



## Investigation of Writing Skills of Secondary School 6th Grade Students in Terms of Various Variables

### Ortaokul 6. Sınıf Öğrencilerinin Yazma Becerilerinin Çeşitli Değişkenler Açısından İncelenmesi

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**ABSTRACT:** Communication is a skill that people have used since ancient times. Although communication differs in terms of its features in the process, it can be basically defined as the ability to understand and explain. The concept of "writing" has a special place in the skill of telling. Because the development of civilizations has generally been thanks to written culture. Knowledge and culture have been transferred to future generations through writings and have preserved their importance until today. The aim of this study is to examine the 6th grade students' ability to express their feelings, thoughts, dreams and impressions in writing, considering the importance of writing skills, in terms of various variables. In this direction, the case study design, one of the qualitative research methods, was preferred in the study. The research group of the study consists of 75 students at the 6th grade level in a state secondary school located in the southeast of Turkey and 5 Turkish teachers working in the same institution. In the data collection process of the study, firstly, a text with a free theme was written to the students. The data obtained from these texts were analyzed with the writing skill level determination rubric prepared by Bahşi (2018). In addition, student writings were evaluated in accordance with the scoring directive by using the attitude scale developed by Can and Ünal (2017) to determine the students' attitudes towards writing. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Turkish teachers. In these interviews, teachers' opinions were taken on the variables that affect the students' writing skill levels. When the findings obtained from the study were interpreted, it was seen that the students' writing skill levels were not sufficient, but their attitudes towards writing were positive. In addition, this situation was affected by teacher, student, program and environment variables as a whole. However, it is seen that the environment variable negatively affects the level of writing skill in a dominant way.

**Keywords:** Basic language skills, secondary school, writing skills, Turkish teaching

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**ÖZ:** İletişim, insanların eski çağlardan beri kullandıkları bir beceridir. İletişim, süreç içerisinde özellikleri açısından farklılıklar göstermekle birlikte esasen anlama ve anlatma becerisi şeklinde tanımlanabilir. Anlatma becerisinin içerisinde “yazma” kavramının yeri ayrıdır. Çünkü medeniyetlerin gelişimi genelde yazılı kültür sayesinde olmuştur. Bilgi ve kültür, yazılarla gelecek kuşaklara aktarılmış ve önemini günümüze kadar korumuştur. Bu çalışmanın amacı yazma becerisinin önemini dikkate alarak ortaokul 6. sınıf öğrencilerinin duygu, düşünce, hayal ve izlenimlerini yazılı olarak ifade edebilme durumlarını farklı değişkenlere bağlı olarak incelemektir. Bu doğrultuda çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden durum çalışması deseni tercih edilmiştir. Çalışmanın araştırma grubu Türkiye'nin güneydoğusunda bir devlet ortaokulundaki 6. sınıf seviyesinde 75 öğrenci ile aynı kurumda görev yapan 5 Türkçe öğretmeninden oluşmaktadır. Çalışmanın veri toplama sürecinde ilk olarak öğrencilere serbest konulu birer metin yazdırılmıştır. Bu metinlerden elde edilen veriler Bahşi (2018) tarafından hazırlanan yazma becerisi düzey belirleme rubriği ile analiz edilmiştir. Ayrıca öğrenci yazıları, öğrencilerin yazmaya yönelik tutumlarını belirlemek için Can ve Ünal'ın (2017) geliştirdiği tutum ölçeği kullanılarak öğrenci yazıları puanlama yönergesi doğrultusunda değerlendirilmiş ve ardından Türkçe öğretmenleriyle yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu görüşmelerde öğrencilerin yazma becerisi düzeyleri üzerinde etkili olan değişkenlere yönelik öğretmen görüşleri alınmıştır. Çalışmadan elde edilen bulgular yorumlandığında öğrencilerin yazma becerisi düzeylerinin yeterli olmadığı ancak yazmaya yönelik tutumlarının olumlu olduğu; bu durumu öğretmen, öğrenci, program ve çevre değişkenlerinin bir bütün olarak etkilediği görülmüştür. Ancak çevre değişkeninin baskın bir şekilde yazma becerisi düzeyini olumsuz etkilediği görülmektedir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Temel dil becerileri, ortaokul, yazma becerisi, Türkçe eğitimi

## 1.INTRODUCTION

The globalizing world has brought all societies closer to each other. Therefore, the communication network, which used to be narrower in scope, has now spread all over the world. Communication skills are included in the Turkish language teaching program and are also addressed within the scope of the Turkish Qualifications Framework. The concept of communication, which is one of the eight key competencies here, refers to individuals being able to explain themselves and understand the other person (MEB, 2019). Language, which is the basic element of communication, is not only for the purpose of transferring information but is also based on the mutual transmission of values, cultures, emotions, and many other issues. In this respect, communication has an important place in social and daily life (Ural, 2003). Therefore, communication skill is a versatile skill that is intertwined with life.

The place of communication skills, which are evaluated as versatile, in education is important. Because communication is a comprehensive skill, its teaching at school becomes important. Considering that education is basically a cultural transfer, it can be seen that cultural transfer can be achieved through communication. Additionally, communication skills are developed through schools. In other words, education and communication mutually affect each other (Çocuk and Soysal, 2021). Developing communication skills in schools is done within the scope of Turkish lessons. Communication in Turkish lessons is handled from two perspectives. Communication, which is considered in terms of understanding and expression, is tried to be improved with various methods and techniques. Listening and reading are in the comprehension dimension of communication while speaking and writing are in the expression dimension (Akyol, 2014). The order in which basic language skills are learned is listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The first two occur spontaneously without any force, but reading and writing mostly occur through formal education. Writing is an endeavor that requires more effort and exercise than reading (Yavuz, 2010). For this reason, it is necessary to focus more on writing skills, which is a comprehensive skill.

Knowing what writing skill is makes it easier to understand its characteristics. Various definitions are made regarding writing skills. However, some of these definitions are basic and summary definitions. Writing skill is built on the transmission of feelings, thoughts, and opinions through letters (Goldstein, 2013). Among all language skills, "writing" can be called the skill at the highest level in terms of learning because its acquisition and use are more difficult and later than others. Writing is a product that does not emerge spontaneously, that is, it is created within a certain plan such as design, development, and editing (Berninger and Winn, 2006). This difficulty feature of the writing skill also makes it privileged. The most important privileges of this skill can be stated as transferring knowledge and culture to the future and enabling communication independent of time and place (Graham and Haris, 2005). In other words, writing skill is independent of the notion of time and space. This aspect pushes it beyond being a difficult skill and makes it an important skill.

Writing skills are generally taught in schools. This skill, which is important for students to acquire, needs to be developed in various ways. There are extensive opportunities such as various activities and digital media to improve writing skills. Students can contribute to the development of their writing skills by making experiments in various environments and make this skill practical (Çocuk and Soysal, 2021). In this way, students' writing skills can be improved by providing active participation in accordance with student characteristics within the constructivist education system. However, it is obvious that this skill is not only related to student characteristics.

Writing skill is not just a student-oriented skill. Many variables affect individuals' writing skills positively or negatively within a common framework. According to Kokkokoğlu and Doğan (2021), the main factors affecting writing skills include student, teacher, environment, family, education system, and teachers' undergraduate education. In addition, teachers' rush to finish the subjects on time in accordance with the schedule and students' indifference and unwillingness to write negatively affect this skill. Kırbaş (2006) also focused on the lack of time devoted to writing and the reluctance of students in his study. Tok and Ünlü (2014) emphasized that the writing skill, which is defined as a difficult process in the eyes of students, stems from students not gaining the habit of reading. According to Yalar (2010), insufficient vocabulary affects students' writing skills as well as their entire lives.

Additionally, Çiftçi (2006) sees test-type exams in the education system as the most important factor affecting writing skills. According to Baş and Şahin (2013), the student's writing skill is closely related to the education level of the parents. In addition, the socioeconomic level of the family also affects the student's writing skills. When other studies (Aslan, 2013; Kandır and Tümer, 2013) are examined, it is seen that communication skills in general and writing skills in particular are closely related to the socioeconomic level and educational status of families. Children from disadvantaged regions fail in many language skills such as reading and listening, as well as in writing skills. Factors such as living in a rural area, poor financial situation, high crime rate, and migration region are the elements of the concept of disadvantage. All these factors mostly negatively affect students' writing skills (Kardaş, 2014). Based on research on writing skills, there are many factors that affect the development of this skill. The main ones are teacher, environment, parent, and program. Of course, all these variables have a holistic effect on writing skills.

There are many variables that affect writing skills. These variables can be evaluated as positive or negative depending on the environment in which the school is located. It is important to "determine the writing skill level of the students of a secondary school located in a disadvantaged region and to see how and by which variables this level is affected." Because in a disadvantaged region, especially environmental and parental factors will have a negative impact on the student's writing skills. It is thought that the program and teacher variables will have a positive effect.

Writing skills, which are among the learning areas of the Turkish course; aim to improve students' ability to express their feelings, thoughts, dreams, and impressions in writing. Seeing the level of students' ability to express themselves in writing and revealing their relationship with various variables is a prerequisite for developing this skill. The aim of the study carried out in this direction is to examine the level of writing skills of 6th-grade secondary school students in terms of various variables.

The research sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the level of writing skills of 6th-grade secondary school students?
2. What is the level of students' attitudes towards writing skills?
3. What are the teachers' opinions about the students' writing skill levels?
4. What are teachers' opinions about how effective teacher characteristics are on students' writing skill levels?
5. What are teachers' opinions about how effective student characteristics are on students' writing skill levels?
6. What are the teachers' opinions about how effective the program features are on students' writing skill levels?

7. What are the teachers' opinions about how effective environmental characteristics are on students' writing skill levels?

## 2. METHOD

The aim of the research is to determine the level of students' writing skills and to see which variable has an impact on this level through teachers' opinions. For this reason, the case study method was used in the research. Case study design, one of the qualitative research methods, is used to examine one or more events in depth (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2022). This pattern allows the relevant subject to be discussed in full detail within its framework (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). Ethics committee permission was obtained for the research.

### 2.1. Sample/Research Group

While determining the sample, the purposeful sampling method was used, which allows research on a specific subject with certain boundaries in accordance with the purpose of the study (Büyüköztürk et al., 2022). The research group of the study consists of 75 sixth grade students from three branches studying at a secondary school in the Southeastern Anatolia region of Turkey in the 2022/2023 academic year and 5 Turkish teachers, 2 female and 3 male, working at the same school. The neighborhood where the school is located generally consists of families who migrated to the city from various villages. Family members appear to be employed in factories, the agricultural sector, and self-employment. The school is located in one of the central districts. According to its success in the high school entrance exam, the school ranks 26th among 46 schools. Some socioeconomic characteristics of its students are given in Table 1.

**Table 1:** *Sociodemographic Information about the Students in the School where the Research was Conducted*

Socioeconomic characteristics	f	%
Students whose Mother is Primary school graduate	276	52,6
Students whose Father is Primary school graduate	229	43,7
Those with 5 or more siblings	89	16,9
Students whose parents are divorced	25	4,7
Having family members with addiction	5	0,9
Those with a criminal conviction in their family	7	1,3
Those victimized by domestic violence	2	0,4
Those experiencing financial difficulties	82	15,6
Those constantly absent in school	43	8,2
Those working at a job	11	2,1

Some sociodemographic characteristics of the 524 students in the school are given in Table 1. Data were obtained from the school guidance service through document review. According to the data, the probability of the mother being a primary school graduate or without a diploma is 52.6. The probability of the father being a primary school graduate or without a diploma is 43.7. The rate of multiple siblings is 16.9 and the divorce rate of parents is 4.7. The rate of students experiencing financial difficulties is 15.6 and the rate of permanent absenteeism is 8.2. There are also students who have a family member who is addicted, has a criminal conviction, or has been subjected to violence, and who are employed.

Personal information about the teachers in the study group is given in Table 2.

**Table 2:** *Personal Information about Teachers*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Sub-Dimension</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Level of Education</b>	Under-Graduate	5
<b>Experience</b>	6-11	4
	11-15	1
<b>Gender</b>	Female	2
	Male	3
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	4
	Single	1

According to Table 2, all 5 teachers are at the undergraduate level in terms of education level. The tenure of teachers is between 6 and 11 years for 4 teachers and between 11 and 15 years for 1 teacher. 2 teachers are women and 3 teachers are men. Additionally, 4 of the teachers are married and 1 is single.

## 2.2. Data Collection Tools

Three different data collection tools were used in the study. The first of these is the free subject text writing form, which is used to see the students' writing skill level. While determining the topics in the form, the literature was examined, the topics were determined and then left to the students' choice. The texts written by the students were examined with the writing skill level rubric prepared by Bahşı (2018). The rubric has a structure that gradually becomes more difficult (sentence, paragraph and text level). The structure was rated at four levels: starter, needs improvement, acceptable, and successful. The attitude scale developed by Can and Ünal (2017) was used to measure students' attitudes towards writing. The attitude scale consists of subdimensions including perception, interest and contribution. Finally, a semi-structured teacher interview form was used to determine the students' writing levels and to see how related these levels are with the variables.

### 2.3. Collection Data

In the study, firstly, students were made to write free-themed texts. Then, their attitudes towards writing skills were measured. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers. In these interviews, voice recording was made with the permission of the participants, codes (K1, K2, K3...) were given to the teachers and the analysis process began.

### 2.4. Analysis Data

In the research, evaluation of the rubric prepared to determine the levels of students' writing skills, description of students' and teachers' personal information, determination of students' attitudes towards writing skills, in other words, data obtained quantitatively was analyzed by taking frequency, percentage and arithmetic averages.

During the analysis process of the interview forms, which are the qualitative data collection tools of the study, the researchers coded them independently of each other. Content analysis was used during the coding process. Content analysis is carried out by following the stages of coding, classifying, and defining the data obtained (Glesne, 2012). The data collected through the forms were coded, classified and defined by the researchers after the examinations. Afterwards, the codings were analyzed with the consensus formula of Miles and Huberman (2015).

### 2.5. Validity and Reliability of the Study

Reliability studies on data collection tools are given in this section.

**Table 3:** *Validity and Reliability Studies of Data Collection Tools*

	<b>Cronbach alfa</b>	<b>Pearson Correlation Coefficient</b>	<b>Credibility</b>
<b>Attitude scale</b>	.94		
<b>Text evaluation</b>		.80	
<b>Rubric</b>			Expert Review
<b>Interview Form</b>			Expert Review/ Miles and Huberman Consensus Formula

Table 3 lists the studies carried out to ensure the validity and reliability of the measurement tools used in the study. Firstly, the rubrics to be used in evaluating the texts written by the students were presented to expert opinion. Then, the students' free-topic writings were examined by the researcher according to the writing skill evaluation rubric, and then they were examined and confirmed by another subject area expert. A good level of correlation (.80) was found between the two raters. Then, the average of the scores of these two evaluators was given as the student score.

The attitude scale was first given to students from different branches who were not in the research group, a preliminary test was made, and the areas that needed clarification were determined. Then, it was applied to the students in the study group. Students who accidentally left items blank during the application were informed. Students with learning disabilities and foreign nationals were dealt with one-on-one and helped to fill out the scale according to their own thoughts. After the data was collected, it was determined to be reliable (.94) according to the Cronbach alpha reliability test to determine reliability.

The teacher interview form was prepared after the literature review. It was then submitted to expert opinion and necessary adjustments were made. Before the application, it was applied to different teachers from the same branch, and necessary explanations were made in areas that were not understood. It was then applied to the teachers in the research group. In order to avoid data loss, voice recording was made with the consent of the teachers. Miles and Huberman's (2015) reliability formula was used in order to see the commonality/unity between the researchers' opinions regarding the coding made during the analysis process for the interviews with the teachers. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 64) defined homologous codes between coders as "consensus" and non-analogous codes as "disagreement". They calculated the percentage of agreement with the formula "Percentage of Agreement = Consensus / (Agreement + Disagreement) \* 100". In the teacher interview form, variables affecting students' writing skills (teacher, student, program, and environmental characteristics) were tried to be determined. While coding the raw data within the scope of these variables, the coding between the researchers was analyzed. As a result of 11 agreements and 2 disagreements in the coding of the environmental variable affecting students' writing skills, the percentage of agreement was determined as 84.61%. As a result of 8 agreements and 2 disagreements in the coding of the program variable affecting students' writing skills, the percentage of agreement was determined as 80%. As a result of 15 agreements and 6 disagreements in the coding of the teacher variable affecting students' writing skills, the percentage of agreement was determined as 71.42%. As a result of 8 agreements and 2 disagreements in the coding of the student variable affecting students' writing skills, the percentage of agreement was determined as 80%. It is thought that the researchers' mastery of the field, their existing knowledge of the problem, and the research they have conducted ensure that the consensus is valid the first time. Because, according to Miles and Huberman (2015), a consensus score above .70 is considered reliable. Regarding the disagreements that occurred during coding, a consensus was reached by mutual decision as a result of consultations between the researchers and comparisons with the raw data.

Within the scope of the validity and reliability studies of the research, consistency was tried to be ensured by having free-themed articles, attitude scales, and teacher interview forms examined by other experts during the data collection and analysis processes. In addition, efforts were made to increase the credibility of the research through direct quotations, detailed and rich descriptions, and participant confirmation.

### 3. FINDINGS

In this section, findings regarding the writing skill levels of 6th grade secondary school students, attitudes towards writing skills, and teachers' opinions on variables affecting writing skills are included.



### 3.1. Writing Skill Levels of Secondary School 6th Grade Students

The first sub-question of the study is "What is the level of writing skills of 6th grade secondary school students?" In order to determine the level of writing skills of the students in response to the question, the free-theme essays written by the students were evaluated through rubrics, and the findings are given in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Average Scores Regarding Students' "Sentence, Paragraph, Text and General" Writing Skill Levels.

Writing skill level	Sentence Level (6-24)	Paragraph Level (5-20)	Text Level (5-20)	General Level (16-64)
<b>Starter Level</b>				
<b>Needs Improvement</b>	16,65	12,6	11,2	40,45
<b>Acceptable</b>				
<b>Successful</b>				

According to Table 4, the average of the scores obtained by the students at the sentence level ( $\bar{X}=16.6$ ), paragraph level ( $\bar{X}=12.6$ ), text level ( $\bar{X}=11.2$ ) and general level ( $\bar{X}=40.5$ ) is at the level of "needs improvement" with (2/4) according to the graded scoring rubric. Although the success rate at the sentence, paragraph and text levels is at the "needs to be improved" level, not all levels are in the same situation within this level. The relatively most successful level is the sentence level, then comes the paragraph level, and lastly is the text level. At the general level, the total success level of the students is seen.

### 3.2. Students' Attitudes Towards Writing Skills

The second sub-question of the study is "What is the level of students' attitudes towards writing skills?" The results of the attitude scale applied to this question are given in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Students' Attitudes Towards Writing Skills

Scale Sub-Dimensions	N	$\bar{X}$	ss
<b>Interest</b>	73	3,50	.93
<b>Perception</b>	73	3,66	.86
<b>Contribution</b>	73	3,40	1,01
<b>Writing skill total attitude score</b>	73	3,51	.87

In Table 5, students' attitudes towards writing skills are presented along with their sub-dimensions. The average scores of the students' interest (3.50), perception (3.66), contribution (3.40) sub-dimensions

and all dimensions (3.51) are at the "agree" (4/5) level. The dimension with the lowest average among the sub-dimensions is "contribution".

### 3.3. Teacher Opinions About Students' Writing Skill Levels

The third sub-question of the study is "What are the teachers' opinions about the students' writing skill levels?" Data regarding the interviews conducted with teachers regarding the question are given in Table 6 and Table 7.

**Table 6:** *Students' Writing Skill Levels According to Teachers*

Levels/Average	Total score	Average
Letter/word	19	3,8
Sentence	15	3
Paragraph	13	2,6
Text	9	1,8
General	56	2,8

According to Table 6, 5 teachers scored the average status of the students' levels between 1 and 5 points. Accordingly, the average of the students at the letter/word level is 3.8, at the sentence level is 3, at the paragraph level is 2.6, and at the text level is 1.8. The general average of these four levels is 2.8.

**Table 7:** *Students' Writing Skills at Various Levels*

1. Theme Letter / Word (f:5)	Participant	f
Inability to write letters or words	K1, K4	2
Mixing uppercase/lowercase letters	K1, K5	2
Vocabulary weakness	K2, K5, K4	3
Inability to use standard Turkish	K2	1
Ability to use new words	K3	1
Inability to read or write	K4	1
Repeating words	K5, K3	2
2. Theme Sentence (f:5)	Participant	f
Inability to establish sentence integrity	K1, K4	2

Inability to use spelling and punctuation	K1, K2, K5	3
Forming shallow sentences	K2, K5	2
Using inverted sentences	K3	1
Incoherency/Ambiguity	K3	1
Writing incomplete sentences	K4	1
<b>3. Theme Paragraph (f:4)</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>f</b>
Inability to establish unity between sentences	K1, K5	1
Inability to create a paragraph	K2, K5	2
Inability to use linking expressions	K3	1
Boring writing	K3	1
Inability to use proverbs, idioms and figures of speech adequately	K3	1
<b>4. Theme Text (f:5)</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>f</b>
Inability to include introduction, body and conclusion	K1, K2	2
Inability to apply ways to improve thinking	K2, K3, K5	3
Inability to give the topic, main idea and supporting idea	K2, K3, K4, K5	4
Failure to maintain integrity	K2, K3	2
Mixing text types	K3	1
Writing in a certain text type (Story)	K3	1
Short writing	K3	1
<b>5. Theme General (f:5)</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>f</b>
Having students at all levels	K1, K4	2
Low average	K1, K2, K5	3
Mid-range average	K4	1
Writing success decreasing from the basic writing level to the upper level	K1, K2, K3	3

In Table 7, students' writing characteristics at various levels are given under 5 themes. Here are the issues that teachers mostly focus on. In the first theme (Letter/Word), especially the issues of "Not being able to write letters or words", "Confusing uppercase/lowercase letters", "Vocabulary weakness" and "Repeating words" were included in the teachers' statements. In the second theme (Sentence), the issues of "failure to establish sentence integrity", "failure to use spelling and punctuation" and "forming shallow sentences" were emphasized. In the 3rd theme (Paragraph), the issues of "Not being able to establish unity between sentences" and "Being helpless while creating a paragraph" were stated. In the 4th theme (Text), the issues of "Not being able to apply the introduction, development and conclusion", "Not being able to apply the ways of developing the idea", "Not being able to provide integrity" and "Not being able to give the subject, main idea and supporting idea" were emphasized. In the last theme (General), the issues of "Having students at all levels", "Low average" and "Writing success decreasing from the basic writing level to the upper level" were emphasized.

In the first theme (Letter/Word), teachers expressed their thoughts as follows. K1 describes the students' characteristics at the letter/word level: "We also have students who do not even know how to write letters yet." K5 said: "There are too many students who do not start with a capital letter where they should." he said. K4 said: They mostly use words from daily life. There are no words that are more comprehensive, different, words that they hear or read and learn." K3 said, "They can make very long sentences, often using the same linking expression, without putting a period or finishing the sentence."

In the second theme (Sentence), teachers expressed their thoughts as follows: K1 "Those who cannot establish sentence integrity yet or..." K5 "There is almost no punctuation." K2 "They use shallow sentences because their vocabulary is not sufficient."

In the 3rd theme (Paragraph), teachers expressed their thoughts as follows: K1 "Unfortunately, the number of students who cannot establish unity between sentences and write at the paragraph level is very high in our school." K2 "The student can express himself in a sentence, but not in a paragraph, the paragraph remains incomplete."

In the 4th theme (Text), teachers expressed their thoughts as follows: K2 "Children generally think that the introduction, development and conclusion consist of dividing a text into three paragraphs." K3 "They use thought development methods unconsciously." K4 "So when you ask the child about the subject, he tells the main idea, and when you say the main idea, he tells the subject. "He is confusing, there is absolutely no thought of giving a message." K2 "Sometimes you can make a sentence and the rest can be irrelevant sentences, that is, they may not revolve around the topic."

In the 5th theme (General), teachers expressed their thoughts as follows: K1 "We have students at every stage and level." K2 "Students' writing skills are very low, not sufficient." K3 "In general, students can construct sentences easily. Of course, when we say "paragraph", it means a barren text, so it goes like this."

Teachers generally stated that students' writing skill levels were low. It has also been stated that this decrease worsens from the lower level to the higher level (letter/word, sentence, paragraph, text), depending on the nature of the writing skill level. The negativity of the characteristics of various variables affecting the level of writing skill is seen as the reason for this failure.

### 3.4. Teacher Opinions on the Effectiveness of Teacher Characteristics on Students' Writing Skill Levels

The fourth sub-question of the study is "What are the teachers' opinions on how effective teacher characteristics are on students' writing skill levels?" Data from the interviews held with teachers regarding the question are given in Table 8.

**Table 8:** *Teacher Characteristics that Affect the Level of Writing Skills*

<b>1.Command of Theme Area (f:5)</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>f</b>
<b>Being able to pay close attention to the student</b>	K1	1
<b>Ability to apply current writing methods, techniques and activities</b>	K1, K2, K5	3
<b>The teacher's level of ability to implement the activity</b>	K1	1
<b>Ability to use the easy to difficult principle</b>	K1	1
<b>Considering readiness</b>	K1, K5, K2, K3	4
<b>Being encouraging</b>	K1, K2	2
<b>Being a role model</b>	K2	1
<b>Ability to use smart board</b>	K2	1
<b>Stimulating creativity</b>	K2	1
<b>Giving homework</b>	K3	1
<b>Teacher's perspective on writing skills</b>	K3	1
<b>Pro-life orientation</b>	K4	1
<b>Other responsibilities</b>	K4	1
<b>2. Theme Academic and seniority (f:5)</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>f</b>
<b>Social media monitoring</b>	K1	1
<b>Young teacher/experienced teacher</b>	K1, K4, K2, K3, K5	5
<b>Master's/PhD degree</b>	K1, K2, K3, K4, K5	5
<b>Undergraduate education</b>	K3	1
<b>3. Studies to improve theme writing skills (f:4)</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Moving up one step</b>	K1	1

<b>Dictation</b>	K3, K4	2
<b>Grammar studies</b>	K4	1
<b>Event studies</b>	K1, K2, K4, K3	4

According to Table 8, teacher characteristics that affect students' writing skills are given. While all teachers expressed their opinions in the first two themes, they did not express their opinions in the last theme. Here are the features that teachers emphasize most. These features are divided into 3 themes. In the first theme (field mastery), teachers emphasized the characteristics of "Ability to apply current writing methods, techniques and activities", "Taking readiness into consideration" and "Being encouraging". In the second theme (academic and seniority), teachers focused on the characteristics of "Young teacher/experienced teacher and "Master's degree/PhD degree". In the last theme (studies to improve writing skills), teachers focused on "Dictation" and "Activity studies".

In the 1st theme (Field mastery), teachers expressed their thoughts as follows: K1 "Writing methods and techniques are a very broad field, the better the teacher uses them, the better it reflects on the students." K5 "First of all, we need to know the level of the students, their readiness, so that we can make pinpoint interventions on the students accordingly." K2 "The literature teacher would write a composition with us, he would read the composition and we would be left speechless, this would be a serious encouraging example for us."

In the 2nd theme (Academic and seniority), teachers expressed their thoughts as follows: K2: "As you know, as a teacher's experience increases, the methods he uses become more diverse, his approach to students becomes different, and by observing himself before, he can identify the points where he was lacking." K4: "He has a master's degree, it is definitely valuable to me because he is improving himself and as he improves himself in this field, he applies it to the students here."

In the 3rd theme (Studies to improve writing skills), teachers expressed their thoughts as follows: K4: "I highly recommend dictation practice, it is very important for the child to be able to write what he hears." K1 "There are station techniques to continue the unfinished story or to bring it to the text level."

Many teacher characteristics affect students' writing skill levels. In general, it was emphasized that teachers are young, do innovative activities and take readiness into consideration. It was stated that teachers with postgraduate education would be successful, but the merit aspect of this was emphasized.

Teachers were asked "What are your suggestions for improving students' writing skills?" When asked the question, teachers gave their own suggestions on how to improve students' writing skills. In other words, they emphasized the teacher variable and stated that studies should be carried out to improve teachers' implementation of contemporary activities and students' reading habits. Teachers expressed their thoughts on this subject as follows: P1: "In other words, it is necessary to do activities very frequently, but we need to get rid of the classic activities and do more activities that will really encourage the students and create a perception of play in the students." K2 "In order to write well, it is necessary to read well. All of my students who write well are good readers. We also need to reinforce this habit."

### 3.5. Teacher Opinions on How Effective Student Characteristics Are on Students' Writing Skill Levels

The fifth sub-question of the study is "What are the teachers' opinions on how effective student characteristics are on students' writing skill levels?" The results of the interviews with teachers regarding the question are given in Table 9.

**Table 9:** *Student Characteristics Affecting the Level of Writing Skills*

<b>1.Theme Physical characteristics (f:5)</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>f</b>
<b>Disability</b>	K1, K2, K3, K4, K5	5
<b>Age</b>	K2, K3, K5, K1, K4	5
<b>Gender</b>	K1, K2, K4, K5, K3	5
<b>Puberty</b>	K3, K4, K5	3
<b>2. Theme Personal characteristics (f:5)</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>f</b>
<b>Interest</b>	K1	1
<b>Hyperactivity</b>	K1	1
<b>Talent</b>	K1, K2, K4, K5	4
<b>Psychological state</b>	K1, K2, K3, K4	4
<b>Individual differences</b>	K4	1
<b>Being a good reader</b>	K2	1

In Table 9, teachers emphasized which characteristics of students affect their writing skills. These features are given in two themes. In the first theme (physical characteristics), teachers emphasized the students' "Disability", "Gender", "Adolescence" and "Age" characteristics. In the second theme (personal characteristics), the "Ability" and "Psychological state" characteristics of the students were stated.

In the 1st theme (physical characteristics), teachers expressed their thoughts as follows: K5 "Of course, whether it is physical deficiencies or mental deficiencies, they affect their writing skills. K3 "The student can also gain a new experience every year and improve his/her skills" K4 "I can say that girls write better, boys do not want to do it much, just careless and imprecise ..." K4 "When girls enter adolescence, they become a little more emotional and maybe they can write to convey those feelings, but when boys reach adolescence they are just frivolous..."

In the 2nd theme (personal characteristics), teachers expressed their thoughts as follows: K2 "Abilities can differ in each person." K1 "If the student is not psychologically ready for that activity, he will not be able to do it anyway."

Participants stated that students with physical disabilities would of course fall behind, but emphasized that studies should be done to raise their levels to a minimum level. Regarding gender, they stated that they generally had positive impressions in favor of girls due to the lesson feature (self-expression, emotional poems, etc.). It has been stated that adolescence generally affects writing skills negatively. However, the gender variable is also important here. In personal characteristics, students' psychological states and abilities are emphasized. Especially the psychological characteristics of the students arising from their families (divorce, violence) were emphasized.

### 3.6. Teacher Opinions on the Effectiveness of Program Features on Students' Writing Skill Levels

The sixth sub-objective of the study is "What are the teachers' opinions on how effective the program features are on students' writing skill levels?" Data from the interviews held with teachers regarding the question are given in Table 10.

**Table 10:** Program Features Affecting the Level of Writing Skills

<b>1. Theme Textbook (F:5)</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>f</b>
<b>Lack of time</b>	K1, K3, K5	3
<b>Quality of Activity</b>	K1, K2, K3, K4, K5	5
<b>Amount and order of activity</b>	K1, K2	2
<b>Pro-life orientation</b>	K4, K5	2
<b>Focusing on Books</b>	K4	1
<b>2. Theme Abundance of theoretical knowledge (f:4)</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>f</b>
<b>Spelling punctuation information</b>	K1, K3, K4, K5	4
<b>Ambugity in expression</b>	K3	1
<b>Impracticality (bogged down in grammar)</b>	K5	1
<b>3. Theme Measurement and evaluation (f:5)</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>f</b>
<b>Process-based evaluation</b>	K1, K2, K3, K4, K5	5
<b>Outcome-based evaluation</b>	K1, K3, K4, K5	4

Table 10 shows the program features that affect students' writing skills. These features are given in 3 themes. In the first theme (textbook), teachers focused on the features of the program, such as "Lack of time", "Quality of activity", "Amount and order of activity" and "Life-longness". In the second theme (abundance of theoretical knowledge), the "Spelling and punctuation information" feature of the program was emphasized. In the third theme (Measurement and evaluation), "Process-based evaluation" and



"Result-based evaluation" were emphasized. Participants stated that they carried out activities such as oral evaluation, reflection on in-class performance, notebook control, positive and negative and explanatory writing, self-evaluation/peer evaluation in process-based evaluation.

In the first theme (textbook), teachers expressed their thoughts as follows: K1 "There is no time to do the writing activity in the classroom, and the teacher necessarily sees the writing activity as homework." K3 "The instructions, whether they are poems, stories or informative texts, are very nice and descriptive. I like the activities in the book, they are good enough" K2 "Write down your thoughts, write them as a story, then do something similar again. "Later on, a similar activity can start to make students feel bored." K5 "Writing skills cannot be achieved by taking lessons, so you have to spend your time for this."

In the 2nd theme (Multitude of theoretical knowledge), the teacher expresses one of his thoughts as follows: K1: "Restrictions such as, I don't know, use the comma in the right place, put a line start here, let your paragraph be this long, I don't know what, etc., will of course affect the student."

In the 3rd theme (Measurement and evaluation), teachers expressed their thoughts as follows: K3 "I collect their notebooks without their knowledge, and evaluate their writings. When I give them grades, they take it seriously." K4 "I already designate the last question in every exam as a text that children can write."

The participants focused on the time devoted to writing, the amount of activity, the quality of the activity and the abundance of grammatical topics regarding the program variables that contribute to low levels of writing skills. They stated that the negative nature of these elements would also reflect on student levels. In addition, teachers stated that they evaluated students through various in-class activities and exams.

### 3.7. Teacher Opinions on the Effect of Environmental Features on Students' Writing Skill Levels

The seventh sub-objective of the study is "What are the teachers' opinions on how effective environmental characteristics are on students' writing skill levels?" Data regarding the interviews conducted with teachers regarding the question are given in Table 11.

**Table 11:** *Environmental Characteristics Affecting the Level of Writing Skills*

<b>1. Theme Physical environment (f:5)</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>f</b>
<b>Disadvantaged area/Slum</b>	K1, K2, K5	3
<b>Migration area</b>	K1	1
<b>Dormitory and house</b>	K1, K2, K4	3
<b>Detached small houses with stoves</b>	K2, K3, K5	3
<b>2. Theme Social environment (f:5)</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Lack of education / Lack of awareness</b>	K1, K2, K3, K5	4

<b>Financial inadequacy</b>	K1, K2, K3, K4, K5	5
<b>Indifferent parent</b>	K1, K2, K4, K5	4
<b>Factory labor and tradesmanship</b>	K1, K2, K5	3
<b>Friendships</b>	K1, K3	2
<b>Factor of parents and relatives</b>	K1, K2, K3	3
<b>Role model</b>	K2, K3, K5	3
<b>Domestic violence, broken family</b>	K4, K5	2
<b>Social media factor</b>	K1, K3, K2, K4	4

In Table 11, environmental characteristics that affect students' writing skills are stated by teachers. These features are divided into two themes. In the first theme (Physical environment), teachers stated the characteristics of the physical environment where students live as "Disadvantaged area / Slum", "Dormitory and house" and "Detached and small houses with stoves". In the second theme (Social environment), "Lack of education/unconsciousness", "Financial insufficiency", "Indifferent parent", "Factory work and tradesmanship", "Friendship relations", "Factor of parents and relatives", "Role model", "Social media factor" and "Domestic violence, broken family" were emphasized.

In the first theme (Physical environment), teachers expressed their thoughts as follows: K1 "We always call it a disadvantaged area" "It seems to me like these are people who have trouble even eating." K2 "detached houses with stoves, where students do not have their own rooms, where efforts are made to study next to the television..."

In the 2nd theme (Social environment), teachers expressed their thoughts as follows: K3 "If the family is illiterate, this creates a big problem for us." K5 "They have a low economic status, they generally work in factories." K2: "Since parents work, the possibility of following them decreases." K1 "There are families working in the factory, that is, husband and wife employees." K3 "When I say you can get help, you can ask each other, you can exchange ideas, good students can support students with poor writing skills." K3 "It is obvious that the child of a family that understands the importance of education and the child of a family that does not have this." K2 "Especially relatives such as mother, father, brother, uncle can always be this role model." K4: "My grandfather came here after drinking alcohol, he beat my mother, he beat my uncle, we always hear in such environments, they live together, most likely his father and mother are divorced." K5 "Negative examples are at the highest level, so of course they negatively affect students' writing skills."

The environment where the students are located is the suburb of the city. In this neighborhood, there are mostly parents who come from surrounding villages, work in factories, and cannot take care of their children. The houses are detached and have stoves, and most of the students do not have individual rooms. Some students stay in a dormitory in the same neighborhood. These students are students whose parents are separated or who are unsuccessful. Participating teachers emphasized that social media or other digital, technological communication tools often have a negative impact on writing skills, but they said that students could not access these tools due to the financial inadequacy of their families.

#### 4. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

In today's world, where social skills in general and communication skills in particular come to the fore, "writing skill" stands out as the weakest skill area among communication skills for various reasons. It is important to see the reflection of this situation (writing skill level) in secondary school students, to determine the students' attitudes towards writing skills, and to determine which variables affect the writing skill level through teachers' opinions. The results obtained from the research findings are discussed and interpreted below according to the questions sought to be answered in the research.

The writing skill level of the students is at the "needs to be improved" level as a result of the evaluation of the free-theme writings written by the students, and according to the teachers' opinions, the average is 2.8. As a result, it is not at a sufficient level. In addition, this situation gradually decreases at the "sentence level, paragraph level and text level" levels, respectively. Due to the structural features of the texts, when students' achievements at the sentence, paragraph and text levels are examined, these three levels are listed from simple to complex. Because there are basic skills at the sentence level, skills that require more comprehensive thinking at the paragraph level, and high-level skills that require organizing the entire text at the text level. While creating a text, students must first be able to write a sentence in accordance with the rules. At the paragraph level, it is expected to multiply the meaningful sentences established in the previous stage, that is, at the sentence level, and connect them within a whole in the most appropriate way. At the text level, the paragraphs created in the previous stage are integrated in a certain order and around a main idea within the context of the text. According to Özbay (2011), sentence and paragraph level skills should be acquired at the primary school level. While these skills should be acquired by secondary school level, they still need to be developed. Especially those expected at the sentence level are the features that must be acquired at the primary school level (Başı, 2018). This level needs to be raised to higher levels until secondary school. The text level includes the skills to be acquired in secondary school (MEB, 2019).

Due to the environment in which the sample was selected, the average writing skill of the 6 foreign students in the study group was negatively affected. While there is a general weakness in the basic communication skills of these students, it has been determined that their writing skills are the weakest communication skills. Additionally, there are 4 students receiving individualized education in the sample. These students also have low communication skills. These special situations also negatively affected the total success score. Looking at other studies conducted at the secondary school level, it can be seen that writing skills are at an intermediate level in Türkben's (2021) and Ağır Haykır's (2012) studies. The fact that the sample in this study was chosen from a school with a low socioeconomic level, called "slum", can be seen as a reason for the difference.

According to the findings of the study, students' attitudes towards writing skills are at the "agree" (4/5) level. According to the average result, it is seen that the students do not have a negative attitude towards writing skills, but even have a positive attitude. In addition, in the scores obtained from the attitude scale, the "contribution" sub-dimension score is lower than the other dimensions. As a result, it is seen that the students think that writing skills will not make a significant "contribution" to them.

In Türkben (2021)'s study, students' writing attitudes were highly positive. Akın (2016) found a weak but positive relationship between writing score and writing attitude. Zorbaz and Kayatürk (2015) found in their study that the level of reading habit affects the level of writing attitude. The difference in writing attitude score averages according to the class variable was found to be statistically significant. Again, in the same study, no significant difference was seen between writing attitude and socioeconomic

level, mother and father education level. However, a significant difference in favor of girls was detected in the variables of writing attitude and gender.

Many variables that affect students' writing skill levels are classified as umbrella variables: "teacher characteristics, student characteristics, program characteristics and environmental characteristics".

Teachers who participated in the research stated that teacher characteristics affect student success, and that teachers with high success in "applying current writing methods, techniques and activities" also have positive reflections on their students. Teachers also stated that activities should be carried out according to the readiness of the students. However, other variables overshadow the positive aspects of teachers. Most teachers stated that maturation in the profession positively affects student success and writing success. Canbulat and İlğan (2011) concluded in their study that teachers' professional achievements and years of seniority are closely related. In this study, it was stated that teacher success positively affects student success. In his study, Dema (2022) stated that teachers are an important factor for students. It was especially emphasized that teachers have an impact on students by being role models. Helena (2018) considered teachers as an important variable in her study. It has been stated that teachers' wages, training, workplace conditions, and motivation are important in this variable. It has been stated that improving the socioeconomic status of teachers will affect their own success and, indirectly, the success of their students. Wahlström (2006) focused on how writing skills are taught in his study. Therefore, it is a study in which teachers are the focal point. According to the results of the study, it was focused on whether teachers used different methods in the writing process. In the study conducted with 4 teachers, one of the teachers stated that he made the students study for national exams. Additionally, the importance of grading writing results was pointed out. Some teachers have prepared their own rubrics. Some used ready-made rubrics. It has also been stated that assigning homework to students is important. Bartscher, Lawler, Ramirez, and Schinault (2001) aimed to improve writing skills and reduce writing anxiety in their studies. In this study, students carried out free and creative writing activities on topics of their own choosing (freely). According to the results of the study, it was observed that students focused more on writing, their writing improved and their writing anxiety decreased. Teachers have great responsibilities in this regard. Because teachers guide and guide students in the writing process. Instead of giving students a standard subject and forcing them to write on a single subject, teachers should allow students to write on free subjects of their choice and enable them to improve their writing.

The program features, which have positive aspects at the forefront, are also found suitable by teachers in terms of including current activities. However, the abundance of theoretical knowledge, in other words, knowledge of spelling and punctuation, disrupts students' writing flow, so students cannot write automatically and are overwhelmed by rules. Demir (2013) stated in his study that the most important problems affecting writing skills are spelling and punctuation rules, adding that "These rules negatively affect students' natural and automatic writing." He expressed it as follows. It has been stated that process- and result-based evaluation has a positive impact on students if immediate feedback - especially non-destructive and positive - is given. Helena (2018) also stated that programs will be successful if they are carried out in cooperation with stakeholders. In addition, Bridge, Compton-Hall, and Cantrell's study states that it is necessary to give students enough time to improve their writing skills. The purpose of this period is to spare time for writing skills and to give students enough time in the writing process (Cavkaytar, 2010). Fink-Chorzempa, Graham, and Harris (2005) stated that students need enough time in the writing process. Moreover, he stated that students could be given additional time if they needed it.

Considering student characteristics, this is where teachers agree the most. It has been observed that students' physical characteristics, abilities, and psychological states are directly related to their writing skill level. In particular, physical characteristics such as disability, age, gender, and adolescence are related to students' writing skills. These characteristics also affect the psychological characteristics of students. As stated by the teachers, gender affects girls positively and boys negatively, especially during adolescence -where age is also effective. In Güngör and Açıkgöz's (2015) study, girls are better at writing skills than boys. Girls who become emotional become introverted and keep their feelings in diaries, memories, etc. express them by writing. Men, on the other hand, become more careless and move away from classes and writing activities. In fact, in many studies (Türkben, 2021; Arıcı and Ungan, 2008; President, 2019; Bölükbaş and Özdemir, 2009; Doğan and Özçakmak, 2014; Karaca, 2019), girls are seen to be more successful than boys in writing skills. Prior to Chuchuen's (2021) study, female students were found to be more successful than male students. However, as a result of the study, this difference decreased. Because the education received has reduced the difference. Female students' habit of keeping a diary positively affects their writing skills. According to Zorbaz (2010), there is a relationship between keeping a diary and writing success. For teachers, students' book reading habits increase their vocabulary, sentences, etc. The prevailing opinion is that it positively affects writing skills in terms of improving the ability to form. In Türkben's (2021) study, writing skill is closely related to reading habits. Additionally, Bank (2006) pointed out the importance of reading in his study and stated that the development of writing can be achieved through the development of reading.

It seems that -according to the teachers' opinions- the most important variable that negatively affects the writing skill level of the students in the research group is the "environment". Adverse physical environment; It also affects students' social environments and puts stronger pressure on students. This negatively affects both students' academic success and writing skills. Students in the neighborhood live in detached houses with stoves or in dormitories in a disadvantaged area. In general, their financial situation is poor, which negatively affects their writing skills. Çalışkan (2000) found in his study that the financial means of the family directly affected the students' comprehension and expression skills. Parents are factory workers, tradesmen, or seasonal workers. Therefore, they have no time to spare for their children. This reveals the situation of indifferent parents. Additionally, most of the parents are primary school graduates at most and are not very conscious about education. This situation negatively affects student success. Damarlı (2007) focused on the parent variable. It was concluded that parental education level positively affects students' writing level. The level of writing skill is also related to the level of parental education in other studies (Türkben, 2021; Çelik, 2012; Kılıç, 2012; Sallabaş, 2007; Yasul, 2014). However, Karaca (2019) concluded that it is not related to education level. The lack of a role model in the neighborhood and the abundance of broken families also have a negative impact on students. Additionally, Dema (2022) stated in his study that parents working in cooperation with teachers will positively affect the students.

As a result, although students' attitudes towards writing are not negative, their writing skills are low. There are four main variables that affect this: teacher, student, program, and environment. Among these variables, the environmental factor is the most dominant. A negative physical environment creates a negative social environment. On the other hand, positive teacher characteristics and program features relatively increase students' levels and attitudes. The physical characteristics of the students are also included in this process. The physical changes of students, especially in their developmental age, determine their characteristics. All these factors create a group of students whose attitude towards writing skills is positive but whose level of writing skills is low.

In this research conducted to examine the writing skills of 6th-grade secondary school students, it was observed that the writing skills of the students were not at a high level. In this regard, many precautions should be taken in terms of students, teachers, curriculum, and the environment, and students should be encouraged to express themselves in writing. Tests consisting of open-ended questions should be preferred whenever possible. Newspapers and magazines should be published in schools, and students' writings should be published there. Teachers should be given in-service training to improve their writing skills. Writing skills should be given more space in education programs. In order to contribute more to the development of students' writing skills, cooperation should be made with students' parents.

### **Declaration of Researchers' Contribution Rate**

The contribution rates of all authors to the research are as follows: 1st author 50%, 2nd author 50%.

### **Conflict of Interest Declaration**

There is no conflict of interest among the researchers.

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