maintain coherence in writing than in speaking.

Grammar

The speaking-writing correlation in terms of grammar was similarly low ($r = .090$) and not statistically significant ($p = .376$). This result supports Foster and Skehan's (1996) view that grammatical accuracy matters more in writing because editing and revision are available, unlike the fluency demands of spontaneous speech. Instructional strategies must, therefore, target these contextual differences by integrating real-time grammar exercises in speaking and revision-based grammar checks in writing curricula. For example, role-play and peer-editing exercises could address these skill-specific needs effectively. This suggests that grammatical accuracy in speaking and writing differs in both cognitive demands and context of use. In speaking, real-time processing constraints often prioritise fluency over accuracy, whereas writing allows for revision and greater grammatical control. This weak correlation in the present study supports the notion that grammar skills may develop separately for these two skills.

According to the descriptive statistics, the mean for speaking grammar (90.20) is far above that for writing grammar (68.98). The standard deviation is also higher for writing grammar scores, meaning writing grammar competence shows greater variation.

Vocabulary

The speaking and writing vocabulary scores also correlated weakly ($r = .151$, $p = .138$). This finding aligns with Nation (2001), who highlights the divergent lexical demands of spoken versus written contexts. Spoken vocabulary often prioritises fluency with high-frequency words, while written language requires precision and varied vocabulary. ESL instruction could address this gap by using corpus-based tools to highlight these differences and promote vocabulary building tailored to speaking (e.g., conversational practice) and writing (e.g., academic word lists). The weak correlation may reflect how vocabulary is used differently in speaking versus writing. Spoken language tends to draw on a smaller vocabulary with more repetition, relying on high-frequency words and phrases to make communication easier (Nation, 2001). On the

other hand, written language uses a more varied vocabulary to be more correct and explicit. This may explain why vocabulary ability differs so little between the two media.

According to the descriptive statistics, speaking vocabulary scores have a higher mean of 93.06 and a smaller spread (range) of 10.785, compared with writing vocabulary, which has a mean of 78.16 and a standard deviation of 20.121. Overall, these scores show that students are much more comfortable and consistent with vocabulary when speaking than when writing.

Overall Performance

The overall speaking-writing correlation was relatively low ($r = .116$) and not statistically significant ($p = .254$). This finding shows that general speaking ability does not necessarily translate into similar writing performance. This aligns with earlier findings that speaking and writing are distinct skills that require different cognitive and linguistic resources (de Jong et al., 2012). The weak general correlation suggests treating speaking and writing as independent language abilities in teaching, learning, and assessment. This weak overall correlation reflects the fundamentally distinct linguistic and cognitive skills required for speaking and writing, as de Jong et al. (2012) highlight. These findings underscore the importance of developing speaking and writing as separate yet complementary skills in ESL programs. Practical implications include designing assessments and instructional methods that treat speaking and writing as independent yet interrelated competencies. For instance, incorporating performance-based speaking assessments and reflective essay writing could provide balanced opportunities for skill development.

The final results show that correlations between speaking and writing performance, in terms of coherence, grammar, vocabulary, and overall performance, were weak and not significant among Bahraini ELF college students. These findings show the independence of these skills and refer to the need to adopt instructional and assessment approaches that are tailored to each language ability in language education.

The descriptive statistics show that overall speaking performance scores were much higher, with a mean of 89.63 and a standard deviation of 10.635, compared with overall writing performance scores, which had a mean of 68.37 and a standard deviation of 18.266. This trend holds across all measures, reflecting that students generally perform better in speaking tasks than in writing tasks. This may be because speaking is immediate, more interactive, and offers more contextual clues and opportunities for self-correction than writing, which demands more deliberate, reflective processing and may pose additional challenges for ESL students.

These findings suggest that speaking proficiency does not necessarily correspond to writing proficiency, and vice versa. Weak, statistically non-significant correlations were found between speaking and writing scores in coherence, grammar, vocabulary, and overall: $r = .151$, $p = .138$; $r = .090$, $p = .376$; $r = .151$, $p = .138$; and $r = .116$, $p = .254$, respectively. This indicates that proficiency in one domain does not directly translate to proficiency in the other. These findings agree with previous studies showing that speaking and writing are distinct cognitive and linguistic tasks. For instance, the spontaneity of speech and the demands of real-time processing differ greatly from the deliberate, reflective nature of writing, which allows revision and greater grammatical accuracy (Bygate, 1987; Kellogg, 1996; Foster & Skehan, 1996). Therefore, in language training, speaking and writing skills should be envisaged as developing through two different, yet complementary, processes. Future research may further examine the factors underlying the independent development of speaking and writing and explore effective methods to enhance proficiency in both skills.

Recent research supports the present study's findings by showing that speaking and writing, although related, place different linguistic demands on learners. Lu and Suzukida (2026) found that the relationships between linguistic complexity and accuracy and functional adequacy differed across L2 English speaking and writing, and that these relationships also varied by learners' proficiency levels and task type. Similarly, Zalbidea (2017) identified modality-specific patterns in L2 performance, with writing favouring greater lexical complexity and accuracy, whereas speaking elicited greater syntactic complexity. These differences may reflect the distinct processing conditions of the two modalities: speaking generally requires real-time, online language production, whereas writing offers more opportunities for planning, monitoring, and revision. Taken together, these findings suggest that speaking and writing draw on some shared linguistic resources but also involve modality-specific demands. Their development should therefore be viewed as related but distinct processes, rather than as if proficiency in one skill necessarily leads to comparable proficiency in the other.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between speaking and writing performance among Bahraini ESL college students across coherence, grammar, vocabulary, and overall performance. The findings revealed weak and non-significant correlations between the two skills, suggesting that speaking and writing develop largely independently.

The study makes several important contributions to ESL teaching and learning. First,

the findings highlight the need to treat speaking and writing as distinct yet complementary skills in language instruction. Teaching practices should therefore incorporate targeted strategies that address each skill's specific cognitive and linguistic demands. For example, speaking instruction should emphasise fluency, interaction, and real-time communication, while writing instruction should focus on organisation, coherence, and grammatical accuracy.

Second, the results have implications for curriculum design. ESL programs should balance instructional time and activities for both speaking and writing, rather than assuming improvement in one skill will automatically lead to improvement in the other. Integrating task-based approaches that support both independent and complementary skill development may further improve learning outcomes.

Third, the findings suggest important considerations for assessment practices. Speaking and writing should be assessed using separate, skill-specific criteria to provide a more accurate evaluation of learners' abilities. Relying on performance in one skill to indicate overall language proficiency may lead to incomplete or misleading conclusions.

The key implications of this study for ESL teaching and learning can be summarised as follows. First, instruction should recognise that speaking and writing are related but distinct skills, requiring targeted pedagogical approaches rather than assuming that improvement in one will automatically lead to improvement in the other. For example, speaking activities may benefit from interactive, communicative tasks such as discussions, presentations, and role-plays that promote spontaneous language use. In contrast, writing instruction should emphasise planning, organisation, drafting, and revision strategies that support the production of coherent, accurate texts.

Second, grammar instruction should be adapted to the specific demands of each skill. Speaking often requires learners to process and produce language in real time, while writing allows for greater reflection and self-monitoring. Consequently, instructional practices should address these differences by incorporating activities that develop fluency and grammatical control in speaking alongside activities that promote accuracy and complexity in writing. Adaptive learning technologies and personalised grammar exercises may further support learners in developing skill-specific competencies.

Third, vocabulary instruction should address the differing lexical requirements of spoken and written communication. Teachers can help learners develop awareness of contextual variations in word usage by incorporating corpus-based resources and concordance tools that illustrate how vocabulary is used across different communicative settings. Such

approaches can support learners in acquiring both high-frequency spoken vocabulary and the more varied, precise lexical repertoire often required for academic writing.

Finally, assessment practices should reflect the relative independence of speaking and writing skills. Rather than treating performance in one skill as an indicator of competence in the other, educators should use separate assessment criteria that capture each domain's unique characteristics. This approach will provide a more comprehensive and accurate evaluation of learners' language abilities and support instructional decisions that address their specific strengths and areas for development. The findings of this study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. Although the sample size was adequate, the study included only 98 Bahraini ESL college students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other learner populations and educational contexts. In addition, the data were collected at a single point in time and therefore do not capture changes in speaking and writing performance over time. Finally, because the study used a correlational design, the findings indicate associations between speaking and writing performance but do not establish causal relationships between the two skills.

These limitations also provide directions for future research. Future studies could use larger, more diverse samples to see whether similar patterns emerge across educational and linguistic contexts. Longitudinal research could investigate how the relationship between speaking and writing develops over time and across different proficiency levels. Future studies could also examine the cognitive, pedagogical, and sociocultural factors that may contribute to the relatively independent development of the two skills. Extending such investigations to other language skills, including reading and listening, may provide a more comprehensive understanding of language proficiency development in ESL contexts.

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CONTRIBUTION OF THE AUTHORS

The first author is responsible for conceptualisation, research design, methodology, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, literature review, original manuscript drafting, and manuscript revision. The second author is responsible for research supervision, methodological guidance,

critical review of the manuscript, interpretation of findings, and manuscript editing and revision. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for its content.

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