

VISUALIZING IDEAS: THE ROLE OF MIND MAPPING IN ENHANCING WRITING SKILLS IN ELT CONTEXTS

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Abstract: This study investigates the use of mind mapping as an instructional tool to enhance university students' writing skills in English Language Teaching (ELT). Writing in a second language often presents challenges such as lack of organization, limited vocabulary, and difficulty in generating ideas. Mind mapping, as a visual and cognitive strategy, supports students in planning and structuring their writing more effectively. The research focuses on how mind mapping can assist in the pre-writing stage, helping students to brainstorm, categorize, and connect ideas logically before composing their texts. Data were collected through classroom observations, writing assessments, and student reflections at a university-level writing course. The results reveal that students who utilized mind maps demonstrated improved coherence and cohesion in their essays, greater confidence in expressing ideas, and a clearer understanding of paragraph and essay structure. Moreover, the use of mind maps was found to promote learner autonomy and critical thinking. The study concludes that integrating mind mapping into academic writing instruction at the tertiary level can be a valuable approach to improving the quality of students' written outputs in ELT contexts.

Keywords: Mind Mapping, Writing Skill, English Language Teaching (ELT), University Students, Pre-writing Strategy, Academic Writing, EFL Learners, Idea Organization, Learner Autonomy

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing in English language teaching (ELT) contexts is a foundational skill that encompasses not just grammatical accuracy and vocabulary, but also the ability to generate ideas, organize them, express arguments coherently, and craft a text that fulfils its communicative purpose. Many learners especially at secondary or university level face difficulties with writing due to issues such as poor idea generation, lack of organization, limited vocabulary, and low motivation. These challenges often lead to texts that are disjointed, less clear, or fail to connect ideas logically. Writing is one of the most essential yet challenging skills in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Unlike receptive skills such as listening and reading, writing requires learners to actively generate, organize, and communicate ideas in a coherent and meaningful way. For many learners of English as a foreign or second language, writing becomes a demanding task because it does not only involve grammatical accuracy and vocabulary knowledge but also the ability to think critically, structure ideas logically, and present arguments effectively. As such, the teaching of writing in ELT contexts demands innovative pedagogical strategies that can bridge the gap between idea generation and written expression. One effective strategy that has gained increasing attention is the use of mind mapping (Febri & Masyhud, 2022). A mind map is a visual tool that allows learners to represent ideas, concepts, and relationships in a non-linear format. Unlike traditional note-taking, which often follows a rigid linear structure, mind mapping encourages creativity, flexibility, and the exploration of connections between ideas. By visualizing information, learners can better organize their thoughts, identify key themes, and generate supporting details before they begin the actual writing process. This makes

mind mapping a particularly useful tool in overcoming one of the most common difficulties faced by language learners: the challenge of starting and sustaining a coherent piece of writing.

In ELT contexts, the application of mind mapping goes beyond simply helping learners brainstorm ideas. It also promotes higher-order thinking, enhances problem-solving skills, and encourages autonomy in learning. Research in recent years has shown that visual learning strategies such as mind mapping contribute to improvements not only in writing fluency but also in learners' confidence and motivation. By enabling learners to externalize their thoughts in a visual form, mind mapping reduces cognitive overload, thereby allowing students to focus more on refining their language and structure. Moreover, writing is not merely a linguistic activity but a cognitive and social practice. Learners often bring different perspectives, experiences, and cultural backgrounds into their writing. Mind mapping provides a platform where these diverse elements can be integrated meaningfully, making the writing process more inclusive and learner-centred. In addition, it fosters collaboration in classroom settings, as learners can co-construct mind maps and exchange ideas before moving on to individual writing tasks. This collaborative dimension resonates with the principles of communicative language teaching, which emphasizes interaction, participation, and learner engagement.

Given these considerations, this study seeks to investigate the role of mind mapping in enhancing writing skills in ELT contexts. Specifically, it explores how visualizing ideas through mind maps can assist learners in generating, organizing, and developing their writing more effectively. By adopting a qualitative approach, the study aims to capture not only the tangible outcomes of writing improvement but also the learners' experiences, reflections, and challenges in using mind mapping as a tool. The findings are expected to provide insights for teachers, curriculum developers, and students on how visual learning strategies can be integrated into the teaching of writing to foster creativity, critical thinking, and better learning outcomes (Kusmiati et al., 2025).

To address these issues, mind mapping has emerged as a promising pedagogical strategy in ELT writing instruction. Mind mapping is a visual tool that helps learners brainstorm ideas, make connections between concepts, and visually arrange subtopics around a central theme thus facilitating pre-writing planning and structure before drafting. It is often used to improve writing of certain genres such as descriptive texts, procedure texts, and news items where clarity of sequence, cohesion, and content organization are important (Julieta Tisya Majid, 2022). This study aims to build on these findings by investigating how mind mapping techniques might enhance writing skills in ELT contexts, with special emphasis on idea generation, coherence, and students' attitudes. By doing so, it attempts to contribute to innovative practices in writing teaching that are both evidence-based and responsive to learners' needs.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the role of mind mapping in enhancing writing skills within the English Language Teaching (ELT) context. A qualitative approach was chosen because the purpose of the study was not merely to measure outcomes quantitatively, but to gain deep insights into learners' experiences, perceptions, and processes while engaging with mind mapping as a learning tool. Writing, as a complex skill that integrates cognitive,

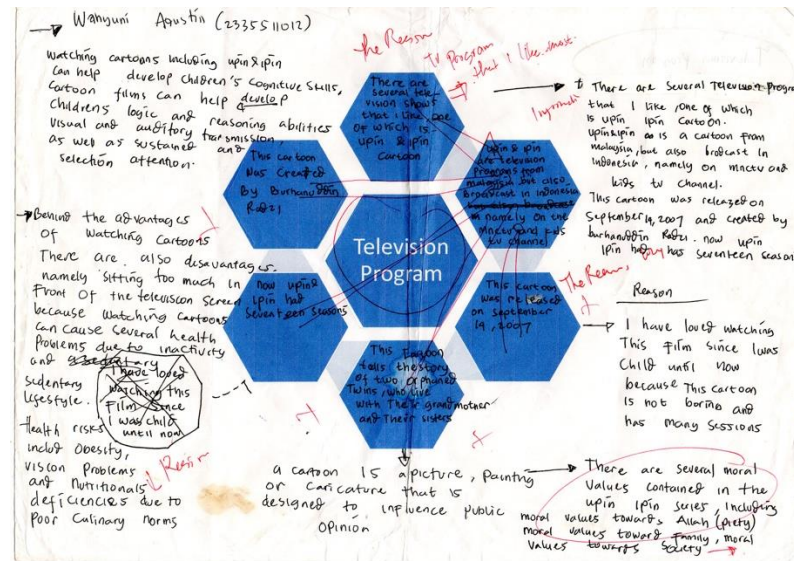
linguistic, and affective dimensions, requires methodological approaches that capture its multidimensional nature. Thus, qualitative inquiry provided the flexibility to examine how students conceptualize, organize, and transform ideas into written texts through the aid of mind mapping. This study adopted a case study design, which allowed for a detailed and holistic investigation of a particular group of learners. The case study approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to focus on the specific dynamics of mind mapping practices in writing classrooms, uncovering both the challenges and affordances of this strategy.

Participants were students of 4th semester of English Education Department of STKIP PGRI Bangkalan as they were at a developmental stage where academic writing skills are critical for both academic success and professional growth. Diversity in proficiency levels, gender, and academic backgrounds was considered to ensure varied perspectives. Multiple qualitative data collection techniques were employed to triangulate findings and strengthen the validity of the study. They are classroom observations, the researcher observed writing classes where mind mapping was introduced and practiced. Observations focused on student engagement, interaction patterns, and how learners constructed and revised their mind maps. Secondly, in-depth interviews – Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to capture their personal reflections on how mind mapping influenced their writing process, idea generation, and organization skills. Thirdly, document analysis – Students' written drafts and mind maps were collected and analysed to trace how ideas developed from visualization to written form. This allowed the researcher to examine the transformation of mind maps into coherent written texts. And the last is reflective journals. Students were encouraged to keep journals documenting their learning experiences, challenges, and insights regarding the use of mind mapping in writing tasks. These journals provided rich data on the internal cognitive and affective processes involved. Through this qualitative approach, the study sought to uncover the transformative role of mind mapping in shaping learners' writing practices in ELT. Rather than reducing learning to measurable outcomes, the methodology embraced the richness of participants' voices, classroom dynamics, and textual artifacts. This approach illuminated how mind mapping not only facilitated the organization of ideas but also empowered students to approach writing as a creative, meaningful, and learner-centred process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this results, the author presents two examples from the students. The students have already made mind mapping based on the topic given. The consideration why these two mind mapping taken is due to its complexity and also better mapping from others.

Picture 1. Student's Mind Mapping Paper



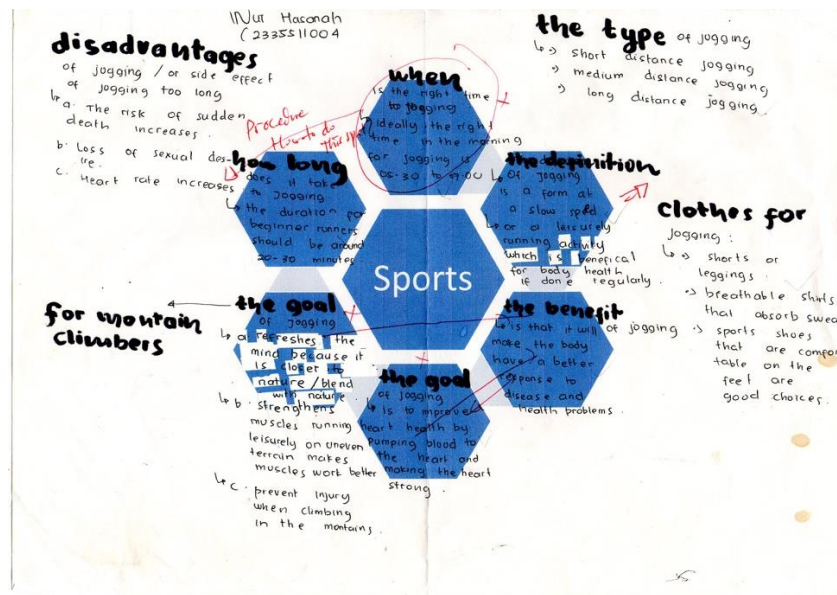
At the top right, the notes begin by explaining that *watching cartoons, including the Japanese series “Upin Ipin,” can help children’s cognitive skills*. It emphasizes that cartoons play a significant role in developing listening and speaking abilities, visual memory, and even social awareness. The notes also mention that television is a medium of entertainment and information, and that cartoons, in particular, can serve as a learning resource. Moving down, another section labelled “Importance” highlights that television programs such as *Upin Ipin* are popular because they are entertaining and educational. The notes stress that this Malaysian cartoon series, first aired in September 2007, has gained international recognition and continues to run for many seasons due to its popularity. The show is described as promoting moral values and positive messages for children, such as kindness, friendship, and respect toward family and society. Under the section marked “Reason”, the writer explains their personal preference: *they love watching this film since it is cheerful and not boring*. The notes mention that *Upin Ipin* has “many sessions” or episodes, which makes it engaging over time. This suggests that the continuity of the show is part of its appeal to viewers.

On the left-hand side of the page, however, the notes also address the disadvantages of watching cartoons. It is explained that there are at least two major drawbacks: first, *children may become too attached to the television screen*, leading to reduced activity or physical inactivity; second, *prolonged watching can create health risks*, including eye strain. Another point raised is that *cartoons sometimes present poor culinary norms, unrealistic scenarios, or stereotyped characters*, which could negatively influence young audiences if not guided by adults.

Additionally, some red ink corrections and remarks from what seems to be a teacher highlight grammar issues, unclear phrases, and suggestions for better organization. Arrows point from one idea to another, connecting “importance,” “reasons,” and “disadvantages” together, showing that the notes were likely part of a writing exercise or draft essay. Overall, the content reflects a balanced discussion of television programs, particularly cartoons like *Upin Ipin*, weighing both their positive contributions to children’s learning and values as well as the possible negative effects on health and behaviour. It demonstrates an attempt to practice

critical thinking by recognizing both sides advantages and disadvantages while also including personal opinions on why the writer enjoys such programs.

Picture 2. Student's Mind Mapping Paper



The central theme of this mind map is *sports*, and the chosen sport for discussion is jogging. Around the center, different aspects of jogging are explored, including its definition, types, goals, benefits, disadvantages, proper clothes, and suitable timing. The definition of jogging is described as a form of slow-paced or leisurely running activity. It is emphasized that jogging, when practiced regularly, can be very beneficial for body health. This places jogging not only as an exercise but also as a lifestyle activity to maintain wellness. The types of jogging are categorized into three: short distance jogging, medium distance jogging, and long distance jogging. This indicates that jogging can be adapted to the needs and stamina levels of individuals, ranging from beginners to more experienced runners. Next, the benefits of jogging are outlined. Jogging is said to make the body stronger and provide a better response to diseases and health problems. Essentially, it improves the immune system and overall physical resilience, reducing the likelihood of illness.

The goals of jogging are explained in two sections. One set of goals highlights the refreshment of the mind, because jogging often brings people closer to nature, especially when done outdoors. It also strengthens muscles, particularly when jogging is done on uneven terrain, which challenges the body more effectively. Another set of goals mentions improving heart health by pumping blood more efficiently, thereby strengthening the heart. In addition, jogging is noted as a preventive measure to avoid injury during mountain climbing, since it builds endurance and muscle strength that are useful for such activities.

The mind map also addresses clothes for jogging, recommending shorts or leggings, breathable shirts that absorb sweat, and sports shoes that are comfortable on the feet. This highlights that proper attire is important for both comfort and safety when exercising. Another aspect discussed is when to jog. The notes suggest that the

ideal time for jogging is in the morning, around 5:30 to 7:00 a.m. This period is seen as optimal because the air is fresher, the body is more energized, and the exercise can set a positive tone for the rest of the day. However, the worksheet also acknowledges disadvantages or side effects of jogging. It warns that jogging too long increases the risk of sudden death, though this is rare and likely linked to overexertion. It also mentions loss of sexual desire and increased heart rate as possible negative effects if jogging is done excessively. These notes serve as a caution that while jogging is healthy, it must be practiced in moderation.

Finally, some red-ink corrections and comments suggest this was a draft for a writing or speaking exercise. For example, “procedure: how to do this sport” and corrections around grammar and sentence clarity appear throughout the page.

Overall, the content demonstrates a structured overview of jogging as a sport, highlighting its definition, types, benefits, goals, proper practice, equipment, and disadvantages. It shows a balanced perspective that not only promotes jogging for health and fitness but also warns against potential risks if done improperly or excessively.

The two mind maps explore distinct topics television programs (with a focus on cartoons such as Upin Ipin) and sports (with a focus on jogging) yet both are analyzed through structured categories such as definition, goals, benefits, disadvantages, and importance. The first mind map highlights television programs, emphasizing both their educational and entertainment values. Cartoons like Upin Ipin are seen as beneficial for developing children’s listening and speaking skills, enhancing visual memory, and instilling moral values such as kindness, respect, and social responsibility. They also serve as a source of enjoyment, offering cheerful and engaging storylines across many episodes. However, the notes also recognize significant disadvantages: prolonged screen time may cause health problems such as inactivity and eye strain, while certain cartoons may present unrealistic or poor behavioral norms. Thus, television programs are viewed as a double-edged medium capable of enriching children’s learning but also potentially leading to negative outcomes if consumed excessively.

The second mind map turns to sports, specifically jogging, and presents a similarly balanced discussion. Jogging is defined as a slow-paced running activity that, when practiced regularly, enhances body health. It is categorized into short-, medium-, and long-distance jogging, providing flexibility for different fitness levels. The benefits and goals of jogging include improving heart health, strengthening muscles, refreshing the mind, and fostering a closer connection with nature. Proper clothing such as breathable shirts, leggings, and comfortable shoes is also considered essential for safe practice. The timing of jogging is noted as ideally in the early morning, when the body is fresh and the environment is more conducive to exercise. However, like television programs, jogging is not free from disadvantages. Excessive jogging can cause harmful effects such as an increased heart rate, fatigue, and even the rare risk of sudden death. These warnings reinforce the importance of moderation and proper practice. The comparison might be seen through this table:

Table 1. Pattern of Mind Mapping of two students

Points emerged	Comparison
Focus and Domain	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Television programs</i> focus on cognitive, moral, and social impacts, especially for children. 2. <i>Jogging</i> focuses on physical and mental health benefits, emphasizing bodily strength and endurance.
Benefits	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cartoons like <i>Upin Ipin</i> foster language learning, moral education, and entertainment. 2. Jogging strengthens physical fitness, heart health, and mental refreshment. 3. Both highlight personal growth, but one is intellectual/social while the other is physical/mental.
Disadvantages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Television programs can cause inactivity, health risks from screen time, and negative behavioral influence. 2. Jogging, if overdone, can cause injuries, fatigue, and health risks such as overexertion. 3. In both cases, excessive engagement leads to harm, underscoring the need for balance.
Context of Practice	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Watching television is sedentary and requires self-control to avoid overconsumption. 2. Jogging is active and requires discipline, proper timing, and suitable clothing.
Overall Message	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Both mind maps convey that every activity whether passive or active offers valuable benefits when done correctly and in moderation, but can be harmful if misused or practiced excessively.

In short: Television programs and jogging may seem unrelated, yet both represent common human activities that influence development. One nurtures imagination, language, and values, while the other strengthens the body and refreshes the mind. Their comparison highlights a universal principle: balance is the key to maximizing benefits while minimizing risks in daily life activities.

The findings of this study emphasize that mind mapping plays a crucial role in supporting the development of writing skills in ELT contexts. Writing is often perceived as one of the most difficult skills to master because it requires learners to integrate grammar, vocabulary, organization, and critical thinking simultaneously. The use of mind mapping addresses these challenges by offering a visual and structured approach to idea generation and organization. This aligns with constructivist learning theories, which highlight the importance of active knowledge construction and meaningful engagement in the learning process. One of the key points that emerged from this study is the ability of mind mapping to reduce learners' cognitive load. When students are asked to write, many struggle with initiating ideas or connecting them coherently (Ningsih & Asnawi, 2023). Mind maps help learners externalize their thoughts, making abstract ideas visible and easier to manipulate. This process not only improves coherence and cohesion in writing but also enhances learners' confidence, since they can see the overall structure of their work before

they begin drafting. Furthermore, the discussion highlights that mind mapping fosters creativity and critical thinking. Unlike linear note-taking, mind maps encourage divergent thinking by allowing multiple branches of ideas to develop simultaneously. This makes writing a less rigid and more exploratory process, which is particularly beneficial for second language learners who often feel restricted by linguistic limitations. In addition, collaborative mind mapping activities in the classroom promote interaction and peer learning, which supports the communicative approach in ELT (Mantra, et al., 2021). The role of technology further enhances the effectiveness of mind mapping. With the availability of digital tools such as online mind mapping applications, learners can create, edit, and share maps easily. This digital integration allows for greater collaboration, supports multimodal learning, and reflects the growing need for technological literacy in education. The discussion also suggests that teachers who integrate mind mapping into their writing instruction not only improve students' writing outcomes but also create a more engaging and student-centred classroom environment (Rifka Alkhilyatul Ma'rifat, I Made Suraharta, 2024).

However, this study also acknowledges some limitations. While mind mapping is effective in the pre-writing and organizing stages, it may not directly address other issues in writing such as grammar accuracy, spelling, or stylistic refinement. Thus, mind mapping should be seen as a complementary strategy, integrated with other instructional techniques. Additionally, students' familiarity with visual learning strategies and their attitudes towards technology may influence the effectiveness of mind mapping. Overall, the discussion supports the idea that mind mapping is a powerful tool in enhancing writing skills in ELT, both in traditional and digital learning environments. It provides learners with a clear framework for organizing their thoughts, encourages creativity, and promotes collaborative learning. At the same time, teachers are encouraged to adapt the use of mind mapping according to their students' needs, proficiency levels, and learning contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the use of mind mapping can be considered an effective and innovative strategy for supporting students in developing their writing skills. For teachers, it provides a practical and adaptable technique that can be applied across different proficiency levels and writing tasks. For learners, it offers a flexible and empowering tool that transforms the often challenging process of writing into a more manageable, creative, and enjoyable experience. Future research and classroom practice should continue to explore the integration of mind mapping with other digital and collaborative tools, thereby expanding its potential to contribute to meaningful learning outcomes in ELT.

The present study highlights the significant role of mind mapping as a pedagogical tool in enhancing writing skills within English Language Teaching (ELT) contexts. Writing, as one of the most complex and demanding language skills, requires learners not only to master linguistic features but also to organize, structure, and express their ideas clearly. Mind mapping serves as a bridge between idea generation and written expression, enabling learners to visualize their thoughts, establish logical connections, and plan their writing in a more systematic manner. By integrating visual elements into the writing process, mind mapping reduces cognitive overload, encourages creativity, and promotes learner autonomy. It also aligns with communicative and learner-centred approaches in ELT, as it fosters collaboration,

interaction, and active engagement in the classroom. Moreover, beyond improving writing fluency and coherence, mind mapping has been shown to enhance learners' confidence, motivation, and critical thinking abilities, which are essential for effective language learning.

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