



**Investigating EFL Learners' Difficulties in Writing Performance.
A Case study of Secondary Schools, Gezira State, Sudan,(2020)**

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ABSTRACT:

Writing is one of the most difficult tasks for many of EFL students. This study aims at: investigating EFL learners' difficulties in writing performance and encouraging EFL teachers to use modern techniques in teaching writing. The study adopted the descriptive analytical method. The data were collected by means of a questionnaire which was distributed to (50) English language teachers at secondary schools in Eastern Gezira Locality, Gezira State (2021). Then the collected data were analyzed by the (SPSS) program. The study came out with many results, the most important ones are :some EFL students face problems in writing performance due to the lack of vocabulary, errors in spelling or the use of grammar, most EFL teachers still use traditional method of teaching writing. The study recommends the use of some teaching techniques of developing EFL learners' writing skills like: extensive reading, collaborative activities, pre-writing activities, brainstorming techniques and the use of modern technology.

writing difficulties, lack of vocabulary, pre-writing, modern techniques

KEYWORDS

المستخلص

الكتابة هي إحدى المهمات التي يصعب علي الكثير من الطلاب تجويدها . تهدف هذه الدراسة إلي بحث مشكلات الكتابة التي يعاني منها بعض طلاب اللغة الانجليزية بالمرحلة الثانوية و تشجيع المعلمين علي تدريس مهارة الكتابة باستخدام أساليب تدريس حديثة وفعالة. اتبعت الدراسة المنهج التحليلي الوصفي كما استخدمت الباحثة نظام الاستبانة لجمع البيانات من خمسين (50) معلماً ومعلمة للغة الإنجليزية من محلية شرق الجزيرة بولاية الجزيرة السودان (2021) . تم تحليل البيانات بالنظام الإحصائي (SPSS) وتوصلت الدراسة الى أن الكثير من طلاب اللغة الانجليزية يرتكبون بعض الأخطاء في واجباتهم الكتابية نتيجة قلة المفردات اللغوية والتمهي أو الضعف في قواعد اللغة .أوصت الدراسة باستخدام بعض أساليب التدريس الفعالة في تطوير مهارة الكتابة للطلاب مثل القراءة المكثفة والأنشطة التعاونية و أسلوب الأسئلة والأنشطة الذهنية واستخدام التقنيات الحديثة.

كلمات مفتاحية: صعوبات الكتابة ، نقص المفردات، كتابة قبلية ، تقنيات حديثة

1. Introduction

Writing skill is an important medium of communication. Through writing people can communicate their thoughts, ideas, and attitudes. However, writing is a difficult skill for many of EFL learners who need it in their academic discourse. Alsamadani (2010) points out that L2 writing is more demanding as it is a complex and challenging process in which writers are required to produce writing form considering the accuracy of syntax, the acceptability of semantics, and the appropriateness of culture. This means that writing, according to Byrne (1993) is a complex process because it requires the mastery of grammatical devices, conceptual thinking, and judgmental elements. Therefore, proficient writing would not be achieved with students lacking self-confidence and unwilling to disclose their feelings over writing. Most students, in this sense, are inclined to show negative attitudes towards writing. .

1.2 The Problem of the Study

Many of Sudanese secondary schools students find it difficult to write a piece of discourse cohesively. Many of them commit errors in their writing performance. This study draws the teachers' attention towards improving EFL learners' writing skills.

1.3 Research Objectives

The study aims at:

1. investigating EFL learners' difficulties in writing performance.
2. encouraging EFL teachers to use modern techniques in teaching writing.

1.4 Research Questions

The study tries to answer the following questions:

1. What are the difficulties that face EFL learners in writing performance?
2. To what extent do EFL teachers use effective teaching techniques in teaching writing ?

1.5 The Hypothesis of the study

The study hypothesizes that :

1. Many of EFL learners commit errors in their writing performance.
2. Most of EFL teachers use traditional methods of teaching writing.

1.6 Significance of the Research

This study investigates EFL students' writing difficulties, discusses the teaching techniques used in Sudanese secondary schools and suggests some teaching techniques for improving learners' writing, including the use of modern technology in EFL classes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Yule (2010), writing is the symbolic representation of language through the use of graphic signs. Writing needs more practice of activities for learners unlike speech that is acquired. The learner has to learn how to write in order to be a good writer. According to Cumming (1998, p.61), writing is not only referred to as a text in the written script but also as the acts of thinking, composing, and encoding language into such text. Thus, in composing writing, one is highly required to involve an entirely different set of competencies (Brown, 2000, p.335) as it implicates extra efforts in understanding, thinking, planning, and revising. Similarly, students' emotions, such as the interest in writing, anxiety, lack of self-efficacy and confusion, play a pivotal role for the development of individual learning (Driscoll and Powell, 2016). In an academic context, writing has

become the most important skill that students must be mastered (Tseng, 2019). Byrne (1991) also states that the symbols have to be arranged or combined to form words, and words to form sentences, and sentences to form paragraphs and essays.

2.1 The Importance of Writing

Writing is an essential skill in learning a language. It is a means of communication that enables EFL learners to organize their ideas and opinions about a certain subject. According to s one (Jabali, 2018), writing is crucially essential for EFL learners as to help students perform a different kinds of activities that requires all language skills like speaking and listening. (Apsari, 2017) argues that writing is important for career and personal life because others will judge our thinking ability according to what we write and how we write it. For students to develop their writing competence, they are expected to produce a well-structured piece of writing (Ceylan, 2019).

2.2 Writing Problems

Writing is the most difficult skill for learners, (Byrne, 1991) argues that writing is a difficult task for learners because it requires conscious mental effort and takes time to learn it. He classifies the difficulties into three types. The first is a psychological problem where the writer faces the problem of lack of interaction and feedback between the writer and the reader. The second is a linguistic problem because writers have to express their ideas in a grammatical sense. The third is a cognitive problems in that writing has to be taught over formal instructions where the writer masters the organization of his or her ideas in written communication. In line with these problems, (Mundriah and Parmawati, 2016) argue that, the factors which influence writing process are: (1) psychology problem, a lecturer is expected to be able to write his/her own without the possibility of interaction or feedback, and itself makes the act of writing difficulties; (2) linguistics problem, a lecturer must keep the communication through his/her own efforts and to ensure, both through his/her choice of sentences structure and by the way his/her sentences are linked together and sequenced, that the text he/ she writes or produces can be interpreted on its own; (3) cognitive problem, a lecturer has to master the written form of the language and to learn certain structures which are important for effective communication in writing.

The obstacles derive from many aspects as vocabulary and diction (Meslissorgou & Frantzi, 2015), grammatical features organization (Hajeid, 2018), and teaching process (Ceylan, 2019). Accordingly, the major difficulties found in students' writing are mostly in the areas of vocabulary and grammar. Furthermore, Winarto (2015) has also revealed that EFL students' writing strategies influence to their writing performance. Various types of writing strategies are mostly used by learners as: (1) direct strategies including memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies, and (2) indirect strategies including metacognitive, affective, and social strategies (Winarto, 2015). Those strategies can be implemented successfully depending on each language learning context where they are integrated.

Concerning the problems of EFL learners' in writing, (Al-samadani,2010,p.53) stated that it *"is a complex, challenging, and difficult process"* because it includes multiple skills such as identification of thesis statement, writing supporting details, reviewing and editing. This complex process makes it rather difficult to teach it. The difficulty of teaching/learning of this skill is due to the fact that it involves a comprehensive knowledge of grammar, suitable vocabulary, writing mechanics (e.g., punctuation and capitalization), organizational skills, style, imagination etc. Another factor that makes teaching of writing rather difficult is that it has been

historically dealt with vis-à-vis the other skills. According to (Toba et al., 2019), most of writing difficulties committed by students in following areas: (1) structural, (2) grammatical, (3) mechanical, and (4) vocabulary.

Additionally, EFL students do not come to school with the same background knowledge as native English speakers; therefore, it is more difficult for them to write with meaning. Their vocabulary is often limited, and while they can communicate orally and be understood through gestures and so forth, writing proves to be frustrating for them as they attempt to express their ideas without the luxury of using their hands.

(FuLan,2006) believes this expectation of failure, causes anxiety in writing which can happen due to two scenarios: first, when students are asked to write about a specific topic and second, when students think of writing as a translating activity. However, anxiety and frustration in writing may be caused by unnecessary focus on errors in spelling and grammar, instead of content. All of these factors contribute to the ongoing problem of writing successfully as an ESL student

(Nunan,1999) believed that the most difficult task to do in language learning is to produce a coherent, fluent, extended piece of writing, which is even more challenging for second language learners. According to (Darayseh, 2003), teaching writing no longer means simply having students do grammar exercises in writing or getting writing which is free from grammar, punctuation and spelling mistakes, instead, we are after writing about what students are interested in and what they really want to communicate to the reader, and how they reach their final writing products. (Colantone ,1998) argues that, many EFL teachers follow the traditional method in teaching composition concentrating on the final product rather than on the process of writing. In writing classes, teachers emphasize mechanics, spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, width of margins, and so on, with little attention to development or style.

2.3 The Significance of Learners' Errors

(James,1998,p.1) maintains that errors made by learners are very valuable to the degree that they can be like a register that shows their current progress on the learned language. (Lengo,1995,p. 20) states that:

“errors play an important role in the study of language acquisition in general and examining second and foreign language learning in particular. Researchers are interested in errors because they are believed to contain valuable information on the strategies that people use to acquire a language”

However, errors are believed to be an indicator of the learner's stages in their TL development. From the errors that learners commit, one can determine their level of mastery of the language systems. Again, (Lengo, ibid) explains that, the investigation of errors has a double purpose: it is diagnostic and prognostic. It is diagnostic, because it can tell us about the learner's development at a given point during the learning process and prognostic because it can tell course organizers to reorient language learning materials on the learner's current problems.

3. Material and Method

The participants of this study were the EFL teachers of secondary schools, Eastern Gezira Locality, Gezira State, Sudan,(2021). To collect the required data for the research, a questionnaire was distributed among fifty (50) of them who were randomly selected. Then, the collected data were statistically analyzed with the SPSS program. The results were shown in the following tables:

4. Data Analysis

Statement(1) Some EFL students commit common errors in their writing performance

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
Neutral	4	8.0	8.0	10.0
Agree	45	90.0	90.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

table (1) shows that, some EFL students commit common errors in their writing performance. According to the statistical analysis of table (1) most respondents (90%), (8%) neutral and (2%) disagree that, some EFL students commit common errors in their writing performance. Therefore, this statement is accepted.

Statement (2) Most EFL teachers still use traditional method of teaching writing

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	4	8.0	8.0	8.0
Neutral	8	16.0	16.0	24.0
Agree	38	76.0	76.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table (2) shows that most respondents (76%) agree that, most EFL teachers still use traditional method of teaching writing. Accordingly, (16%) disagree and (8%) not sure that, most EFL teachers still use traditional method of teaching writing. Therefore this statement is accepted.

Statement (3) Many students do not use cohesive devices in their writing.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	4	8.0	8.0	8.0
Neutral	7	14.0	14.0	22.0
Agree	39	78.0	78.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table (3) shows that, students do not use more cohesive devices in their composition writing. Most respondents (78%) agree, (8%) disagree and (14%) neutral that, students should use more cohesive devices in their composition writing. According to the statistical analysis the statement is accepted.

Statement (4) Effective practice of extensive reading improves writing

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	5	10.0	10.0	10.0
Agree	45	90.0	90.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table (4) shows that most respondents (90 %) agree and (10%) disagree that , reading improves writing. According to the statistical analysis of statement (5) most respondents (90%) agree with the statement. Thus this statement is accepted.

Statement (5) Collaborative writing activities motivate EFL learners to improve their writing performance

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
Neutral	2	4.0	4.0	10.0
Agree	45	90.0	90.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The statistical results in table (5) show that,most respondents (90%) agree , (28%) agree and (4%) neutral and (6%) disagree that, collaborative writing activities motivate EFL learners to improve their writing performance.

Statement (6) Teaching techniques of writing influences students' ability in their writing production

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	5	10.0	10.0	10.0
Neutral	6	12.0	12.0	22.0
Agree	39	78.0	78.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The statistical analysis in table (6) indicates that, (78%) of respondents , (12%) neutral and (10%) disagree that, teaching students how to write influences their performance. So, that this statement is accepted.

Statement (7) Using questioning strategy in writing activities in the classroom helps students to generate and arrange ideas.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	6	12.0	12.0	12.0
Neutral	5	10.0	10.0	22.0
Agree	39	78.0	78.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table (7) shows that most respondents (78%) agree, (10%) neutral and (12%) disagree that, using questioning strategy in writing activities in the classroom helps students to generate and arrange ideas. Therefore this statement is accepted

Statement (8) Pre-writing activity in the classroom help learners improve their writing

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	5	10.0	10.0	10.0
Neutral	4	8.0	8.0	18.0
Agree	41	82.0	82.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table (8) shows that most respondents (82%) agree, (8%) neutral and (10%) of the sample disagree that, pre-writing activity in the classroom help learners improve their writing. Accordingly, this statement is accepted.

Statement (9) Brainstorming techniques develop EFL students' essay writing skills.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
Neutral	9	18.0	18.0	22.0
Agree	39	78.0	78.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

According to the statistical analysis of table (9), most respondents (78%) disagree, (18%) neutral and (4%) of the sample agree that, brainstorming techniques develop EFL students' essay writing skills. Therefore this statement is not accepted.

Statement(10) Using modern in teaching writing helps students to improve their writing performance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	5	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Neutral	4	8.0	8.0	18.0
	Agree	41	82.0	82.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table (10) shows that, modern media helps students to improve their writing performance. According to the data in table (10) most respondents (82%) agree, (8%) neutral and (10%) of the sample disagree that, modern media helps students to improve their writing performance. This statement is accepted.

5.0 Findings and Recommendations:

After analyzing the data, the study states the findings and recommendations.

5.1 Findings

The study came out with the following findings:

1. Some EFL students face problems in writing performance as a result of lack of vocabulary, errors in spelling and grammar.
2. Most EFL Sudanese teachers still use traditional method of teaching writing.
3. Practicing extensive reading improves learners' writing.
4. Collaborative writing activities motivate EFL learners to improve their writing performance.
5. Using questioning strategy help students to generate and arrange ideas.
6. Practicing pre-writing activity in the classroom helps learners to improve their writing.
7. Using brainstorming techniques in writing develops EFL students' essay writing skills.
8. Using modern technology in teaching writing improves students' writing performance.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends:

1. EFL learners should practice extensive reading for improves writing.
2. Collaborative writing activities should be created in EFL classes for improving students' writing performance.
3. Questioning strategy should be used by the teacher to help students to generate and arrange ideas.
4. Pre-writing activity should be practiced in the classroom for helping learners improve their writing.
5. Brainstorming techniques in writing should be practiced in EFL classes to develop EFL students' essay writing skills.
6. Modern technology should be used in teaching writing to help students to improve their writing performance.

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