

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

An investigation to identify the factors that cause failure in English essay, precis, and composition papers in CSS exams

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ABSTRACT

The research study aims to examine why candidates in Pakistan failed the English Essay, Precis, and Composition sections of the Central Superior Services (CSS) tests. Those candidates chosen for various civil service positions take the prestigious and difficult CSS exam. The study aims to discover candidates' difficulties in these particular CSS exam sections and investigate methods for enhancing their English language ability. A mixed-methods strategy is used in the research process to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Participants in the CSS exam who once took the English Essay, Precis, and Composition papers and got fail in it received a survey form to respond according to their experience. Other than this, we also conducted semi-structured interviews with CSS test winners currently working as officials, such as Deputy Commissioners, Assistant Commissioners, Assistant Superintendents of Police, and Deputy Superintendents of Police. Insights into the causes of failure and the experiences of successful candidates are sought after from both data sources. The research findings highlighted several key factors contributing to failure in English Essays, Precis, and Composition papers. These factors include lack of comprehension and understanding, grammatical errors, inadequate organization, poor handwriting, insufficient practice, lack of originality, difficulty in adapting to essay prompts and precis passages, poor organization, failure to understand and address the purpose, insufficient development of ideas, failure to reach the required word count, grammatical mistakes, neglecting proofreading and revision, poor writing expression, and weak induction and conclusion in essays, tough paper pattern old formatted curriculum. Participants reported struggling to express their ideas coherently, having limited language skills, facing challenges in managing time effectively, lacking proper precis structure understanding, inadequate expertise in the subject, lack of training and resources, lack of analytical and critical thinking abilities, inadequate exam preparation, time management issues, poor grammar abilities, exam phobia, and limited vocabulary as potential factors contributing to failure.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background to CSS exam in Pakistan

The abbreviation CSS stands for Central Superior Services in most cases. These exams are considered as most zealous and ambitious exams in Pakistan and in many other Asian Countries. Each year thousands of candidates apply for these competitive exams, but very few are successful in them. These exams enable many attendants of the exams to be enlisted for the Federal government services. In light of the direction provided by the CSS exam guide, CSS exams are the most combative exams held by FPSC (Federal Public Service Commission) to draft the new members for BS-17 grade as an officer to be posted on the services that are under the supervision of Federal government^[1,2].

The CSS exam has a long-standing history in Pakistan and has undergone significant changes since its inception. After the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, the newly formed government of Pakistan inherited the Civil Service of India and introduced some essential modifications in its policies and framework. The CSS exam was then introduced to ensure that competent individuals were recruited and selected to serve in the civil service, police service, Foreign Service, and more of Pakistan. Since then, the CSS exam has evolved, and changes have been made in its structure and content to keep up with the changing demands of society and the civil service sector.

1.2. CSS exams basics

A CSS exam consists of six optional and six compulsory subjects. To champion the Competitive exams, one must have in-depth knowledge about the compulsory subjects of the examination. The English Essay, English Precis and Composition, General Science and Ability, Current Affairs, Pakistan Affairs, and Islamic Studies or Comparative Study of Major Religions (For Non-Muslims) are the six subjects that must be covered to pass the CSS exam. One of the toughest portions of the CSS Exams is the written part of the exam, which fails many candidates. The written part of the CSS exam includes the English Essay, Precis, and Composition paper, which is considered the most critical section of exams.

The major reason for the inclusion of English Essay, Precis, and Composition paper in CSS exams is to gain knowledge in regards to the candidate's English writing capability and language expertise. To understand this portion of exams, discussing Essay, Precis, and Composition in detail from the initial level is necessary. So, let's start a discussion. First is an Essay, Essay is a written piece that is relevant to the given topic and represents someone's thoughts, ideas, and

justifications. It is utilized for many different purposes, for convincing, entertaining, and inspiring someone. An essay can be of any kind there are several forms of it, like it can be argumentative, descriptive, narrative, and expository. One of the French philosophers of the 16 century “Michel de Montaigne”, defined an essay as an experiment, test, or review of a work that is in progress^[2]. Oxford Dictionary^[3] defines it as a written piece that expresses someone’s personal views about a particular topic (OED, n.d.). Second is composition which is the process through which a writer’s ideas are expressed, shaped, and examined to allow him or her to communicate an essential message that must be accepted by his target audience.

On 24 June 2019, Nordquist^[4] defined composition in the realm of literature refers to the art of skillfully arranging words and sentences to create a coherent and meaningful work. The concept itself, derived from a Latin word that means” to assemble,” includes all sorts of things such as writing, the subject matter it deals with, its work, and even an educational course designed for teaching that skill. Composition is defined by the Vocabulary dictionary^[5] as being both an action and a finished work of writing. In addition, it covers the materials that we use to create something. The Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary^[6] defines composition as the act or process of creating and organizing elements into specific proportions or connections, in particular in the artistic form, such as the composition of a painting. The precise, which Richard Nordquist defined on February 5, 2020^[7], as a summary of the larger works such as books, essays, or speeches, is another important form of writing.

Efficiency, clarity, completeness, unity, and consistency should be qualities that a well-designed precise ought to have. It is emphasized that preserving the original sequence of events and the flow of ideas is of utmost importance in writing a precis^[8]. According to the University of Ottawa^[9], precis can be defined as a form of metalizing that retains the style, outline, and meaning of the original text. It is intended to be a summary of the reading material, typically covering between 100 and 200 words, which ranges from approximately one-fifth to one-twentieth of its original length. The Knowledge Hub of CSS PMS^[10] provides guidelines for writing a precis, which include taking some time to read the text, underline important words, summarize key elements in the closing section of the answer sheet, and write an early draft on one page using simple but succinct language.

1.3. Statement of problem

Current research has identified the factors that make English essays, English Precis, and Composition fail the CSS exam; it also looked at how these factors affect aspirants’ performance. Further strategies are discussed that can be implemented to improve a student’s English proficiency in these areas and the most common mistakes a student makes in her CSS exam with English Essays, precis, and Composition Papers are also mentioned. The research also focused on investigating the relationship between language proficiency and grades in English essays, precis, and composition in the CSS exam.

1.4. Importance of topic

There have been reports of higher failure rates in English Essay, Precis, and Composition examinations for the last several years than on any subject under the CSS examination. This phenomenon is supported by several factors. First of all, CSS examinations in the country are considered to be challenging with a large role played by them when it comes to picking individuals for public service. Second, the English language is an important official language and means of communication in Pakistan that is relevant to a wide range of fields, including academia, business, and government. To communicate effectively with civil service staff, candidates must have a good knowledge of English and can express their opinions and views without being hindered by language skills which can affect their performance in the workplace. To improve the quality of candidates for civil service posts in Pakistan, it is important to examine the reasons for the failure of candidates in English essays, precis, and writing tests during the CSS. In particular, a study was carried out in July 2017, by AIBusaidi^[11] which examined the relationship between language proficiency and learning outcomes. The

importance of this topic is further examined in **Figure 1**.



Figure 1. Importance analysis of proposed research topic.

1.5. Objectives of research

This study aims to investigate the elements that influence applicants' ability to pass the CSS exam's composition, precis, and English essay sections. Secondly, this study is to ascertain whether there is a relationship between language proficiency and grades. Another objective of this research is to identify the most typical errors that students make when writing English essays and precis for the CSS exam. Another crucial area must be examined is how exam anxiety affects CSS applicants' performance in the English essays, precis, and composition sections.

1.6. Structure of literature review

This sub-section investigates the relevant literature through extensive reading of articles, books, and already done research regarding identifying the factors contributing to failure in English essays and precis in the last six years. Further, the previous research, books, and article's variables, aims, and key findings will be discussed in detail in paragraphs, while the main points will be highlighted using bullet points.

1.7. Related theories

It is essential to examine the importance of effective test-taking strategies when conducting a literature review specifically focused on the CSS exams^[12]. These strategies cover a wide range of techniques, including time management, question analysis, and study approach, which are proven to increase performance in examinations. Additionally, an investigation into research on self-regulated learning^[13] provides valuable insights into the pivotal role played by strategies like goal-setting and self-reflection in effectively managing the learning process and optimizing overall performance. Moreover, the cognitive process of writing has been revealed, and valuable insight is given into the skills needed to succeed at essays, precis, and composition papers through the use of the Writing Process Theory proposed by Flower and Hayes 1981^[14].

An intervention aimed at developing planning, drafting, revision, and editing skills is also supported by the knowledge of this theory. Moreover, considering writing anxiety theory, as discussed by Daly and Miller^[15], sheds light on the emotional and psychological factors, such as anxiety, self-doubt, and fear of evaluation, which may hinder writing performance. The study can obtain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing CSS exam failure through its English essays, summaries, and composition papers by using these theories in its literature review. To facilitate an overall approach to investigations, this knowledge enables the

development of research methods, methodologies, data analysis, and interpretation in a relevant and understandable manner.

2. Literature review

This research study analyses factors contributing to the failure of English essays, precis, and composition papers during the CSS examination. The examination of current literature will look for obstacles that impede candidates' ability to deliver, and a suggested improvement strategy is examined here. A complete analysis of pertinent literature in scholarly journals, reports, and books shall be carried out as part of this review.

This literature review highlights the factors contributing to failure in English essays, precis, and composition papers among CSS aspirants. The findings underscore the significance of addressing challenges such as inadequate English language proficiency, poor critical thinking and analytical skills, weak time management, and insufficient exam preparation. The review contributes to existing knowledge by providing insights into key patterns and trends identified across the reviewed studies. It emphasizes the need for future research to focus on practical approaches, comprehensive training programs, and targeted interventions to enhance writing skills among CSS aspirants. The review also highlights the importance of language proficiency development, guidance on writing techniques, and access to resources in improving performance in CSS exams.

2.1. Previous studies

This literature review sheds light on the factors causing failure in English essays, precis, and composition papers in CSS exams. It emphasizes the need to address challenges such as inadequate language proficiency, poor critical thinking and analytical skills, weak time management, lack of awareness of writing rules, weak grammar skills, and insufficient exam preparation. By adopting targeted interventions, providing resources, and conducting comprehensive training programs, CSS aspirants can overcome these challenges and improve their writing abilities. Future research should focus on practical approaches, explore effective interventions, and investigate the impact of exam format revisions to enhance writing skills among CSS aspirants.

To demonstrate the link between language ability and academic competence, several studies were carried out. One such study looked at college students in Oman and found that their lack of English skills has a detrimental effect on the quality of engineering classes studied^[16]. Other research carried out at two tertiary education institutions in Oman similarly discovered a high, positive connection between English language proficiency and GPA^[17]. Concerning the Arab student in Suleiman's words, their "deficient proficiency of four language skills" such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing make it difficult for them to advance in higher education. These studies have shown that language skills are important in a range of professional areas, and the relationship between academic performance and linguistic abilities has been established^[18].

Several groundbreaking studies in this field have already been performed, and all candidates are being helped to understand how the CSS works at the practice level. Here are a couple of studies looking at things that have led to failure in the CSS exam especially in the written portion of it. The research study conducted in 2013, which was designed to investigate the stress levels experienced by CSS aspirants and their effects, showed that a significant proportion of candidates have experienced chronic stress and increased frustration associated with studying for the exam. Such frequent occurrences may be associated, as Khaskhely et al.^[19] indicate, with the severe societal pressure on such candidates due to their lack of access to professional advice. The fact that it takes a great deal of effort and persistence to pass the CSS test is thus obvious. Students who have been stressed are not well able to cope with the exam. DAWN 2016^[20] reported that in 2016, 98% of Pakistani students failed to complete the English composition and speech writing part of the CSS exam. It's important to note that students from Pakistan continue to struggle with writing in English after they have acquired their qualifications.

In the paper, Qureshi and Haidov^[21] suggested that in 2020, collocations are key to providing learners

with better creative writing skills because they find themselves having difficulty in organizing thoughts, using good grammar, and reading a language. The potential for improvement in competence can be shown by direct quotes from the English media. The exact cause of the failure in English essays, precis, and writing sections for CSS tests is to be determined by further research. According to Harmer^[22], students need to have an open mind if they want to expand their ideas and write more creatively. The student should have decent, broad thinking because their first thought will come to them before they can compose and write on paper. Cooze's study from 2006^[23] presents that EFL students frequently violate grammar norms, lexical conventions, and other aspects of language usage. Concerning the findings of his study which suggests that it is more important to focus on writing than all four English language skills, Shen^[24] offers his views these words that incorporating grammar instruction, such as sentence-combing exercises, can be beneficial for enhancing the composition skills of EFL students. Secondly, he asserts that the proper utilization of grammatical concepts is essential for any writing to fulfil its intended purpose, implying that no written work can accomplish its writing objectives without the correct application of grammar.

Iqbal et al.^[25] examines the linguistic features of argumentative essays submitted for CSS/PMS exams in Pakistan, Biber's multidimensional approach has been used to carry it out, to prepare for the examinations, researchers collected 30 controversial articles from popular Internet communities. Findings demonstrate that CSS/PMS candidates lack logical reasoning and argumentation based on facts, emphasizing information sharing over argument development. The analysis reveals grammatical, cohesion, and coherence issues. This study aims at assisting applicants in bridging this gap and improving their writing skills. Heydari and Bagheri 2012 carried out research on error Analysis in EFL which reveals their pivotal role as indicators of progress, offering valuable insights to teachers and shedding light on language acquisition strategies. This paper delves into foundational studies, equipping EFL educators with a comprehensive understanding of common errors and empowering them to implement impactful teaching strategies for optimal learning outcomes^[26].

Sajid et al.^[27] was carried out in 2015 by Ansari and Siddiqui regarding the publication of quality articles within a wide variety of social and science genres, as linguistic styles play an essential role. This study used the error analysis techniques such as Error Analysis to deal with the writing problems of new EFL writers and improve postgraduate students' ability to write research articles to make the language clearer and more understandable in this study 40 introductions from Pakistani journals of social and medical sciences were analyzed using the Markin-4 technique for lexicogrammatical. In 2020 a study was conducted, and it illuminates the transformative impact of incorporating collocations in language instruction, notably in creative writing. By facilitating fluency and addressing translation hurdles, teaching ready-made language chunks like collocations empowers learners to enhance their writing and language skills^[28]. This research advances pedagogical strategies, fosters dictionary development, and cultivates a holistic improvement in learners' linguistic capabilities^[29].

Focused on investigating the case of Punjabi secondary school students in Multan who have committed writing errors. It uses Corder's error analysis model to analyze the information gathered from the essays of thirty students in the matric class. Results demonstrate that students are not well acquainted with several fundamental grammatical concepts, especially tenses, singular plural names, verb forms, pronouns, and the proper use of adjectives and adverbs. The lack of confidence and uncertainty in students has been exacerbated by these linguistic shortcomings. It concludes that individuals can improve their language skills through special treatment, an appropriate learning environment, and a supportive atmosphere. Aamir Mahar has posted a CSS Beginner's Guide, discussing why it might not be all students who can take the exam, noting that intrinsic qualities such as creativity, perseverance, spontaneity, and ability to cope with stress play an important role. One of the barriers to success, which includes insufficient planning and practice, is recognized as not being adequately prepared. In addition, he also puts forward several solutions to this problem with a reminder of the need for enthusiasm and determination in preparing for the CSS examination by cautioning against relying

solely on shortcuts or advice without proper preparation. It emphasizes the importance of good guidance and makes it clear that there are no shortcuts to success^[29].

The Examiner report of 2014^[30] CSS Exam mentions weak areas of aspirants in English Essay, Precis, and Composition papers as the purpose of the question paper was to assess how well the candidates performed in terms of their conceptual, linguistic, and writing competencies; however, common patterns that were noticed included a lack of conceptual clarity, a superficial understanding of the subject, grammatical errors, and the inappropriate use of vocabulary and stereotype answers. Most candidates developed fragmented sentences instead of entire paragraphs, breaking from the traditions of confrontational debate. Most CSS students did not have an exhaustive reading, comprehensive perspective, or admirable ability to perform at the required level. The performance of the English essay was below expectations, as indicated by the 2016 examiner's report^[31]. By a considerable margin, 7841 or 81% out of the 9643 candidates who showed up in total performed better than this topic. The suggestions were made randomly. There was no sound logic or facts to back up the argument. There was a lack of coherence and consistency. The applicants have not been able to present an argument from a variety of perspectives or prove their case. There was an insufficient organization of the outline of the essay. The Essay response scripts rarely included the aspects specified in the outline. While the candidates' ability to write Precis was poor. Certain basic mistakes are capitalization, grammar, spelling, and the incorrect use of a third person or past phrase. A considerable proportion of the population does not properly understand word syntax, phrases, or etymologies.

Another problem has been the interference caused by First Languages. The exam did not pass for 8894 candidates out of 92%. The examination pointed out that there was a need for informing higher education institutions about the necessity of taking steps to improve graduate-level English skills. According to the examiner's reports of 2017^[32] CSS exams, the typical essays have been evaluated based on logic, substance, language, and intellectual signifiers. The standard and depth of critical arguments have been very weak in general. The majority of applicants were finding it difficult to distinguish between subjects with latent conflicts. The majority of publications contained low or irrelevant content. The main subject of these essays concerned the incorrect use of the British language. The grammatical structure had not been correct. In addition, the errors in syntax and grammar were frequent. The writing itself was mediocre in intellectual quality, and the applicants couldn't understand its subject matter. The overall performance of the candidates was low in English Precis and Writing. They could not produce original ideas, importance, mental clarity, or even a solid understanding of the issue. In terms of English grammar, sentence construction, word usage, and some other things, they seemed to have no familiarity at all. The given text (440 words) was anticipated to be summarised in 140 to 150 words. However, many of them did it in more than 600 words or as low as 50. The answers only repeat the sentences from a paragraph on the question paper. Most of the time, there was no handwriting at all. Candidates must clearly understand what the question requires and be able to give pertinent, concise, and comprehensive answers.

Several positive points for the applicants were also highlighted in the examination report of 2018^[33], given that a large proportion of candidates had a clear knowledge of what constitutes an excellent essay or why it differs from other types of writing. The characteristics of an ordinary work paper and the Commission's expectations concerning a competition test must be considered by candidates. These sections are presented in the examiner's report of 2019^[34] as weaknesses that were found to be common among a majority of candidates, whereas an analysis of paragraphs from essays and precis tests suggests different opportunities for improvement. In the essay part, candidates often did not express genuine thinking or critical analysis and submitted a series of Simplistic but limited responses. In addition, grammatical errors have been identified in the verb tense and subject-verb agreements. The apparent lack of understanding of the writing conventions for precis was evident from candidates' deviations from the content specified and their use of paraphrased sentences. Overall, the results of language proficiency tests were unsatisfactory, and there was a need for

further development in areas such as speech, grammar, agreement, or quotation. Applicants are asked to concentrate on originality, logical reasoning, and comprehension of the passage to succeed in competitive examinations.

2.2. Strengths of previous studies

The strengths of these research studies are to identify factors contributing to failure in the English essays, precis, and composition papers for the CSS exam, examine the relationship between language competencies and aptitude level, and provide strategies for improving them.

By reading a large amount of literature, such as articles, books, and previous research, the study is also based on relevant literature. It examines the significance of effective test-taking strategies, self-regulated learning, the writing process theory^[35], and the writing anxiety theory. The research reviews several studies that emphasize the importance of language proficiency in academic success, including studies on college students in Oman^[16] and Arab students. Other research studies highlight the role of collocations in enhancing creative writing skills, the need for open-mindedness in developing ideas, weaknesses in logical thinking and argument building in CSS/PMS candidates, and the improvement of research paper writing skills through error analysis. Additionally, the research incorporates the investigation of the move-step structure of argumentative essays^[36,37], the analysis of writing errors made by secondary school pupils^[28], and the insights provided in Aamir Mahar's CSS Beginners Guide. The examination reports of various years, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019, highlight shortcomings in the candidate's performance and provide recommendations for improvement.

2.3. Limitations of previous studies

In addition, the following research is restricted in scope: These studies rely on specific samples, such as CSS aspirants from particular regions or institutions, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the wider CSS exam population. Some studies have relied on self-reported data collected through surveys or questionnaires, which may lead to response biases and errors. The participants may be able to provide a socially acceptable answer or not accurately reflect their actual writing skills as in Imtiaz Mahmood's research. Other than this, these studies that focus on the last few years may give a view of factors contributing to failure during this period, but they cannot consider longer-term trends or changes over time. As a result, it was not easy to determine causation or identify certain factors that are unique to failure in the CSS exams with extensive studies that did not include controls or comparison groups.

Research has also revealed the common errors that students have made in the mentioned papers, such as weak language structure and sentences, a lack of coherence and logical flow, improper vocabulary use, or an inadequate understanding of precis writing style. Moreover, anxiety during the examination has been found to harm student performance and thus decrease their ability to read rapidly or organize thoughts. It has been demonstrated that the total quality of reading is reduced. Furthermore, future studies will need to implement practical approaches to improving writing skills, adequate funding, and a comprehensive training program to address inadequate English language proficiency and exam preparation. Research on improving precise handwriting skills and exploring efficient interventions such as language learning programs, specialized training in precis writing technique, or guidance for punctuality needs to be carried out.

To help CSS candidates improve their writing skills in the essay, specific interventions should be implemented, including more intensive preparation strategies, formative thinking development, vocabulary reinforcement, grammar advice, and guidance on how to structure their essays. In improving linguistic skills and writing techniques, further study is necessary to address grammatical errors encountered in CSS English Essay Writing, such as targeted language training, feedback, or systemic learning programs.

2.4. Gap covered in current research

Previous research's complete written portion of the CSS exam, including English Essay, Precis, and

Composition, had never been addressed through single research. CSS successful candidates had never been interviewed, so these gaps are covered through the current study.

3. Proposed methodology

To enhance students' English proficiency in specific areas, this study investigates the various factors influencing the performance of English essays, precis, and composition papers in the CSS tests. Employing a mixed-methods approach, both quantitative and qualitative data is collected. The primary data-gathering method involves distributing a survey questionnaire to CSS exam participants who have attempted the English essays, precis, and composition papers. Additionally, semi-structured interviews are conducted with successful CSS test winners employed as officials to gain deeper insights and opinions, described in **Table 1**.

A systematic survey questionnaire is developed to collect quantitative information from CSS exam candidates, particularly those who were previously unsuccessful. The questionnaire consists of close-ended questions focusing on the elements contributing to failure in English essays, precis, and composition papers. Students' difficulties are addressed, such as language proficiency, time management, comprehension of essay prompts, and common errors. The survey is distributed electronically to ensure a diverse sample of CSS exam candidates.

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with successful CSS exam applicants employed as officials. Purposeful sampling techniques are employed to select candidates based on their strong performance in English composition, precis, and essay papers. Open-ended questions are utilized during the interviews to facilitate flexible and in-depth analysis of the participants' experiences, strategies, and insights. The interviews cover factors that influenced their success, common errors made by students, and recommendations for enhancing English proficiency. The interviews are recorded with the participant's consent, and comprehensive notes are taken.

Table 1. Proposed study methodology is analyzed step-wise.

Step	Methodologies	Data Gathering	Analysis	Ethical Considerations
1	Survey	Develop a survey questionnaire	Descriptive statistics	Informed consent
		Close-ended questions focusing on failure factors and challenges	summarizing survey responses	Confidentiality
		-	Inferential analysis exploring correlations between variables	Anonymity
		Electronic distribution for diverse sample	Thematic analysis	-
2	Semi-structured interviews	Purposeful sampling of successful applicants as officials	Qualitative analysis of interview transcripts for recurring themes and insights	Consent; Confidentiality
		Open-ended questions on strategies, experiences, and recommendations	-	Anonymity
3	Data analysis	Descriptive statistics	Inferential analysis	-
		summarizing survey responses and interview data	examining correlations between variables	-
		Thematic analysis of interview transcripts	Triangulation of data for comprehensive insights	-
		Integration of quantitative and qualitative data	Development of strategies to improve English proficiency	-

Descriptive and inferential statistics are employed to analyze the quantitative data obtained from the survey questionnaire. Descriptive statistics summarize the frequency and distribution of responses, while inferential analysis identifies connections and correlations between variables. This investigation aims to

uncover the underlying causes of failure and their impact on student performance.

A thematic analysis approach is utilized to analyze the qualitative data gathered from the semi-structured interviews. The thematic analysis identifies recurring themes, patterns, and insights by transcribing the interviews verbatim. The study approach gives ethical considerations a top priority. All participants are asked for their informed consent before the interviews to ensure their consent to participate. Confidentiality and anonymity are rigorously upheld to safeguard the participants' identity, and any identifying information is omitted from the transcripts.

Combining the survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, this research aims to gather comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data to understand better the factors contributing to failure in English essays, precis, and composition papers in the CSS exam. Integrating both methods enables data triangulation, providing valuable insights for developing effective strategies to improve student's English proficiency.

4. Data analysis

This comprehensive data analysis presents the combined findings from semi-structured interviews and a survey conducted to investigate the reasons for failure in the Central Superior Services (CSS) English Essay, Precis, and Composition Paper. The interviews were conducted with successful CSS candidates, including Deputy Commissioners (DC), Assistant Commissioners (AC), Assistant Superintendents of Police (ASP), and Deputy Superintendents of Police (DSP). The survey collected responses on various aspects related to English essays, precis, and composition assignments in CSS exams from aspirants who have attempted the CSS exams. The aim was to identify the factors contributing to failure and gather suggestions for improvement from the participants were taken. The data is analyzed in **Table 2**.

Some of the quoted statements of CSS officials are as follows:

The AC Nizakat Dahani remarked, "the absence of adequate writing expression is one of the major grounds for failing in these papers. Ineffective expression impairs the coherence and clarity of concepts, making it difficult for the examiner to understand the arguments made. To succeed in these important components of the CSS exam, applicants must concentrate on enhancing their writing abilities, including vocabulary, sentence organization, and general coherence."

AC Zohaib Anjum highlighted the following factors contributing to failure in the written portion of CSS exams: "Poor understanding of grammar and English structure, lack of writing practice, and reliance on substandard books greatly affect the performance of candidates. It is crucial to have a strong foundation in grammar and practice writing extensively to improve. Additionally, language proficiency and grades are highly relevant, as they reflect the candidate's ability to effectively communicate ideas. Moreover, exam anxiety negatively impacts performance, leading to failure. Candidates must manage their anxiety levels and adopt strategies to perform optimally under pressure."

4.1. Data from the survey

The survey was conducted on those candidates who have attempted the CSS exam at least once in their life and got fail. The survey was consisting of close-ended as well as open-ended questions. These questions were about the factors that lead to failure in English Essay, Precis and Composition, relevancy of language proficiency and grades on each other, the effect of anxiety on CSS exam performance, common mistakes candidates do in CSS exam, the role of teachings methodologies in the improvement of this portion and ways to improve in the written portion of CSS exam.

Table 2. Data from interviews.

Participant Numbers (Civil Service Officers)	Overview of Suggestions	Reasons for failure	Solutions to improve
DC	Lack of Comprehension and Understanding	Lack of comprehension and understanding was identified as a reason for failure	Go through SAT vocabulary and use it effectively.
AC	Grammatical errors and lack of Organization	Grammatical errors, random spelling mistakes, and lack of organization are highlighted as reasons for failure	Practice more frequently, avoid overconfidence, and manage anxiety.
AC	Boring Essays and Inadequate Revision	Failure due to boring essays with no titles and inadequate revision	Stay focused, maintain a fresh mindset, and read and revise essays and précis thoroughly
AC	Poor Handwriting and Insufficient Précis Practice	Poor handwriting and insufficient practice of précis were identified as reasons for failure	Seek guidance from language experts, and practice précis regularly.
DC	Lack of Originality, no feedback provided, and Repetition	Lack of originality and repetition of ideas and vocabulary are seen as reasons for failure	Study and analyze sample materials to broaden knowledge and enhance creativity and a writing center should be established
DSP	Difficulty in Adapting to Essay Prompts and Précis Passages	Difficulty in adapting to specific prompts and passages mentioned.	Regularly practice timed writing exercises, and learns new strategies for effective analysis.
AC	Poor Organization and Lack of Coherence	Poor organization and lack of coherence were highlighted	Form an outline before attempting each part, ensuring a logical flow of ideas
DC	Failure to Understand and Address the Purpose	Failure to understand and address the purpose of essays and précis mentioned	Analyze requirements, and reflect the core purpose through written work
ASP	Insufficient Development of Ideas and Grammatical Mistakes	Insufficient development of ideas and grammatical mistakes are seen as reasons for failure	Read widely, engage in debates, practice grammar exercises, and study grammar books
AC	Failure to Reach Required Word Count	Failure to reach the required word count identified	Read more books related to different subjects to broaden your knowledge
DSP	Grammatical Mistakes and Exam Anxiety	Grammatical mistakes and exam anxiety are mentioned	Practice grammar exercises, study grammar books, apply rules in writing, and be confident and pressurefree.
DC	Neglecting Proofreading and Revision	Neglecting proofreading and revision leads to errors	Allocate specific time for proofreading, and pay attention to punctuation, spelling, and grammar
AC	Poor Writing Expression and Unnatural Diction	Poor writing expression and the use of unnatural diction led to failure	Include solid evidence, and attend courses to enhance précis writing skills
AC	Lack of Critical Thinking and Inclusion of Substandard Books	Lack of critical thinking, the inclusion of substandard books mentioned	Practice writing more often, consult Oxford and Cambridge grammar material, and revise the syllabus according to modern requirements
DC	Weak Induction and Conclusion in Essays	Weak induction and conclusion in essays fail and paper pattern CSS Exam	Revise the syllabus of Pakistan, work hard, and focus on learning and using natural vocabulary

4.1.1. Statistics on the population

The data collected in this section provides insights into the demographic characteristics and academic backgrounds of the respondents, as illustrated in **Figure 2**.

Regarding gender, out of the 58 respondents, 68.4% were female, 28.1% were male, and 3.5% preferred not to disclose their gender. In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents (84.2%) fell within the age range of 18–24, followed by 25–34 (12.3%) and 35–44 (2%). Regarding academic background, 58.6% of the respondents held an undergraduate degree, 31% had a graduate degree, and 10.3% had a Postgraduate

degree. When asked to rate their overall command of the English language, 50% of the respondents considered it to be good, while 31% rated it as excellent and 19% as Average.

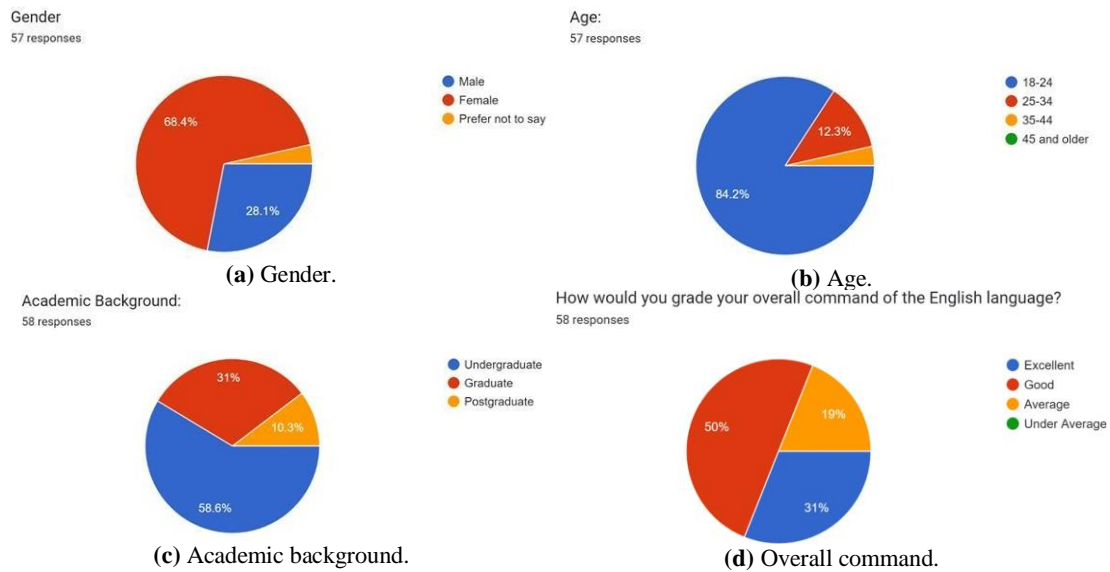


Figure 2. Data collected from survey.

Furthermore, 74.1% of the respondents had received official training or preparation for CSS tests' English essays, precis, and composition questions and 25.9% did not receive official preparation. In terms of the years in which they attempted CSS exams, the majority (75.6%) did so between 2018–2022, 14.6% gave CSS attempts between the range 2010–2014, and 9.8% did it between the year ranges 2014–2018.

4.1.2. Factors that affect CSS exams

This section explores the respondents' opinions on the factors that contribute to the failure of English essays, precis, and composition papers in CSS exams, as shown in **Figure 3**. The selected factors for potential failure include inadequate expertise in the subject (13.8%), (8.6%) lack of training and resources, lack of analytical and critical thinking abilities (22.4%), inadequate preparation for the exam (8.6%), time management issues (15.5%), poor grammar abilities (22.4%), exam phobia (5%), and a little vocabulary (8.6%).

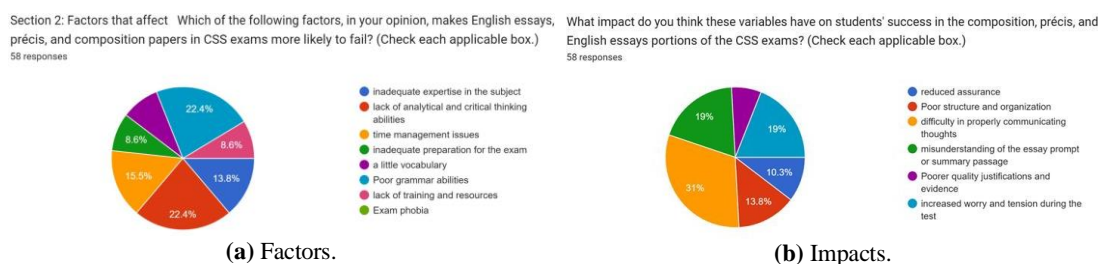


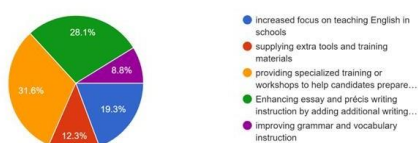
Figure 3. Data collected from survey.

According to the respondents, these factors have various impacts on students' success in the composition, precis, and English essays portions of the CSS exams. These impacts include reduced assurance (10.3%), poor structure and organization (13.8%), difficulty in properly communicating thoughts (31%), misunderstanding of the essay prompt or summary passage (19%), poorer quality justifications and evidence (6.9%), and increased worry and tension during the test (19%).

4.1.3. Techniques for enhancement

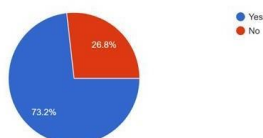
This section aims to identify the methods that respondents believe could help students improve their writing skills for English essays, precis, and compositions in CSS exams, as shown in **Figure 4**.

Section 3: Techniques for Enhancement What methods do you think should be used to help students write better English essays, précis, and compositions for CSS exams? (Check each applicable box.)
57 responses



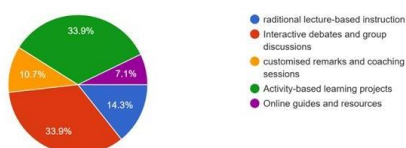
(a) Technologies.

Is there any relevancy between exams anxiety and performance of students . Please answer based on your previous experience of attempting the CSS exams.
56 responses



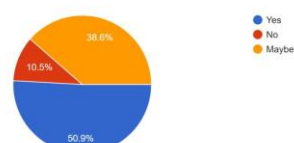
(c) Relevancy.

In order to improve students' performance in English Essay ,Precis and Composition which teaching technique would be most suitable suggest one .
56 responses



(e) Students performance.

Is there any dependency between language proficiency and grades in English essays, précis, and composition? Please answer based on your previous experience of attempting the CSS exams
57 responses



(b) Dependency.

If there is any relevancy so what impact it brings on the performance of English Essay ,Precis and Composition?
57 responses



(d) Impact.

Figure 4. Data collected from survey.

The recommended techniques include providing specialized training or workshops (31.6%), enhancing essay and précis writing instruction through additional practice and feedback (28.1%), increasing focus on teaching English in schools (19.3%), supplying extra tools and training materials (12.3%), and improving grammar and vocabulary instruction (8.8%).

Then to know what the aspirants' view was regarding the relevancy of language proficiency and grades in English Essay, Précis, and Composition, 50.9% responded "Yes" there is relevancy, while 10.5% responded "No" and the remaining 38.6% expressed uncertainty.

Furthermore, the analysis explored the relevancy between exam anxiety and students' performance based on 56 responses. The findings showed that 73.2% believed in the relevancy, while 26.8% did not. Among those who believed in the relevancy, 41 respondents answered "Yes," and 15 respondents answered "No."

Regarding the impact of exam anxiety on English Essay, Précis, and Composition performance, 57 respondents provided their insights. The most significant impacts identified were reduced creativity and critical thinking (26.3%), decreased focus and concentration (19.3%), decreased language proficiency (17.5%), no noticeable impact (8.8%), impaired time management (7%), weakened organization and structure (7%), limited coherence and cohesion (7%), negative impact on overall quality (7%), and no noticeable impact (26.3%).

Finally, when asked about suitable teaching techniques to improve students' performance, 56 respondents suggested various options. Activity-based learning projects received (33.9%), interactive debates and group discussions received (33.9%), Traditional lecture-based instruction received 14.3%, customized remarks, and coaching sessions received (10.7%), and online guides and resources also received 7.1%.

4.1.4. Additional comments

In this section, respondents were allowed to provide additional thoughts and recommendations regarding the reasons behind the lack of success in English essays, précis, and composition assignments in CSS tests. Drawing upon the amalgamated outcomes of both the interviews and the survey, a multitude of factors emerge as contributors to failure in the CSS English Essay, Précis, and Composition Paper. These encompass

deficiencies in comprehension, grammatical errors, inadequate organization, insufficient practice, and the prevalence of exam anxiety. Notably, the participants put forth valuable suggestions that underscore the importance of augmenting vocabulary, engaging in regular writing practice, fostering critical thinking abilities, and reevaluating the syllabus and examination requirements. By heeding these findings, prospective CSS aspirants can refine their preparation strategies, while educators and policymakers can glean insights to enhance the assessment process.

5. Results and findings

This unique research study aimed to investigate the factors that contribute to the failure of CSS exam candidates in English Essays, Precis, and Composition papers. This chapter presents the findings obtained from the data analysis, providing an overview of the results without extensive interpretation or discussion. The study included interviews with a diverse range of CSS participants, such as DC, AC, SSP, ASP, and DSP, who shared their insights into the challenges they faced during the CSS exams. Additionally, a survey collected responses from CSS aspirants who attempted the CSS exams but failed, providing valuable insights into various aspects related to English essays, precis, and composition assignments.

5.1. Descriptive overview

A summary of the participants' characteristics was provided, including their demographics and overall proficiency in the English language. This information helps to gain a better understanding of the profile of CSS aspirants who participated in the study. Successful candidates were asked about these things in the interview and others responded through survey questions as shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Table from another survey just for providing an Example.

Timestamp	Gender	Age	Academic background
07/07/2023 22:38:58	Male	21	MS
07/07/2023 22:39:18	Female	35	M.Phil.
07/07/2023 22:39:43	Male	31	MS
07/07/2023 22:40:16	Male	30	MPhil
07/07/2023 22:40:39	Male	29	BS
07/07/2023 22:41:40	Male	28	MS
07/07/2023 22:42:16	Female	25	BS
07/07/2023 22:42:49	Male	24	BSC
07/07/2023 22:43:45	Male	27	MPhil
07/07/2023 22:44:16	Male	26	MS

5.2. Key findings

5.2.1. Interview

The interview findings revealed several key factors contributing to failure in the CSS exams. These factors included a lack of comprehension and understanding, grammatical errors, inadequate organization, poor handwriting, insufficient practice, lack of originality, difficulty in adapting to essay prompts and precis passages, poor organization, failure to understand and address the purpose, insufficient development of ideas, failure to reach the required word count, grammatical mistakes, neglecting proofreading and revision, poor writing expression, and weak induction and conclusion in essays.

5.2.2. Survey

The survey findings provided additional insights into the factors affecting CSS exams. Respondents highlighted inadequate expertise in the subject, lack of training and resources, lack of analytical and critical

thinking abilities, inadequate exam preparation, time management issues, poor grammar abilities, exam phobia, and limited vocabulary as potential factors contributing to failure. These factors were found to impact students' success in terms of reduced assurance, poor structure and organization, difficulty in communicating thoughts effectively, misunderstanding essay prompts or summary passages, poorer quality justifications and evidence, and increased worry and tension during the exam.

5.3. Supporting evidence

To support these findings, relevant quotations and examples were included, showcasing participants' experiences and highlighting the specific challenges they faced in essay writing during the CSS exams as quotations by ACs' are mentioned, and pie charts are the evidence of this research's findings.

5.4. Limitations and constraints

When the research was conducted, it was crucial to remain mindful of the potential limitations that could arise throughout the study. One significant limitation to consider was sample bias, where the survey questionnaire employed for data collection may have only reached a specific subset of CSS exam participants willing to respond, potentially leading to a biased sample. Those who were unsuccessful in previous attempts might have been less inclined to participate, resulting in an underrepresentation of their perspectives. This limitation could have affected the generalizability of the study's findings, as the sample might not have adequately encompassed the diverse range of CSS exam candidates.

Another significant limitation to address was self-reporting bias, wherein participants' responses in the survey questionnaire may have been influenced by recall bias or social desirability bias. They might have provided responses they believed were expected or socially acceptable, rather than candidly expressing their genuine experiences. Such bias had the potential to impact the accuracy and reliability of the collected data. To mitigate this limitation, it was essential for researchers to prioritize confidentiality and anonymity, emphasizing the importance of participants providing honest and authentic responses.

Additionally, it was important to recognize the potential limitations in the scope of the conducted interviews. While semi-structured interviews with successful CSS exam applicants currently employed as officials offered valuable insights, this approach might not have captured the full range of perspectives from all successful candidates. This limitation could have potentially restricted the depth and diversity of the qualitative data collected. To address this, researchers could have explored the possibility of including interviews with successful candidates from various professional backgrounds or those who had pursued different career paths. This expanded approach would have enriched the data by incorporating a broader range of perspectives.

Lastly, it was crucial to acknowledge the impact of time and resource constraints on the study. Conducting surveys and interviews could be a time-consuming and resource-intensive endeavour. Limited availability of time or resources might have imposed constraints on the number of participants or the breadth of data collected, potentially affecting the overall comprehensiveness and depth of the study's findings. Consequently, careful planning and allocation of resources were necessary to optimize the data collection process, ensuring that the study's objectives were effectively met within the given limitations.

In conclusion, this results chapter presented the key findings obtained from the data analysis. The factors contributing to failure in English Essay, Precis, and Composition papers during CSS exams were identified, including a lack of clarity in writing, weak grammar and vocabulary, time management issues, insufficient preparation, and an inadequate understanding of essay structure. These findings provide valuable insights for improving performance in CSS exams. The interpretation and discussion of the results will be presented in subsequent chapters, offering a more comprehensive analysis and implications of the findings.

6. Research conclusions

This study sought to identify the elements that influence students' performance on the English essays, precis, and composition portions of the CSS exam and suggest methods for raising students' English ability in these areas. The study's mixed-methods approach included a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with successful CSS exam candidates. The results identified many essential elements contributing to subpar performance on these examinations, including inadequate English language ability, a lack of analytical and critical thinking abilities, poor time management, and inadequate exam preparation. Grammar and sentence structure flaws, a lack of coherence and logical flow, poor word use, and issues with essay and precis writing forms were all frequent faults made by students. Additionally, it was discovered that exam stress harmed students' writing style and content quality. To address these challenges and to tackle these difficulties research recommends improving students' writing skills, the study recommends practical interventions such as language proficiency development programs, targeted training on writing techniques, and guidance on time management. It also emphasizes the importance of providing comprehensive resources, structured training programs, and increased awareness of writing rules and structuring steps.

This research contributes to the existing knowledge by identifying the gaps and limitations in previous studies and CSS aspirants can utilize it to enhance their writing abilities and increase their chances of success in the CSS exam.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, KG, WS, AR, EH, RAZ, KA, RS and LA; methodology, KG; software, KG; validation, KG; formal analysis, KG; investigation, KG; resources, KG; data curation, KG; writing—original draft preparation, KG; writing—review and editing, KG, WS, AR, EH, RAZ, KA, RS and LA; visualization, KG; supervision, KG. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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