



EFL Freshmen's Writing Performances: A Rural and Urban School Perspective

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Abstract

The inputs comprehended by freshmen when they were at high schools contribute much to their present writing performance. However, the influence of school location towards this issue is still debatable and gets minor attention to explore in its relationship towards the recent courses. This comparative study aims to compare and see the differences in several writing aspects, including content, organization, and language features among freshmen who graduated from rural senior high schools and urban senior high schools. A writing test was administered to collect the students' writing documents which were quantitatively analysed by employing content analysis to reveal the differences, supported by an Independent T-test and Mann Whitney U test to find their significance. This study uncovered that rural freshmen generally performed better than urban freshmen did. Conversely, it voices the support on equality and inclusivity of rural and urban freshmen on academic environment, thus leading the existence of no diversity between both groups. Implicitly, this study advices further researchers to investigate any existing gap or discrimination among students regarding their school origins, and to effectively unravel the issues, achieving SDG 4 and EFA.

Keywords: *EFL; freshman; rural school; urban school; writing performance*

INTRODUCTION

English writing has become a persistent challenge for college students, despite its long-standing presence in secondary school curricula (Adam et al., 2021; Magaba, 2023). Writing in English is not a purely linguistic activity but a complex cognitive process that requires attention to multiple levels, including theme development, paragraph organization, sentence construction, grammatical and lexical choices, to strengthen learners' overall English proficiency (Ampa & Basri, 2019). Such complexity demonstrates that effective writing demands not only language mastery but also the ability to organize thoughts coherently, develop arguments, and use cohesive devices to link ideas (Saprina et al., 2021). As a skill that does not develop naturally, writing often requires extensive instruction, practice, and feedback to be fully mastered (Fitrawati & Safitri, 2021; Graham, 2019).

The transition between high school and college writing contexts further intensifies the challenges of writing in English. Students often face a gap due to differences in writing expectations, genres, and frequency of writing tasks (Toba et al., 2019). College writing demands analytical and critical thinking skills that are seldom practiced in high school settings, where emphasis may rest more on structural and grammatical correctness than on idea development. Nevertheless, the foundational writing instruction provided in high school remains essential, as it equips students with the basic knowledge necessary for more advanced academic writing. Furthermore, prior engagement in writing-to-learn activities is shown to positively influence students' later writing abilities in higher education (Vacalares et al., 2023).

In addition to institutional differences, the geographical context, particularly the distinction between urban and rural educational settings, plays a significant role in shaping students' writing proficiency. Studies have shown that urban and rural EFL students often display notable differences across various sub-skills of writing, including vocabulary use, syntax, grammar accuracy, and even handwriting (Deepa, 2021). These disparities can be attributed to differences in access to educational resources, exposure to English, and the overall learning environments of schools. While some research suggests that the performance gap between urban and rural learners is statistically insignificant (Bachore, 2022), others have found that urban students generally outperform their rural counterparts due to greater access to qualified teachers, technology, and supplementary materials (Ismail et al., 2020).

Rural and urban schools significantly impact an education system, particularly influencing students' academic achievement. This disparity is primarily driven by a multitude of factors, with Socioeconomic Status (SES) acting as a dominant determinant (Munir et al., 2023). Crucially, the parents' education level and income are repeatedly identified as foundational factors (Chang et al., 2021; Brew et al., 2021), as family financial capacity often dictates access to supplementary education and resources. The negative effects of low SES, which include exposure to poverty and limited resources, can translate into reduced study time for students (Brew et al., 2021). Beyond the home environment, institutional factors such as teachers' subject knowledge (Chang et al., 2021), the availability of resources like textbooks, libraries, practical laboratories, and meal provisions, and issues like truancy all contribute to the overall educational ecosystem (Brew et al., 2021).

The resulting differences manifest clearly in a general trend where urban students perform better than rural students (Ismail et al., 2020), a gap often attributed to the limited opportunities for talent development and resource constraints in rural settings. This achievement gap is particularly pronounced among high-achieving students in skill areas such as English literacy, where urban high achievers were found to significantly outperform their rural counterparts (Bachore, 2022). However, the picture is not uniform; one study found an insignificant difference in literacy skill performance between urban and rural low achievers (Bachore, 2022), suggesting the rural-urban resource disparity may widen the gap primarily for students with higher potential, or that other factors equalize outcomes at the lower end of the achievement spectrum.

As the findings of those prior studies conclude that college students from rural and urban areas performed differently in writing is still debatable, and however, this issue gets minor attention to explore, this study aims to compare and see the differences in writing performance in terms of content, organization, and language features between freshmen who graduated from rural senior high schools and freshmen who graduated from urban senior high schools. This analysis is necessary to develop specific teaching methods that fit the needs of each group. Ultimately, the results will provide

essential, practical information for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators and curriculum developers working to reduce the difference in writing ability. This study was guided by the following questions to answer:

1. How is the writing performance of rural freshmen compared to that of urban freshmen in terms of overall writing, content, organization, and language features?
2. What are the differences on writing performance between rural and urban freshmen in terms of content, organization, and language features?
3. Is there any significant difference in writing performance between rural and urban freshmen in terms of content, organization, and language features?

METHODS

Research design and procedure

This research belongs to a comparative study with procedure is shown by Figure 1. A writing test was administered to collect the data of students' writing. The data were then grouped based on the students' school origin (rural or urban), and content-analysed for the score by referring to the adapted rubric shown on Table 2. The scores were calculated for the mean to gain the performance category and differences descriptively. Additionally, Independent T-test and Mann Whitney U test were performed to see the significance of differences statistically.

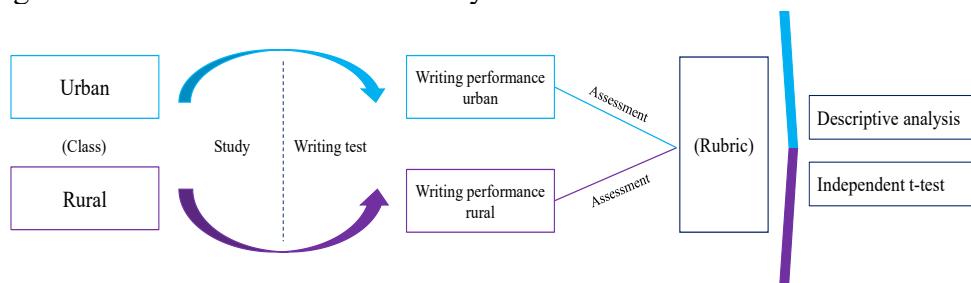


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of the stages of the research

Participants

Prior to the research process, 128 participants had submitted their consent to this study inclusion, and the study process was conducted in compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki as well. The participants were the first semester students enrolled in Paragraph Writing class at the Department of English Language and Literature of a public university in Indonesia. The characteristics and distribution of the participants are captured in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant distribution

Aspect	Number of Participant	
	School Origin	
Rural	64	
Urban	64	
Sex		
Female	90	
Male	38	
Age (years old)		
18	91	
19	25	
20	12	

Instrument

A writing test was administered to collect the students' writing documents. Content analysis was employed as the key method to analyse the documents. The process went quantitatively to reveal the differences on writing performance between rural and urban freshmen, supported by an Independent T-test and Mann Whitney U formula to test their significance. The approach was used since the document analysis in quantitative study is conducted by using content analysis, supported by numbers and statistics to make sense of data (Morgan, 2022). It focuses on measurements that facilitate comparison and statistical aggregation of data (Patton, 2015). Conducting a document analysis allows researchers to have access to data that would otherwise take enormous effort and time to collect (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Another reason relates to the need to complete studies designed to focus exclusively on how texts portray different groups of people as well as to represent different groups of people accurately rather than stereotypically (Morgan, 2022).

Data analysis technique

The data of this study which were comparison and contrast paragraph were collected from students' mid-term test works to maintain the natural setting (Fitrawati & Safitri, 2021). Before coming to the analysis process, the data were categorized as rural and urban by seeing the students' school origin, referring to the Central Bureau of Statistic Policy. Each of them was then analysed by using the writing assessment rubric adapted from (Brown & Lee, 2015; Hughes, 2003; Jacobs, 1981) as shown in Table 2 as the guidance. The data were scored and analysed statistically to uncover the mean. In categorizing the scores of freshmen writing performances, the theory of (Hyland, 2021) was adapted, presented in Table 3.

Table 2. Scoring Indicators adapted from Brown & Lee, (2015); Hughes, (2003); Jacobs, (1981)

Aspect	Indicators
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topic - Details (similarities and differences)
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Block organization - Point-by point organization
Language features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comparison - Contrast signals - Agreement

Table 3. Mean category of freshmen writing performance

Score	Category
91 – 100	Excellent
81 – 90	Very Good
71 – 80	Good
61 – 70	Average
51 – 60	Fair
41 – 50	Poor
≤ 40	Inadequate

Furthermore, the score interpretation was adapted from Harris (1969) as Table 4 displays.

Table 4. The performance interpretations from aspect score

Score	Probable performance
80 – 100	Good to Excellent
60 – 79	Average to Good
50 – 59	Poor to Average
0 – 49	Poor

The data were analysed by using descriptive analysis techniques to disclose the average, lowest, and highest score from both groups. To reveal the differences in writing performance between the two groups, a significance test was performed, crediting to the result of the normality test preceding the process; Independent T-test used for normal data distribution, meanwhile Mann Whitney U test used for non-normal data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

RQ1: How is the writing performance of rural freshmen compared to that of urban freshmen in terms of overall writing, content, organization, and language features?

The result shown by Table 5 exposes that the overall writing score is led by rural freshmen which is generally in the good category. The average total score is 71 with the lowest score is 45 (Poor) and the highest score is 96 (Excellent). Meanwhile, urban freshmen's overall writing score is generally in the average category with a score of 70. The lowest score is 44 (Poor) and the highest score is 91 (Excellent). The overall writing performance of rural freshmen (Good) is generally one level ahead than that of urban freshmen (Average). However, both of their highest scores are in the same level that is in excellent category. In line with it, both of their lowest scores are also in the same level that is in poor category.

Table 5. Rural and urban freshmen's overall writing score

	N	Sum	Mean	Min	Max
Rural	64	4548	71	45	96
Urban	64	4480	70	44	91

As Table 6 presents, rural and urban freshmen's writing performance in content is generally in good category with the average total score of 75. Rural freshmen's writing performance in content is considered average to good with the lowest score is 38 (Poor) and the highest score is 100 (Excellent). Likewise, the score of 72 shows that urban freshmen's performance in content is generally in the good category or is considered average to good. Furthermore, the lowest score is 35 (Inadequate) and the highest score is 97 (Excellent). Additionally, the writing performance in content of rural freshmen is at the same level as that of urban freshmen which generally falls in the good category. Both of their highest scores are also in the same level which is categorized excellent. Conversely, both of their lowest scores are in inadequate category. For the content aspect, generally, both rural and urban freshmen's performances are considered average to good. It means they are fairly able to write a topic sentence in complete and clear sentences. Moreover, the details of similarities and differences were clear but almost appropriate to the topic.

Table 6. Rural and urban freshmen's writing performance in content aspect

	N	Sum	Mean	Min	Max
Rural	64	4783	75	38	100
Urban	64	4613	72	35	97

Additionally, Table 7 describes rural and urban freshmen's writing performance in organization is generally in good category with the average total score is 72. In general, rural freshmen's performance in organization is considered average to good with the lowest aspect score is 20 (inadequate) and the highest aspect score is 100 (Excellent). Meanwhile, urban freshmen's writing score in organization is generally in the average category with a score of 70. The lowest score is 18 (Inadequate) and their highest score is 98 (Excellent). As the result shows up, the writing performance of rural freshmen (Good) is one level ahead than that of urban freshmen is in general. Both of their highest scores are in the same level that is in excellent category. In addition, both of their lowest scores are also in the same level which is inadequate category. However, largely, their performances are considered average to good, meaning that the freshmen are able to break the information of similarities and differences into block or point-by-point structure but did not follow a consistent order when discussing the comparison and contrast.

Table 7. Rural and urban freshmen's writing score in organization aspect

	N	Sum	Mean	Min	Max
Rural	64	4578	72	20	100
Urban	64	4460	70	18	98

Furthermore, Table 8 discloses rural and urban freshmen's writing score in language features. It shows that rural freshmen's score is generally in the average category with a score of 67. It means that their performances in language features are considered average to good. In detail, their lowest score is 20 (inadequate) and the highest score is 100 (Excellent). Likewise, urban freshmen's score in language features is generally in the average category with score is 68 and can be interpreted that their performances in language features are also considered average to good. Their lowest score is 23 (Inadequate) and their highest score is 98 (Excellent). Generally, the writing performance of rural freshmen in language features is at the same level as that of urban freshmen is which is in the average category. Both of their lowest scores are also in the same level which are in the inadequate category. In line with it, the highest score of rural freshmen (Excellent) is in the same category as that of urban freshmen is (Excellent). In language features aspect, both rural and urban freshmen's performances are considered average to good. It means there are few grammatical or signal words inaccuracies of comparison signals, contrast signals, S-V agreement in these students' paragraph.

Table 8. Rural and urban freshmen's writing score in language features

	N	Sum	Mean	Min	Max
Rural	64	4285	67	20	100
Urban	64	4368	68	23	98

RQ2: What are the differences on writing performance between rural and urban freshmen in terms of content, organization, and language features?

Differences in content aspect

Figure 2 shows rural and urban freshmen's writing score in content aspects. Among 64 rural freshmen, the majority of them obtained very good scores. There were 15 (23.44%) of them who have been demonstrating that their ability in expanding the content has achieved two levels above average. Furthermore, 11 (17.19) freshmen attained excellent scores, illustrating that they accomplish a qualification in expanding and writing clear sentences. However, there were 9 (14.06%) freshmen who scored poorly which explained that their ability in enlightening the content needs to be improved. On the other hand, urban freshmen's writing competency in the content aspect is more diverse. Among 64 freshmen, the majority, 18 (28.13%) of them achieved good scores which demonstrates that their ability in expanding the writing content has achieved the minimum completeness criteria. Moreover, the second place was attained by excellence in which 12 (18.75%) of the freshmen gained the scores. This implies that the freshmen have understood how to enrich the text. Nevertheless, 2 (3.13%) freshmen acquire inadequate scores which delineate their low ability in augmenting the sentences.

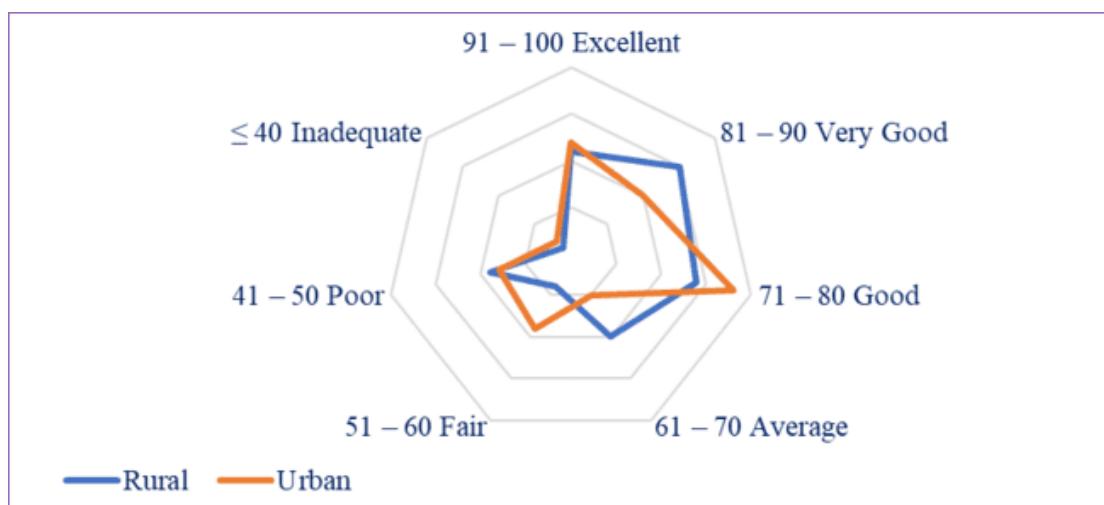


Figure 2. Distribution of rural and urban freshmen's writing score category in content aspect

Figure 3 reveals that 26 (40.63%) rural freshmen whereas 27 (42.19%) urban freshmen are considered good to excellent in aspect of content. It means these freshmen are able to write a topic sentence in complete and clear sentences as shown in Figure 4. They are also able to write details of similarities and differences that are appropriate, accurate and specific to the topic. Furthermore, to get a better notion on other categories, several students' writing documents are presented as samples in Figure 5-7.

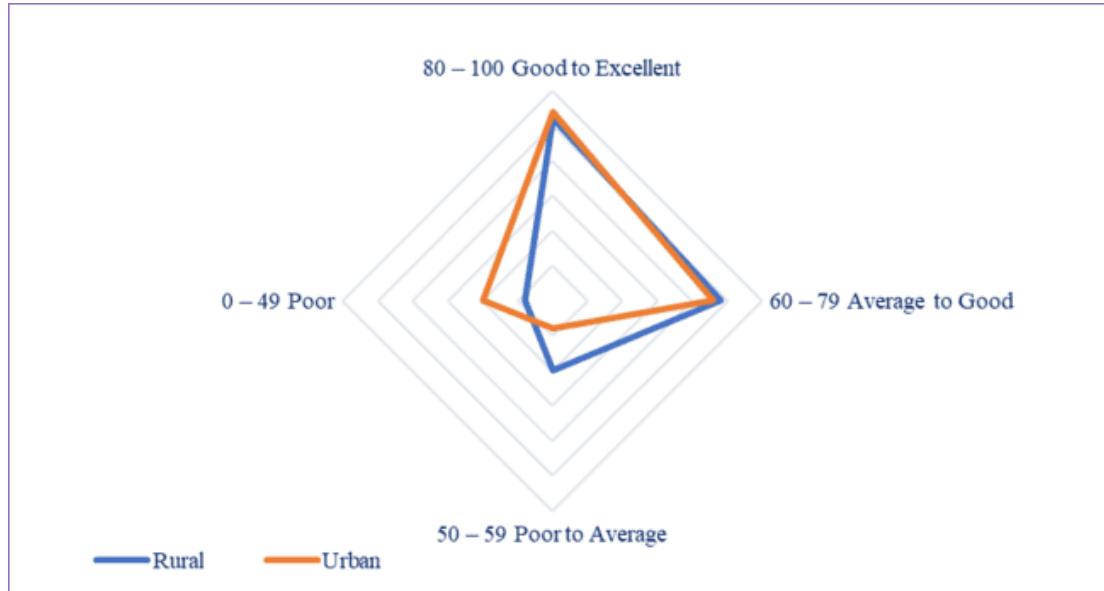


Figure 3. Distribution of rural and urban freshmen's writing score interpretation in content aspect

PW (Rural)	: Topic	"There are two types of watermelons, red watermelon and yellow watermelon. <u>These two fruits have many differences and similarities.</u> "
	Details	Similarities: "The similarities start from nutritional content, size, taste, and skin color of the fruit. The nutritional content of these two fruits is the same, ..." Differences: "...but the content of vitamin A in red watermelon is higher than yellow watermelon. Because of red watermelon is higher in Antioxidant Beta-carotene which have vitamin A."
		Similarities: "The taste of these two watermelons equally same, ..." Differences: "...but yellow watermelon is sweeter than red watermelon because of high sugar content."
		Differences: "Although there are many similarities of these two fruits. The main different is the color of flesh in the fruit. Red watermelons have a bright red color while the yellow watermelons have a bright yellow color. The texture inside is also different. The yellow watermelons are denser and somewhat softer, though still crunchy. While the red watermelon is less dense, more crunchy, slightly stringy with short strands of flesh that sometimes get caught between the teeth. there are many similarities and differences of these two watermelons, which one want you to choose, sweeter or higher of nutritional content."
HN (Urban)	: Topic	"There are so many kinds of mushrooms, like enokitake and champignon mushroom. <u>The two kinds of mushroom have similarities in color, texture, and taste.</u> "
	Details	Similarities: "the color of both mushroom is white. The texture also the same its soft and crunchy at the same time. The taste of both mushrooms is sweet."
		Differences: "they also have couple of differences like the size of the mushrooms, shape, originality, and the benefit after consuming both of the mushrooms. Enoki mushrooms are very smaller in term of size than champignon mushrooms that are bigger. Champignon mushrooms is shaped like a rock on the other hand enoki are long, and thin. Enoki mushroom is from Japan. Meanwhile champignon mushrooms is from France. And the benefit after consuming enoki in maintaining heart health. For champignon the benefit after consuming is to make digestive system healthy."

Figure 4. Good to excellent contents aspect

There are 24 (37.50%) rural freshmen and 23 (35.94%) urban freshmen are considered having average to good performance in aspect of content. As shown by Figure 5, they are fairly able to write a topic sentence in complete and clear sentences. The details of similarities and differences are clear but almost appropriate to the topic.

PA (Rural)	: Topic	<i>"There are many types land. Including Clay and Farmland. <u>The two of land have many differences between them.</u>"</i>
	Details	Differences: "The first differences is texture, texture of clay is denser and texture farmland not denser. The second difference is color. Farmland have color light brown, and clay have many color like white, grey, yellow and etc. Then Origin, clay on the rock and farmland on the field. Last but not least differences is function. Farmland is for field (rice) and Clay is for making various crafts like a glass, jar, ceramic and etc. Similarities: "However, they have some similarity is contains water. Clay and Farmland same contain waters. So basically Clay and Farmland have the same important use."
RIS (Urban)	: Topic	<i>"There are several milk such as cow's milk and soy milk. <u>They have some similarity in ingredients, consumption, and benefit.</u>"</i>
	Details	Similarities: "They can be consume everyday. In addition, cow's milk and soy milk can help lower the risk of heart problem. The energy in this two milk, comes from of contains protein, carbohydrates, and fats." Differences: "However, cow's milk has a higher calorie contain than soy milk. For the color, cow's milk is whiter than soy milk which is slightly browned. Cow's milk come from glands of cow, whereas soy milk come from soybeans. Despite all of those differences, cow's milk and soy milk are good for our health, and the important is don't consume the milks with over."

Figure 5. Average to good content aspect

In addition, there are 10 (15.63%) rural freshmen and 4 (6.25%) urban freshmen who are considered having poor to average performance in aspect of content. Referring to Figure 6, when they were writing a topic sentence, it was not complete and clear. They wrote details of similarities and differences but they were not clear and specific to the topic.

RAF (Rural)	: Topic	<i>"All creatures in this world have twin. Including cat and tiger."</i>
	Details	Similarities: "They are carnivora. That's mean They need to eat meat to keep survive. They are mammal, have similar genetic, love height place and they really hate water." Differences: "However, even if they have similarity, They're also have many different. like tiger has more bigger in the size than cat. Tiger is wild Animal. Meanwhile, cat is tame Animal. Tiger is really Aggressive than cat. Cat is more obedient that's why there are so many people choose a cat as pet. Despite all of similar and different that we see, we all know that both of them have interesting side that others don't and that's thing will make it special"
RDP (Urban)	: Topic	<i>Earth and mars are planets in our solar system.</i>
	Details	Similarities: "Earth and mars is almost have the same characteristic. one day in mars is 24 hour 37 minute its almost the same with the earth." Differences: "the earth have satelit we call it the moon, and the mars have two satelits the fobos and deimos. the mars gravity is 68% lower than earth. The can inhabited by living things and the mars cannot in habited by living things. The mars temperature is lower than earth. We called earth the blue planet and mars red planet, 75% of earth is water but mars doesn't have water. The earth population is more than 7 Billion people, the mars doesn't have population."Similarities: "Mars and earth are close to the sun. so."

Figure 6. Poor to average content aspect

There are 10 (15.63%) urban freshmen considered having poor performance in aspect of content. Their writing in topic sentences is ambiguous whether the topic sentence is not introducing the topic or the topic sentence is not complete and clear as granted by Figure 7. The details of similarities and differences are also inappropriate and inaccurate to the subject.

VAH (Urban)	: Topic	<i>"Although known as Source of Protein, the content of soy milk protein is much less than cow's milk."</i>
	Details	<p>Similarities: -</p> <p>Differences: "According to one source, the protein content of milk soy is 6.37 grams, much less than milk beef with up to 8.20 grams of protein. Besides that part of the nutritional content of. Soy milk is still more a little bit of cow's milk. For example, calorie content, the calorie content of soy milk is 79 calories, while cow's milk is 150 calories. Even so, milk soy bean turns out to have fiber that is owned by human's cow's milk. the fiber content of soy milk is 3.18 grams."</p>

Figure 7. Poor content aspect

Differences in organization aspect

Figure 8 reveals rural and urban freshmen's writing score in the organization aspect. It is uncovered that each of the areas obtained 7 (10.94%) freshmen performed excellently. These freshmen's writing results almost scored perfect with some minor mistakes. However, the majority, 16 (25%) rural freshmen scored good which illustrate that their ability in organizing their writing is above the standard. Differently, 16 (25%) freshmen, which are the majority of urban freshmen, scored very good. It is indicated that their understanding in organizing aspects is above good. Furthermore, 6 (9.38%) rural and 6 (9.38%) urban freshmen attained fair scores. It implies that their ability in organizing the text needs to be improved. Moreover, the same number of 6 (9.38%) freshmen from both areas gained inadequate scores. This demonstrates that there are many things that should be mastered by them.



Figure 8. Distribution of rural and urban freshmen's writing score category in organization aspect

As performed by Figure 9, the result found that 22 (34.38%) rural freshmen whereas 23 (35.94%) urban students are considered having good to excellent performance in aspects of organization. It means that they are able to break the information of similarities and differences into block or point-by-point structure and follow a consistent order when discussing the comparison and contrast as revealed by Figure 10. Regarding other categories, several students' writing documents are

presented as samples in Figure 11-12. As a note, there is no sample of poor to average category since no one in both groups are considered there.



Figure 9. Distribution of rural and urban freshmen's writing score interpretation in organization aspect

FR (Rural)	: Topic	<i>One of God's creations that has big impact on earth is humans. Every human being was created different in so many aspects, as well as my father and mother.</i>
	Block point organization	Similarities <i>For example, they have different ways of responding me telling them things that I did. My father would listen to me first, then respond, while my mother would make a face even before I finished my sentence. Another difference that noticeable is the way they show their love. My father tends to show it with actions only, while my mother shows it with both actions and words.</i>
	Differences	<i>They are different in many ways, however they complement each other with all the differences and similarities. In similarity, they have the same rules on build the disciplines in family. They taught me how to take responsibility. They both also love to travel, our family go out of town at least twice in year. Both of them also are a clean and diligent person, they work hard and they are people that I look up to. After all differences and similarities, they complete each other very well, they love their children in a perfect way.</i>
HN (Urban)	: Topic	<i>There are so many kind of mushrooms, like enokitake and champignon mushroom. The two kind of mushroom have similarities in colour, texture, and taste.</i>
	Block point organization	Similarities <i>The colour of both mushroom is white. The texture also the same its soft and crunchy at the same time. The taste of both mushrooms is sweet.</i>
	Differences	<i>they also have couple of differences like the size of the mushrooms, shape, originality, and the benefit after consuming both of the mushrooms. Enoki mushrooms are very smaller in term of size than champignon mushrooms that are bigger. Champignon mushrooms is shaped like a rock on the other hand enoki are long, and thin. Enoki mushroom is from Japan. Meanwhile champignon mushroom is from France. And the benefit after consuming enoki in maintaining heart health. For champignon the benefit after consuming is to make digestive system healthy.</i>

Figure 10. Good to excellent organization aspect

In addition, there are 30 (46.88%) rural freshmen and 29 (45.31%) urban freshmen who are considered having average to good performance in terms of organization. Figure 11 shows that they are able to break the information of similarities and differences into block or point-by-point structure but do not follow a consistent order when discussing the comparison and contrast.

AS (Urban)	: Topic	<i>Did you know that frog and toad is very different? let me tell you about them. Both frog and toad have things in common.</i>
	Similarities	<i>The both similarities are amphibians animals. They also have the same hibernation and mating season, ...</i>
	Differences	<i>... although physically they both look quite same. However they are actually a lot of differences between frog and toad. the toads are rough and big and frogs are smooth and slim. How about their legs, the toad's legs is short when jumping the toad isn't too far away. Unlike the frog have longer legs so they can jump further.</i>
SM (Rural)	Similarities	<i>In conclusion although both have many things and similarities. they are unique creatures of good and have benefits for human health, one of them are treating impotence in men and over coming heart damage.</i>
	: Topic	<i>There are two types of vegetables, namely kale and spinach. They have some similarities in color, stem condition, and content.</i>
	Similarities	<i>In terms of color, kale and spinach are both green. In terms from stem condition kale and spinach are both have wet stems and in terms from content kale and spinach are both contain vitamin c.</i>
Block point organization	Differences	<i>However, they are have some of the difference, namely leaf shape, terms of shape, size, and fiber content. If look from In term leaf shape kale has fibrous roots than spinach has tap roots. In term of the size kale is bigger than spinach. And if look in term fiber content kale has less in spinach.</i>
	Similarities	<i>So, even some have differences kale and spinach good for our health.</i>

Figure 11. Average to good organization aspect

Moreover, there are 6 (9.38%) rural freshmen and 6 urban freshmen (9.38%) are considered to have poor performance in aspects of organization. It was found when they were not able to organize the comparison and contrast properly as depicted by Figure 12. Many details of similarities and differences were not in a logical or expected order and there was little sense that the writing was organized.

ICND (Rural)	: Topic	<i>The similarities between seawater and freshwater show them a same of form.</i>
	Differences	<i>By comparing seawater and freshwater they have different flavour, taste and also the mineral content of water.</i>
	Similarities	<i>Seawater and freshwater are alike in several ways. Seawater and freshwater are alike in several ways. Because them a kind of liquid form and also a ecosystem for aquatic living things.</i>
Block point organization	Differences	<i>Both seawater and freshwater are important because water and freshwater are important because water is substance that our bodies urgently needs.</i>
	Similarities	<i>Although seawater and freshwater are very different, ...</i>
		<i>...their similarities are very useful for the continuity of living things in the earth and also for laboratory research.</i>
RDP (Urban)	: Topic	<i>Earth and mars are planets in our solar system.</i>
	Similarities	<i>Earth and mars is almost have the same characteristic. one day in mars is 24 hour 37 minute its almost the same with the earth.</i>
	Differences	<i>the earth have satellite we call it the moon, and the mars have two satellites the phobos and deimos. the mars gravity is 68% lower than earth. The can inhabited by living things and the mars cannot be inhabited by living things. The mars temperature is lower than earth. We called earth the blue planet and mars red planet. 75% of earth is water but mars doesn't have water. The earth population is more than 7 Billion people, the mars doesn't have population.</i>
Block point organization	Similarities	<i>Mars and earth are close to the sun.</i>

Figure 12. Poor organization aspect

Differences in language features aspect

Figure 13 presents the distribution of rural and urban freshmen's writing scores in language features. The majority of urban freshmen, 27 (42.19%) freshmen, gained good scores while rural freshmen attained 17 (26.56%) freshmen. This gap shows that most urban freshmen are good at conditioning the language features of the text compared to rural freshmen. Additionally, 6 (9.38%) urban freshmen gained excellent scores while 5 (7.81%) rural freshmen gained so. This result indicates that urban freshmen understand the language features more than rural freshmen. Furthermore,

inadequate scores were detected from both sides. Urban freshmen captured 5 (7.81%) of them whereas 9 (14.06%) rural freshmen scored so. This score indicated that those freshmen need to understand more about language features.

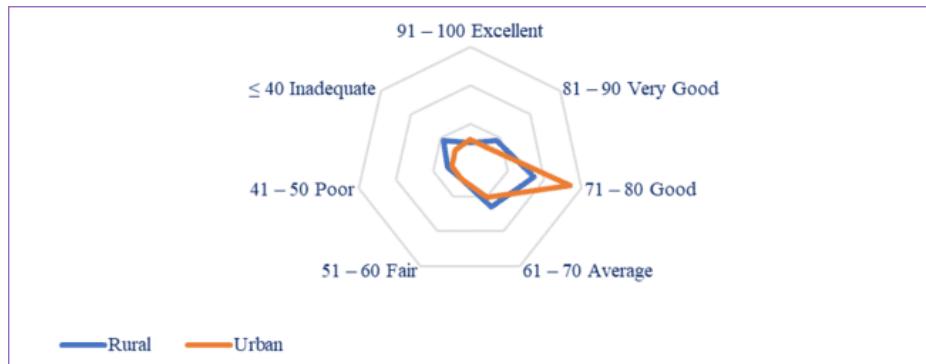


Figure 13. Distribution of rural and urban freshmen's writing score category in language features

Moreover, Figure 14 interprets the writing performance of rural and urban freshmen in terms of language features. It is found that 14 (21.88%) rural freshmen and 13 (20.31%) urban freshmen are considered having good to excellent in writing comparison and contrast signal words and subject-verb agreement. It found very few grammatical or signal words inaccuracies as simplified by Figure 15. Moreover, several students' writing documents are presented as samples in Figure 16-18 to gain deeper appearance in other categories.



Figure 14. Distribution of Rural and Urban Freshmen's Writing Score Interpretation in Language Features

WDJD: (Rural)	1. <i>Shrimp has a curved body shape, while lobster doesn't. (wrong)</i> <i>Shrimp has a curved body shape, but lobster doesn't. (correct)</i> 2. <i>Shrimp shells is softer than tough lobster shells. (wrong)</i> <i>Shrimp shells are soft, while lobster shells are tough. (correct)</i>
FAR: (Urban)	1. <i>Not only human have to maintain their live but animal, too.</i> <i>(wrong)</i> <i>Not only humans but also animals have to maintain their lives.</i> <i>(correct)</i> 2. <i>Many animal is a social creature so they can't live alone just like human. (wrong)</i> <i>Many animals are social creatures, so they can't live alone just like humans. (correct)</i> 3. <i>Humans often called as Homo Sapiens. (wrong)</i> <i>Humans are often called as Homo Sapiens. (correct)</i>

Figure 15. Good to excellent language features aspect

There are 33 (51.56%) rural freshmen and 36 (56.25%) urban freshmen who are considered having average to good performance in writing comparison and contrast signal words and subject-verb agreement. It means that there are few grammatical or signal word inaccuracies in these freshmen's paragraph as exemplified by Figure 16.

SM: (Rural)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>In terms from stem condition kale and spinach are both have wet stems. (wrong)</i> <i>In (terms of) stem condition, both kale and spinach have wet stems. (correct)</i> 2. <i>In terms from content kale and spinach are both contain vitamin C. (wrong)</i> <i>In (terms of) content, both kale and spinach contain vitamin C. (correct)</i> 3. <i>If look from in term leaf shape kale has an elongated than spinach has a round leaf shape. (wrong)</i> <i>In the leaf shape, kale has an elongated leaf shape while spinach has a round leaf shape. (correct)</i> 4. <i>In term of shape kale has fibrous roots than spinach has tap roots. (wrong)</i> <i>In roots shape, kale has fibrous roots while spinach has tap roots. (correct)</i>
AS: (Urban)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Did you know that frog and toad is very different? (wrong)</i> <i>Did you know that frog and toad are very different? (correct)</i> <i>The toads are tough and big and frogs are smooth and slim. (wrong)</i> <i>The toads are tough while the frogs are smooth and slim. (correct)</i> 2. <i>The toad's legs is short when jumping the toad isn't too far away, unlike the frog have longer legs so they can jump further. (wrong)</i> <i>The toad's legs are short, so when jumping, they aren't too far away. In contrast, the frogs have longer legs, so they can jump further. (correct)</i>

Figure 16. Average to good language features aspect

Furthermore, 7 (10.94%) rural freshmen and 5 (7.81%) urban freshmen are considered having poor to average performance in writing comparison and contrast signal words and subject-verb agreement. Figure 17 reveals that there are numerous grammatical or signal words inaccuracies.

RAI: (Rural)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The texture is the same as soft.</i> <i>Their texture is the same as soft.</i> <i>OR</i> <i>The texture of petruk durian and weasel king durian is the same as soft.</i> 2. <i>But they have differences.</i> <i>However, they have differences.</i> 3. <i>Petruk durian taste slightly more bitter weasel king.</i> <i>Petruk durian tastes slightly more bitter than weasel king durian.</i> 4. <i>King durian is bigger petruk durian.</i> <i>Weasel king durian is bigger than Petruk durian.</i> 5. <i>Weasel king durian comes from malaysia, petruk durian comes from java.</i> <i>Weasel king durian comes from Malaysia while Petruk durian comes from Java.</i> 6. <i>Weasel king durian more expensive than petruk durian because weasel king durian has a fragrant aroma and is more delicious.</i> <i>Weasel king durian is more expensive than Petruk durian because weasel king during is more fragrant and delicious than Petruk durian.</i>
GA: (Urban)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>There are some types of Elephant in the world, such an Sumatera Elephant and African Elephant.</i> <i>There are some types of elephant in the world, such as Sumatera elephant and African elephant.</i> 2. <i>There are similarity of sumatera elephant and African Elephant, like a body, trunk and tusks.</i> <i>There are similarities between Sumatera elephant and African elephant, such as the body, trunk and tusks.</i> 3. <i>Sumatera Elephant have similarity body with African Elephant.</i> <i>Sumatera elephant has a similar body with African elephant.</i> 4. <i>And Sumatera Elephant also having a tusks like a African Elephant.</i> <i>In addition, Sumatera elephant has a task like African elephant.</i> 5. <i>There are also have some differences between Sumatera Elephant and African Elephant. Such as breed, original.</i> <i>There are also some differences between Sumatera elephant and Africa elephant, such as the breed and the origin.</i>

Figure 17. Poor to average language features aspect

However, there are 10 (15.63%) rural freshmen and 10 (15.63%) urban freshmen who are considered poor in writing comparison and contrast signal words and subject-verb agreement. There were found frequent grammatical or signal words inaccuracies in their paragraphs as presented by Figure 18.

NH: (Rural)	1. <i>They are two types of poultry, there are Duck and Goose.</i> <i>There are two types of poultry, they are duck and goose.</i> <i>Duck and Goose have some of similarity, include their Type,</i> 2. <i>Breeding process and Ability.</i> <i>Duck and goose have some similarities, including their type, breed process and abilities.</i> 3. <i>The kinds of type Duck and Goose are same They are a poultry categorized.</i> <i>The type of duck and goose are the same. They are poultry categorized.</i>
MNR: (Urban)	1. <i>There are two kind of Reptiles, there is Alligator and crocodile</i> <i>There are two kinds of Reptile, they are alligator and crocodile</i> 2. <i>They have some similarity. The Reptile...</i> <i>They have some similarities. Both of them are reptiles.</i> 3. <i>...and they have same habitat and same food diet...</i> <i>Then, both have the same habitat and the same diets.</i> 3. <i>...and this kind of reptiles are old species.</i> <i>These reptiles are also categorized as old species.</i>

Figure 18. Poor language features aspect

Table 8. List of Comparison and Contrast Signals used by Rural and Urban Freshmen

Comparison			Contrast		
Signals	R	U	Signals	R	U
just (like)	3	3	But	16	27
not only...but also	3	3	Although	5	18
the same (as)	21	31	Unlike	4	3
As	6	10	However	32	19
similar (to)	14	7	While	25	22
both and	12	4	Eventhough	3	4
and (too)	-	5	different from	3	4
Too	7	6	on the other hand	4	7
Equally	5	8	Whereas	3	5
Also	19	17	Meanwhile	3	5
			in contrast	4	3

Table 8 lists comparison and contrast signals which are mostly used by rural freshmen in writing were ‘the same (as)’ and ‘also’. Likewise, comparison signals that are mostly used by urban freshmen are ‘the same (as)’ and ‘also’. Meanwhile, contrast signals that are mostly used by rural freshmen are ‘however’ and ‘while’. However, contrast signals that are mostly used by urban freshmen are ‘but’ and ‘although’.

Significance Test of Differences

Before coming to the significance test of rural and urban freshmen’s differences in writing performance in terms of overall, content, organization, and language features, the data were firstly tested for the normality and homogeneity to decide whether parametric or non-parametric statistical method should be used. Since the research sample is more than 50, the normality test was conducted by using Kolmogorov

Smirnov with $\alpha = 0.05$, and the homogeneity was tested by applying Levene's formula. The results of both tests are presented by Table 9.

Table 9 shows the p-values of overall and content aspect are higher than 0.05, indicating that the data distributions are normal. Additionally, their Sig. value resulted from homogeneity test are also both higher than 0.05, indicating that the variables' variances are homogenous. Therefore, the data of both overall and content were proceeded through parametric analysis to test their significant difference by employing Independent T-test formula. Conversely, the p-values of organization and language features aspect are lower than 0.05, indicating that the data are not normally distributed. However, their homogeneity tests result the Sig. value higher than 0.05, indicating that the variables' variances are homogeneous. Hence, the significance for both organization and language features aspect were statistically tested by using non-parametric test, Mann Whitney U test. The generated hypotheses of those tests are reported by Table 10.

Table 9. Normality and Homogeneity test result

School	Normality			Homogeneity	
	Statistic	df	Sig.	F	Sig.
Aspect					
Overall					
Rural	.104	64	.085		
Urban	.090	64	.200	.199	.657
Content					
Rural	.127	64	.012	.765	.384
Urban	.119	64	.024		
Organization					
Rural	.160	64	<.001	.274	.601
Urban	.156	64	<.001		
Language Features					
Rural	.168	64	<.001	.154	.696
Urban	.212	64	<.001		

Table 10. Tested hypotheses

H	Overall Writing Performance	Content Aspect	Organization Aspect	Language Feature Aspect
H ₀	There is no significant difference on rural and urban freshmen's overall writing performance	There is no significant difference on rural and urban freshmen's writing performance in content aspect	There is no significant difference on rural and urban freshmen's writing performance in organization aspect	There is no significant difference on rural and urban freshmen's writing performance in language feature aspect
H ₁	There is a significant difference on rural and urban freshmen's overall writing	There is a significant difference on rural and urban freshmen's writing	There is a significant difference on rural and urban freshmen's writing performance in writing	There is a significant difference on rural and urban freshmen's writing performance in language feature aspect

performance content aspect	performance in organization aspect	performance in language feature aspect
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To decide whether the null hypothesis was rejected or not, the following indicators were used:

- If $\text{sig}/\text{P-value} < \alpha (0.05)$, H_0 is rejected/ H_1 is accepted
- If $\text{sig}/\text{P-value} > \alpha (0.05)$, H_0 is accepted/ H_1 is rejected

Referring to Table 11 below, the result of Independent T-test analysis on rural and urban freshmen's writing scores on overall writing, content, organization, and language feature aspect mean score meet the $\text{sig}/\text{p-value} > \alpha = 0.05$. It can be concluded that the null hypothesis (H_0) is accepted and the alternative hypotheses (H_1) is rejected. It indicates that there is no significant difference on those aspects of writing performance between rural and urban freshmen.

Table 11. Significance test result

Aspect	Overall	Content	Organization	Language Feature
Test Formula	Independent T-test		Mann Whitney U test	
Sig. (2-tailed)	.657	.384	.261	.463
H_0	Accepted	accepted	Accepted	Accepted
H_1	Rejected	rejected	Rejected	Rejected

Discussion

The findings of this study generally disclosure that writing performance between rural and urban freshmen are different (Bachore, 2022; Ismail et al., 2020). In overall writing score, both rural and urban freshmen are interpreted as having average to good writing performance. Yet, they got different mean which led them to be categorized differently, where rural freshmen's scores were considered good, and those of urban freshmen were considered average. It comes to the conclusion that rural freshmen generally perform better than urban freshmen in writing. Meanwhile, looking at the details of the aspects, it can be seen that in writing content, both rural and urban freshmen's scores were categorized good and thus, they are interpreted as having average to good performance, particularly are fairly able to write a topic sentence in complete and clear sentence. Whereas, their score means were actually 3 points different, leading to the conclusion that the content written by rural freshmen is considered slightly better than those of urban freshmen. Moreover, in line with the result in overall writing, rural freshmen's mean in organization aspect was one level ahead from that of urban freshmen, resulting in rural freshmen obtained good scores while urban freshmen obtained average scores. However, their performances are same interpreted as average to good. Yet, the conclusion shows that rural freshmen are better at breaking the information of similarities and differences into block or point-by-point structure but still in inconsistent order when discussing the comparison and contrast than urban freshmen are.

Regarding their performances in using language features, both rural and urban freshmen's means were categorized average, meaning that they have average to good performance. Looking at the exact mean, yet, urban freshmen got 1 point higher than rural freshmen did. However, their writing had numerous grammatical errors,

especially in subject-verb agreement, and signal word inaccuracy use. The findings are in line with what (Lesmanpraa & Ariffin, 2020) stated that students' common issues in writing performance are lexical choice and sentence structure. It also supports the research findings which reveal that sentence level problem especially subject-verb agreement (Alkhudiry, 2020) is as the students' writing problem. In addition, omission (Kumala et al., 2018; Manik & Arie Suwastini, 2020; Tiarina, 2017; Yusuf et al., 2021), particularly in verb use (Alghazo & Alshraideh, 2020; Fitrawati & Safitri, 2021; Ramendra, 2021) is the most common errors committed by students. The grammatical errors can be occurred for some reasons, including overgeneralization and rule ignorance (Prasetyo et al., 2022), insufficient grammatical knowledge (Fitrawati & Safitri, 2021), and mother tongue interference (Puspita, 2019; Tiarina, 2017). Therefore, grammatical cohesive devices should be taught explicitly, as well as in association with writing skill, to develop grammatical cohesive devices awareness, as well as to improve writing performance.

Moreover, the differences found in rural and urban freshmen writing were also explored by their performance in using comparison and contrast signals. There were 9 comparison signals used by rural freshmen and 10 signals used by urban freshmen. The same (as), and also were used frequently by both rural and urban freshmen. In using contrast signals, both rural and urban students employed 11 signals. However, and while were commonly used by rural students while but and although were frequently appeared in urban freshmen's writing.

Even though many differences were revealed from this study, in fact, the results of Independent T-test analyses show that those differences are statistically insignificant. This result confirms what (Bachore, 2022) found in his research in which there is no significant difference between writing performance of rural and urban students. However, it contradicts with research findings pointed out by Ismail et al., (2020) which reveal that the differences between rural and urban students' writing performance are statistically significant where urban students outperform. Another study also found that urban students lead the achievement academically (Fu & Hashim, 2024) However, referring to the mean differences, this study discloses that rural students generally performed better in writing. It reflects the finding by (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008) that rural students have better grades than urban students in college level. Likewise, rural areas are often close-knit, which may indicate that educators have stronger connections with students and their families, leading to a greater comprehension of their distinctive educational requirements (Starrett et al., 2021). Therefore, and perhaps, students in rural areas help teachers to understand the individual needs even though there is limited sufficient technology or facility to help the teacher conduct the lesson.

Furthermore, the ministry of education of Indonesia has held programs, i.e., SM-3T (Undergraduate Educate in Frontier, Outermost, and Disadvantaged area) and Campus Teaching (Kampus Mengajar) which aim at strengthening literacy, numeracy, and technology learning of rural schools, especially in disadvantaged, outermost, and frontier regions, and low accredited primary schools, as well as overcoming the shortage of teachers in those aforementioned regions (Febriana et al., 2018). These programs are greatly possible to improve the learning quality and outcomes of rural schools to be in line with those of urban schools. Another aspect comes from parents, in which rural students' parents, who mostly work in agricultural activities or are engaged in part-time work, are able to spend more time helping their children to study than urban students' parents, who tend to work full time. The more time parents spend with their children, the higher achievement will attain (Li & Guo, 2023). Regarding

those reasons, consequently, there is no gap in academic performance between rural and urban school graduates in college courses.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this comparative study found that rural freshmen generally demonstrated better overall writing performance than urban freshmen. However, the statistical analysis revealed that there was no significant difference in overall writing, content, organization, or language features between the rural and urban freshmen. This finding supports the notion of equality and inclusivity in the academic environment and aligns with previous research suggesting an insignificant difference in performance between these groups. The most critical common issue identified for both groups was the frequent and inaccurate use of grammatical features, particularly in subject-verb agreement and signal word usage. Therefore, it is strongly suggested that paragraph writing and grammar instruction should be aligned, potentially through integrated materials and assessment, to build grammatical awareness and improve writing performance. However, this study remains its primary limitation on its narrow scope, as the findings are based on a single, short-form writing instrument (comparison and contrast paragraph) which may not fully capture the students' complete writing abilities across different genres and contexts, participants, and data amount. Future research is thus advised to expand the scope of inquiry with extensive participants and data, and the use of multiple instruments and genres for data collection to achieve a deeper understanding of freshmen writing performances and to explicitly investigate any existing gap or discrimination based on school origins, thereby supporting the aims of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 and Education for All (EFA).

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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