

Difficulties Faced by Iraqi EFL Students in Writing Research Paper**Tha'er Adnan Jameel*****Sunni Endowment Diwan- Department of Religious Education and Islamic****Studies: Baghdad– Iraq****adnanthair81@gmail.com**** <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8002-8220>****Received: 24/11/2024, Accepted: 26/12/2024, Published: 30/12/2024**

Abstract: The assessment of writing competence is the main objective of the current study. One of the most significant categories of linguistic awareness is thought to be this one Written form, according to (Good , 1973, p. 67), is the capacity to learn the necessary writing skills while putting in the least amount of time and effort possible given the volume of work completed. The challenge of the current study is that most college students find it difficult to write their research papers. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to look into the difficulties that students have when writing papers. It also seeks to offer a questionnaire for evaluating students' awareness of written skills. It's believed that Iraqi EFL students are incapable of finishing their research papers. Only twenty students enrolled in the fourth stage of Al-Anbar University/College of Education are included in the data set. Quantitative analysis would be the approach taken. Lastly, it has been found that Iraqi EFL students are incapable of achieving writing proficiency in particular domains..

Keywords: WRITING, ACADEMIC WRITING, EFL, RESEARCH PAPER.

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الصعوبات التي تواجه طلاب اللغة الانجليزية العراقيون في كتابة الأبحاث

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ملخص: إن تقييم كفاءة الكتابة هو الهدف الرئيسي للدراسة الحالية. ويعتقد أن أحد أهم فئات الوعي اللغوي هو الشكل الكتابي، وفقاً لـ (1973: 67)، فهو القدرة على تعلم مهارات الكتابة الضرورية مع بذل أقل قدر ممكن من الوقت والجهد بالنظر إلى حجم العمل المنجز. إن التحدي الذي تواجهه الدراسة الحالية هو أن معظم طلاب الكليات يجدون صعوبة في كتابة أوراقهم البحثية. لذلك، فإن الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو النظر في الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلاب عند كتابة الأوراق البحثية. كما تسعى الدراسة إلى تقديم استبيان لتقييم وعي الطلاب بالمهارات الكتابية. يُعتقد أن طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقيين غير قادرين على إنهاء أوراقهم البحثية. تم تضمين عشرين طالباً فقط مسجلين في المرحلة الرابعة بجامعة الأنبار / كلية التربية في مجموعة البيانات. سيكون التحليل الكمي هو النهج المتبع. أخيراً، وجد أن طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقيين غير قادرين على تحقيق كفاءة الكتابة في مجالات معينة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكتابة، الكتابة الأكاديمية، اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية، كتابة البحوث.

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1. Introduction

Writing correctly and in acceptable style is a significant issue for non-native speakers, particularly EFL students. Students in the fourth stage learn English for a definite academic objective in order to meet academic standards. To utilize the language effectively, people must be skilled in the writing method, traits and elements such as complexity, formality, and objectivity. Writing is regarded as a device of learning language, a critical skill in daily life, and a major category of teaching any foreign language, as it is an essential productive skill for EFL learners in specific. Besides, it is regarded as the foundation for efficacious academic goal in educational system. Therefore, better English language usage requires greater experience, in-depth interpretation, and a thorough understanding of the target language lexicon. (Aajami, 2018, p. 89)

Statement of the Problem

A prevalent issue identified in the study is the lack of confidence among the majority of students when it comes to composing research papers, particularly in tasks such as describing individuals, locations, articulating opinions, and so forth. This deficiency in expressive writing ability not only hampers their academic progress but also chokes their creative potential. Effective research paper writing necessitates the talent to employ coherent structures for crafting meaningful and accurate expressions across diverse formats.

1.1 Research Question:

The study tries to obtain answers for the following two questions:

1. What are the difficulties faced Iraqi students when writing research papers?
2. What are the techniques that help students to write properly?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

As for the purpose of the study, it is aimed at:

1. Identifying difficulties faced by Iraqi students.
2. Identifying techniques for students to write with proper spelling and grammar, meaningful sentences, appropriate conjunctions, and appropriate titles for their topic sentences.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study's findings will help EFL students improve their writing skills. Students who are skillful at writing can outperform others who are "unskilled." It may help students expand their writing skills through the use of English. As a result, the principles of respectable writing would be taught and practiced starting in the primary years of school. It is equally important for teachers to develop and implement strategies for teaching writing rules.

1.5 Definitions of Key Terms

Writing Skill:

According to (Vachek, 1976), the written language indicates a pattern of graphically clear language units whose function is to interconnected with given stimuli in a constant manner, i.e., in a surveyable and preserveable behavior that focuses primarily on the merely communicative aspects of the language interlocutors' approaches.

Research Paper:

According to (Sommers & Hacker , 2018) An extended essay that gives the author's analysis, assessment, or argument based on extensive independent research is called a research paper. In order to address a research question or advance the academic field, it usually entails the methodical study of a particular subject, source analysis, and information synthesis. In addition to citations from reliable sources, the article is organized to include an introduction, literature review, methods, results, discussion, and conclusion.

Non-native speaker (EFLs):

Cook (Cook, 2007) defines a nonnative speaker as someone who understands and uses a second language for any purpose. Because language teaching and SLA research have traditionally

focused on native speakers as a starting point, most people regard a non-native speaker as deviating from native speaker norms.

Academic Writing:

According to (Swales, & Feak, 2004), academic writing entails declaring claims, providing proof, and substantiating those assertions with trustworthy data and reasoning. They stress the significance of argumentation, logic, and evidence. In order to prevent plagiarism, they emphasize the importance of precise organization and citation.

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1 What is Research Paper?

According to (Kamraju & Siva, 2019, p. 90), a research paper is a popular genre of academic writing. Students and academics must conduct research to learn more about a topic, establish an opinion on the topic, and give support (or evidence) for their stance in a structured report. A research paper can also refer to a scientific work that offers the findings of an original study or an assessment of other people's research.

Most scholar works must undergo fellow review before being published in an academic journal.

They (Kamraju & Siva, 2019) add that when you hear those lines, what idea comes to mind: sifting through stacks of articles and books, looking for the "treasure" of other people's ideas? Whatever image you conjure up, you're almost probably imagining sources of information: articles, books, people, and artwork. A research paper, on the other hand, is more than just the total of your sources, a collection of diverse pieces of information about a topic, or a review of the literature in an area. According to (Mugenda & Abel, 1999, p. 78), a research paper is a lengthy essay in which you provide your own interpretation, evaluation, or argument based on the author's original research on a specific topic. When you write an essay, you apply what you know and have a full understanding about a subject; when you write a research paper, you expand on what you already know

about the subject and make a serious effort to discover what experts know.

2.2 Steps of the Writing Process

Writing is the most vital skill for learning a foreign language. It encompasses a variety of sub-procedures such as composition, sales, and penmanship. Students must arrange their ideas correctly in order to create any piece of writing. Because there is no direct message between writers and readers, writing may be seen as a necessary skill that requires greater clarity.

The writing abilities must be exact and accurate in grammar, word order, punctuation, vocabulary, capitalization, spelling, and other aspects. (Mogahed, 2013, p. 24) sees writing as a tool for language practice, as writers try to explain their thoughts and ideas. They divide writing into six categories: "personal writing, public writing, creative writing, social writing, study writing, and institutional writing" and propose levels of writing, as shown in the figure below:

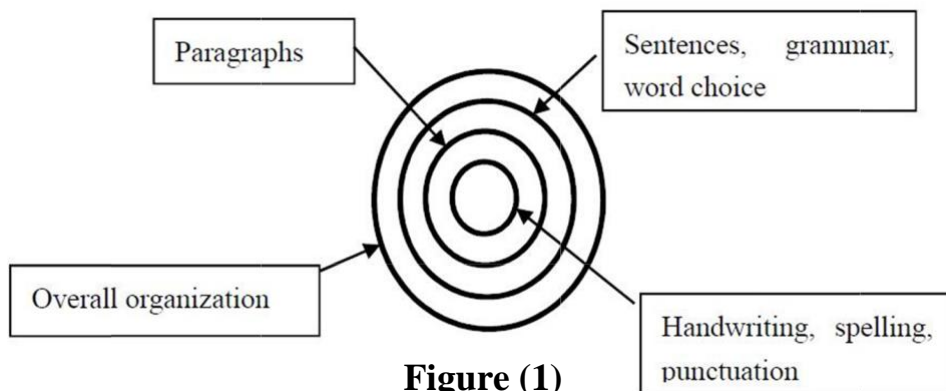


Figure (1)

Levels of Writing (Mogahed, 2013, p. 188)

Writing is the most important aspect of learning a foreign language. Writing allows one to present facts and ideas in well-formed phrases that can be easily understood.

(Good , 1973, p. 76) defines it in writing as the ability to achieve desirable writing skill with a minimum of effort and time in

terms of work volume. Writing performance represents an individual's actual application of linguistics (Richards , Platt, & Platt, Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics, 1992, p. 12)

The operational explanation of written performance defines the students' true writing achievement as:

Introduction, Body, and Conclusion;

Content;

Grammar;

Spelling, Punctuation, and mechanics

Style and feature of expression, (ibid).

Furthermore, (Richards & Schmidt, Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, 2010) observe that, while written and spoken language have the same core grammar and structures, some elements appear considerably more frequently in one language model than others or have distinct features when spoken vs written. Coordination, for example, is more frequently used in spoken language than in written language, resulting in greater subordination. The discrepancies between written and spoken language demonstrate that spoken language occurs in real time.

2.3 Difficulties of Writing

Iraqi students face several challenges when it comes to producing assignments. To improve one's writing talents and abilities, one must first notice errors in sentence structure in order to write well-formed phrases. (Alfaki , 2015, p. 86) outlines some of the linguistic obstacles and difficulties that EFL students face during the writing process, including grammatical, sentence structure, mechanical, and diction issues.

According to (Al fadda, 2012, p. 54), transformation is a frequent writing issue for EFL students. Students feel that if they can write paragraphs and phrases in their native language, they can do the same in the target language. Writing is a difficult skill to master due to "cultural disparities in the way academic register is viewed and interpreted in different nations" (Klimova, 2014).

According to (Muhammad , Almas , & Muhammad , 2016) student writers may face a number of writing challenges and difficulties at different stages of their education. These obstacles may be linguistic, cognitive, psychological, or educational in nature.

(Kellog & Raulerson , 2007) argue that "cognitive control" is important in writing, citing components of purposeful exercises used by school-level writers as evidence.

They also examine the topic of engaging in intentional writing activities. According to them, students must practice, not be taught, in order to develop "understanding of accurate spelling, punctuation, syntax, diction, thesis statements, topic sentences, and cohesive connects with a paragraph" (ibid). According to (Mohammed, 2018), the reasons for the students' blunders are that English differs from Arabic in numerous ways, including patterns, regulations, and structure. The difficulties of the concerned students can be categorized as follows:

Grammar

According to (Hajana, 2006, p. 67). using students' writing as the primary medium for conveying grammatical concept senses is a great way to help EFL students improve their grammar. Each appropriate paragraph is simple to read and understand. Furthermore, (Abdulmajeed & Hameed , 2017) emphasized that grammar is a complex subject with no simple solutions. It is tough and intricate. The following are the categories of grammatical difficulties:

- a. Misuse of tenses.
- b. Subject- verb harmony
- c. Word order
- d. Articles
- e. Recognizing sentence structures.
- f. Categorizing types of sentences.

Spelling

According to (Swales, & Feak, 2004), "spelling mistakes arise when a pupil does not adequately focus due to exhaustion or neglecting the correctness of words." The presentation of any

piece of writing is dependent on the arranging of ideas into written form. The English spelling pattern is challenging and confusing for Iraqi students due to the influence of other languages. (Alenazi , 2018) believes that Arabic differs from English, particularly in its orthographic system (a language's spelling system), in that Arabic is read from right to left; as a result, he divided the issues into orthographic and phonological concerns. Spelling issues are categorized as follows:

- a. Incorrect spelling
- b. Ambiguous sounds and letters.

Punctuation

Punctuation "takes precedence over spelling." Punctuation marks provide meaning to words and can change their meaning if not used properly. As said by (Harmer, 2007, p. 43), language has several important predictions, including punctuation and capitalization. Alternatively, when kids try to write, they learn more about capitalization and punctuation rules. Punctuation difficulties are classed as follows:

- a. Misemployment of capitalization,
- b. Misemployment of full stop,
- c. Misemployment of commas.

Handwriting

Handwriting is a tool for stating language. It is a tool that allows students to communicate their views, and it can lead to a shortage or pass the exam since instructors do not take the time to decode what is written. Good writing involves letter size, style, form, and word spacing, all of which indicate visible handwriting. Handwriting difficulties are classified as follows:

- a. Misplaced spaces
- b. Incorrect writing of letters.
- c. Letters style. (ibid)

2.4 Concept of Non- Native Speaker

According to (Mariño, 2019) a non-native speaker is someone who uses and knows a second language at all times. Because non-native speakers differ from native speakers, the concept of a non-native speaker should be based on uniqueness

rather than deficiency. Rather than being considered as inept locals, bilinguals should be recognized. It has been established that people who speak two languages frequently have different abilities that demonstrate

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

According to (Good , 1973), a sample of a research study is the association from which information is derived. The larger group to whom the findings are intended to be applied is referred to as "the population." The study's population consists of fourth-year Iraqi university students enrolled in the English department for the academic year (2021-2022). This sample was picked for a variety of reasons, including advanced learning, studying a variety of disciplines in English departments, being more mature than others, and so on. The study sample is 20 students.

3.2 Data Collected Instruments

(Purpura, 2007) describes a research instrument as "a tool used to collect data." An instrument is a device that is used to assess knowledge, attitudes, and skills. There are several sorts of research instruments, including surveys, interviews, and observations. In this inquiry, one method was utilized to understand the viewpoints of university informants, while data from students was collected using a questionnaire. The questionnaire is the most typical instrument for acquiring information about a specific topic by delivering a set of predetermined questions to a specific audience.

(Brown, 2001, p. 89) defines a survey as "any written instrument that presents respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to respond either by writing out their replies or selecting from a list of options." The questionnaire in this paper was distributed to 20 fourth-stage EFL university students. The survey consists of six questions.

3.3 Procedures of the Study

The researcher intends to:

1. Seek to revisit the phrases writing talent, research paper, and

non-native speaker.

2. As part of this effort, administer a questionnaire to fourth-year students.

3. Identify problematic points in their own writings.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Based on the questionnaire utilized for sample collection, textual analysis will be conducted in accordance with the detailed data and proportions outlined in the survey:

Question 1: How do you perceive your English writing level?

Table (1) Questionnaire on Question (1)

Types of Level	Frequency	Percentages
Good	8	40%
Average	10	50%
Weak	2	10%
Total	20	100%

The data presented in the table highlights a predominant trend among students, with a significant majority indicating that they perceive their writing skills to be average, represented by a substantial 40% of the respondents. This suggests a common perception among the student population regarding the adequacy of their writing abilities.

Question 2: Do you give importance to the writing skill during your writing session?

Table (2) Questionnaire on Question (2)

Degree of Importance	Frequency	Percentages
Yes	14	70%
No	6	30%
Total	20	100%

The table above unmistakably illustrates that the most prominent percentage (70%) of students consider writing skills to be crucial in their academic pursuits. This significant majority emphasizes the overarching importance attached to writing proficiency among students within their academic endeavors.

Question 3: How do you find writing in English?

Table (3) Questionnaire on Question (3)

Degree of Comprehension	Frequency	Percentages
Easy	13	65%
Difficult	7	35%
Total	20	100%

As per the data depicted in the table above, a substantial proportion of students (65%) express the belief that writing is perceived as easily acquirable by the majority of pupils. This sentiment suggests a prevailing perception among students regarding the attainability and learnability of writing skills within the academic context.

Question 4: What types of challenges do you typically encounter while writing your research?

Table (4) Questionnaire on Question (4)

Types of Problems	Frequency	Percentages
Spelling	4	20%
Vocabulary	0	0%
Grammar	0	0%
mechanism of writing	0	0%
Organization of ideas	12	60%
Writing style	0	0%
Citing references	4	20%
Total	20	100%

As indicated by the table above, there is an evident lack of uniformity in students' responses regarding various aspects of writing skills. Specifically, a segment of students, constituting 20%, find spelling to be challenging. Moreover, a considerable majority, accounting for 60%, perceive organizing ideas in writing as a problematic area. Additionally, a subset of students, comprising 20%, encounter difficulties in providing references within their written work. This disparity in perceptions underscores the diverse challenges students face when it comes to different facets of writing proficiency.

Question 5: What are the activities that you practice outside of the college to enhance your level in research writing?

Table (5) Questionnaire on Question (5)

Type of Activity	Frequency	Percentages
Daily practice	10	50 %
Online sessions	10	50 %
Total	20	100 %

As depicted in the table above, students' perspectives on enhancing their writing abilities are evenly split, with an equal distribution of 50% for each option: daily practice and online sessions. This dichotomy in preferences highlights a balanced division in the strategy's students opt for to improve their writing skills, with half of the respondents valuing consistent practice while the other half favoring online sessions for skill development.

Question 6: What procedures do you use to overcome your mistakes and problems in research writing?

The majority of students agree on the strategy to be used by instructors to replace their method of teaching the relevant skill. The percentage of such responses is 95%.

3.4 Findings and Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the process of developing writing skills among fourth-year EFL students at Al-Anbar University. In this sense, the questionnaire was used as a tool to collect information from EFL students to test the researcher's hypothesis.

According to the findings of the questionnaire study, the majority of students experience hesitation and anxiety of making mistakes (see table 1). Because they did not have sufficient grasp of writing activities, they assessed the learning process to be ordinary. This could be attributed to a lack of writing experience. Most students prioritize the relevant skill (see table 2) because it is required to pass the majority of course handout exams.

Furthermore, the statistics show that learners believe writing is a simple ability to master (see table 3). Many obstacles arise

for students when creating their own research papers, as illustrated in table (4).

The data presented in Table 5 suggests that students advocate for targeted practices like consistent daily exercises and engaging in online sessions to enhance their writing skills. Furthermore, there is a consensus among learners that by adapting traditional teaching methodologies, they can refine their English writing proficiency with greater accuracy. Consequently, the study's hypothesis, which posited that EFL Iraqi students face challenges in completing their research papers, is substantiated by the findings.

Conclusions

The following key points are deduced from the study:

1. A research paper is a scholarly document that either presents the findings of an original investigation or evaluates existing research in a particular field.
2. Writing proficiency encompasses the ability to enhance writing skills with minimal time and effort investment.
3. Students encounter difficulties primarily in areas such as grammar, spelling, punctuation, and handwriting.
4. A non-native speaker is an individual who consistently communicates and comprehends a second language.
5. A questionnaire is a written tool that presents respondents with a series of inquiries or statements, prompting them to provide written responses or select from a list of options.
6. The study's hypothesis has been substantiated, specifically indicating that Iraqi EFL students encounter challenges in completing their research papers.

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