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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Writing Difficulties among Undergraduate Arab Students in English Language: A Case Study of King Khalid University

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| ABSTRACT

Writing is one of the important skills for English language acquisition. This study aims to investigate the issues of EFL learners' difficulties in writing skills. Writing is the most prior skill in developing the English language. To examine the cause and issues of writing skills, the study was conducted among undergraduate Arab students in the English department at King Khalid University, Science and Arts College for girls, AlMajardha. A semi-structured interview was conducted with five English department undergraduate students. All the participants are requested to write an answer to the research questions which are applied to this study investigation. The answers of the participants in writing skills showed that all of them have problems in writing and lacking in English writing skills, such as grammar mistakes, spelling mistakes and difficulties in punctuation marks. With clear examination, the study proves that students need to develop knowledge in grammatical skills, vocabulary building and compositional skills.

| KEYWORDS

Writing skills, EFL, grammatical skill and compositional skill.

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### 1. Introduction

Verbal literacy is very important in English language acquisition; however, writing is significantly related to acquiring linguistics knowledge. Writing is always considered to be a critical skill compared to other skills in the English language. Any EFL or ESL learners who fail to improve their writing skills may have difficulty in academic progress as well as in personal development. It is a fact that writing is critical among EFL and ESL learners; the difficulty which relates to writing clearly, and precisely and in organizing the sentences. Writing without any error always seems to be a challenge to EFL learners, but this can be improved with linguistic knowledge in the English language, so constant practice is needed for the EFL learners writing skills development.

Four skills in the English language are very necessary to master the language, the four skills namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among the four skills, writing becomes the most difficult skill for Arab students because of the alphabetical system between Arabic and English language. "Writing is the process of communicating thoughts and ideas in a readable form by employing symbols such as alphabet letters, punctuation and spaces" (Banwell,2018). Writing skills depend on other skills as well; poor attention to reading and listening skills lead to problems in writing the language. A simple spelling mistake is important to note as to how the pronunciation mistake is noted. However, pronunciation mistakes are not considered illiteracy, but grammar, spelling mistakes and poor sentence constructions will show the learners' knowledge of the writing skills.

#### 1.1 Importance of writing skills

Writing includes forming letters along with lower-level and higher-level skills. Lower-level skills include grammar rules, spelling, punctuation, and higher-level skills include narrative writing and, formal sentence construction and so on. These are necessary for writing because it is one of the strongest ways to transfer communication to others; from the beginning, written communication

benefitted society by providing knowledge and cultural practices, which shows that writing is very important in every language, but when it comes to EFL or ESL it judges the knowledge in your learning of English Language. Writing is an essential skill for communication, along with speaking skills. High-quality written skills prove the EFL or ESL learners' knowledge of the English language, so to improve their writing skills, the learner must expand the vocabulary with the help of reading along with the knowledge of grammar rules. Therefore, writing helps learners to be creative in their tasks which constitutes the importance of communication and has a positive effect on their academic performances.

### **1.2 Objective of the study**

This study aims to analyse the problems and issues of EFL learners' difficulties in writing in the English language.

## **2. Literature review**

According to Muhammad Nadeem Anwar & Nazir Ahmed (2016), investigation with second language learners in writing is more difficult than speaking because the former is more formal than the latter. Writing skills cannot be developed without being proficient in the vocabulary and grammar of that language. Therefore, writing must follow conscious construction than speaking, which relates to complex sentences and narratives. Writing simply includes sentences, and when sentences are combined into paragraphs and paragraphs into chapters, then chapters into books, therefore all sentences need to be followed with careful writing structure. So, to improve the EFL learners' writing skills, they could need constant practice in writing because academic writing requires formal, clear, and unpretentious prose writing.

Writing is the process of communicating thoughts and ideas in a readable form by employing symbols such as alphabets letters, punctuation, and spaces. (Banwell,2018). Therefore, writing is a proper way to convey ideas and thoughts to society. Hyland (2002) stresses the reliance on style, content, and tangible information and detail that protect the formal style that qualifies writing to be academic and thus presented to its specific audience, scholars, and teachers.

Bryne (1988) divided the problems that make writing difficult into three categories. The first is the linguistic difficulty. Linguistics aspects like grammar, vocabulary, language use and choice of sentences in writing must have fully monitored. Considering the main features of academic writing, it becomes a problem for EFL or ESL learners to construct accurate, clear and organized sentences, but errors and mistakes are common in learning English as a foreign language.

## **3. Methodology**

This study focuses on problems and errors in EFL students writing skills in the English language. Qualitative methodology was followed to achieve the objective of this study because the qualitative method enables participants to express their behavior and experiences towards their problem in writing the English language. Therefore, a semi-structured interview was arranged with the participants to observe the causes. The semi-structured interview included two sections, pre and post-writing interviews with the participants.

### **3.1 Participants**

This study was conducted with four EFL female students from the English department, the participants are studying BA English and literature course, and they are from different levels at Science and Arts College of Majadra for girls, King Khalid University.

### **3.2 Research Question**

This aims to answer the following main question in this research.

- What are the errors often committed by EFL students when writing in the English language?

## **4. Results and Discussions**

This study analyses the answers to the research questions from the pre and post-interviews of the participants. The five students are identified as S1 to S5 in this research. Pre-writing interview's first question is, "Do you follow any strategies to improve the English writing skills"? S1 said that "I do follow some strategies like focusing on reading to learn spelling so that I can write anything without spelling mistakes". This answer shows that the student is very limited in improving his writing skills.

S2 stated that "I do not follow any particular steps for improving than the classroom learning", While S3 said, "I try to learn how to use the punctuation marks in writing correctly, but I am still struggling to write it". All these students are at different levels, but their knowledge of writing skills seems that they all need to improve to a higher level in academic writing.

S4 added that "I used to have spelling mistakes while writing, even in the exam, but I have the desire to improve myself by practising all paragraphs or sentences before any writing tasks".

Grammar mistakes, spelling, and punctuation are the most common errors made by Arab EFL students when writing in English. All the participants seem they are very limited in their knowledge of writing skills, and they desire to improve their skills in different

ways. Secondly, the participants are requested to answer the post-writing question, such as what are the mistakes you make while writing in the English language?

The participants answer as follows:

S1 said that *"Yes, I make mistakes in writing letters, and when I begin to write, I forget some letters, and I make spelling mistakes".* S2 added that *"I misspell a lot. Considering that my first language is Arabic, the way you write words is determined by what you hear, and that isn't the case most of the time in English, also done by many students; this stems from out start in learning the language and nobody taught writing skills in the beginning".*

S3 added that *"sometimes I forget letters and I don't find vocabulary, so that makes my narrative not clear or not good. Also, I have a problem with a lack of focus on the topic of the text, and I can't sometime write the silent letter in the word".* S4 stated that *"I make mistakes in word order and spelling. Sometimes can't write some difficult words, and most of the time, I forget the starting the sentence in capital letters".*

All the participants were also requested to answer if they could write a narrative text on a particular topic.

S1 stated that *"I don't think so because I lack in words, and I can't organize the ideas into the correct order".*

S2 said that *"It's not that easy for me, but I found that if I think about it and prepare it firstly in my first language (Arabic) and then I can translate ideas into English".*

S3 simply said, *"No, I don't".*

S4 stated that *"Because I have a problem in vocabulary, grammar rules and spelling, I can't construct a sentence or paragraph on my own".*

From the above discussions, the study finds that they have difficulty and problems with capitalization, spelling mistakes and lack of knowledge in vocabulary, and due to that, they are committing frequent errors while writing in the English language. Also, the responses show that they have less knowledge of academic writing practices. The study results suggest that learners develop reading habits because reading will help the learner to build their vocabulary.

## 5. Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, the main objective of this study is to identify the difficulties of Arab in learning English as a second language, particularly in writing. To conclude, the present study found that the most frequent errors made by Arab EFL learners were in using punctuation marks in the right position, and discussions show that they have major problems in writing the English language. Most of the frequent errors made by Arab EFL learners are grammar mistakes, spelling mistakes, punctuation, and problems in organizing ideas to construct a sentence. Punctuation marks are very important to express any ideas in the right way, and EFL learners also need to be aware of grammar rules and spelling mistakes to improve their writing skills in the English Language. Most of the students are very limited in knowledge of academic writing, so to improve their standards, teachers also must pay more attention during class time for the development of skills. The study also found that all Arab EFL learners need improvements and practice more on their writing skills, such as grammatical structure, spelling, punctuation marks, capitalization, and good knowledge of vocabulary because writing is a very necessary skill to master the English language.

### 5.1 Suggestion for future study

Since the study was only conducted on a small number of students, the study should be expanded and conducted on a large number of students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia so that the results are more clear and more comprehensive.

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