

استكشاف مشاكل طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الجامعية العراقية في كتابة
الإنشاء

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كيفية اقتباس البحث

العبيدي ، نور حازم حسون عبدالقادر، استكشاف مشاكل طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الجامعية العراقية في كتابة الإنشاء ، مجلة مركز بابل للدراسات الانسانية، تموز 2026، المجلد: 16 ، العدد: 7.

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Exploring Iraqi EFL Undergraduate Students' Problems in Writing Composition

Exploring Iraqi EFL Undergraduate Students' Problems in Writing Composition

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المُلخَص

يواجه أغلب متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية تقريباً صعوبات في كتابة الانشاء وهذا يؤثر على درجاتهم بصورة سلبية. وقد لاحظ الباحث هذه المشاكل وخطط لتتبعها للتقليل من آثارها، ولتحقيق هدف البحث الحالي تمّ اختيار عينة مكوّنة من (15) انشاء من طلاب المرحلة الثانية في قسم اللغة الإنكليزية/ كلية التربية للبنات/جامعه الموصل لتكون بيانات لهذا البحث. أظهرت النتائج أن الطلاب يواجهون العديد من المشاكل في كتابة الانشاء. يمكن أن تعزى هذه المشاكل إلى عدد من العوامل مثل قلة الكفاءة اللغوية، وضعف ممارسة الكتابة والتداخل مع اللغة الأم. تم تقديم توصيات عديدة لتحسين مهارة الكتابة لدى الطلاب.

Abstract

Almost all EFL students struggle with written composition, which lowers their grades. The researcher noted these issues and intended to trace them back in order to mitigate their effects. To satisfy the goal of

the current research, a sample of (15) compositions of the second stage EFL students in the Department of English/College of Education for Girls/University of Mosul were chosen as the data of this research. The findings reveal that the participants encounter many problems in writing composition. Low language skills, poor writing practice, and interference from one's mother tongue are all potential causes of such issues. A number of recommendations are made to improve students' writing skills.

1. Introduction

Writing is one of the oldest talents that the Sumerians invented in Mesopotamia to record all of their everyday activities. Writing is an activity that is used to convey ideas and feelings on paper, which relates between the writer and the reader. Brown (2007: 7) states that teaching a language consists of four main skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. EFL students should be taught all the mentioned skills to master English language successfully.

According to Widdowson (1978:32), writing is "an act of producing correct sentences and transmitting them into words on paper." According to this concept, writing is viewed as a method of recording one's thoughts using proper grammar. He adds that effective writing is not something done accidentally; it is a purposeful attempt by the writer to express his thoughts and feelings that would create the result that he has meant to achieve.

McCrimon (1963:3) says, "before start to write, we must think carefully about two related questions precisely do I want to do? and how can I best do it? ". Writing has many functions such as communicating the way of our thinking. He defines writing as "the ability to create words and ideas out of yourself and criticize them in order to decide which ones to use". Writing may help with self-development and self-awareness. Writing can be used by students to illustrate their grasp and interpretation of the theories they are learning. He believes that when pupils understand the issue, they may incorporate it into their work. As a result, students can write when they understand what the teacher has already taught them. (Ibid, 4)

1.1 Statement of the Problem

English is a universal language and it provides a medium for all cultures to communicate through books, movies, plays, internet and other resources. It also plays an important role in education and EFL students are expected to use it effectively. Teaching English in our country is difficult because while many EFL students can understand the language,





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the majority struggle to successfully communicate their views. Such issues stem from a deficiency in English vocabulary, grammar, and writing inventiveness. Many EFL students clearly struggle with writing. According to Mourtaga (2010: 1), teachers face a difficult problem while teaching English creatively. He thinks that EFL students can become autonomous learners and profit greatly from the creative teaching strategies used by their teachers.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The study attempts to detect and identify difficulties and mistakes made by undergraduate EFL students, together with their percentages. It reveals the reasons behind the occurrences of such errors. It also tries to present effective solutions that may help English language teachers to shed some light on these problems and specify more time and effort to modify the current teaching techniques.

1.3 Limits of the Study

The study included 15 EFL second-year students from the English Department of the College of Education for Girls, University of Mosul. It is also limited to the study's implementation phase, which occurred during the first semester of the academic year 2023-2024.

1.4 Hypothesis of the Study

It is predicted that Iraqi EFL undergraduate students encounter challenges in writing composition.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study may help English teachers use appropriate ways and teach skills in writing composition. This could help EFL students enhance their composition writing skills. Furthermore, the findings of the current research may assist policymakers and curriculum architects in aligning the curriculum with desirable objectives.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Writing

Writing is one of the ways in which EFL students can express themselves on a given topic. The skill of writing a composition in the English language is very important and it requires special attention. Therefore, that, writing is not an easy mission, but it is less difficult than many EFL students and their teachers thought. It plays an important role in communication. According to Grami (2010: 9) writing can be defined as

“a complex mental production which requires careful thoughts, disciplines and concentration.”

Harmer (2007:112) states that writing is utilized as a practice tool to assist students practice and apply the language they've been learning. For example, the teacher may ask his students to compose five sentences on a specific topic or utilizing five new words or phrases that they have learnt. Writing assignments like these are intended to strengthen EFL students' writing skills.

2.2 Definition of a composition.

Composition is a piece of writing that consists of multiple paragraphs. According to River (1971:252), "composition involves individual selection of vocabulary and structure for the expression of personal meaning". According to Dumais (1988:48), a "paragraph" is a collection of sentences focused on a single topic or major theme.

From a linguistic point of view, composition can be defined as the ability of writing simple English in a good and clear handwriting without making many spelling, vocabulary and punctuation mistakes. Furthermore, writing involves encoding of the message that translates our thoughts into language and language into written forms. When we write, we use something called “graphic symbols”, which are letters and their combinations that represent the sound that we make when we speak. Therefore, we can say writing is the art of these symbols. EFL Students always arrange the symbols according to certain rules or conventions in order to form words and arrange words to form sentences (Harmer, 2007:112).

In sum, writing composition is a creative way for expressing thoughts on different topics. It includes the use of complex group of abilities. It is not as easy as uttering words because this process is controlled by certain rules.

2.3 Writing a Composition

When EFL students wrote a composition, It is critical that they have a clear understanding of what they are writing about. Before starting to compose a composition, EFL students should practice writing a paragraph. They should compose the first, second, and even third drafts before writing the final content. Then they should go over the syntax and structure of concepts. Following that, they should edit their work,





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identifying and correcting any problems. Finally, they wrote the final version of the composition (Hill, 1999:21–2).

2.4 Elements of a Good Composition

A composition is a piece of written language that contains multiple sentences. Weaver (1957:195) explains the three major components of a composition:

1. The topic sentence

The topic sentence is the first sentence in the paragraph. It has the responsibility of stating the issue. A good topic sentence is a complete sentence that includes a subject, verb, and a complement. It announces the topic of the paragraph and, in some cases, provides a generic description of the topic's content. A topic sentence's subject is commonly referred to as "the topic," and the verb and complement are referred to as "the controlling idea."

2. The supporting sentences

The supporting sentences develop the topic sentence i.e. they explain the topic sentences by giving more information about the subject. A supporting sentence is then any information, which functions to develop the topic sentence. Every supporting sentence must support the main idea of the paragraph. The remaining sentences give details about or support the topic. So writing supporting sentences means collecting data about the topic sentence.

3. The concluding sentence

A concluding sentence is the last sentence of a paragraph. It should firmly close the paragraph. This sentence supports and mirrors the topic sentence. The concluding sentence concludes the paragraph by first, restating the main idea of the topic sentence and second, by offering a suggestion, opinion, or prediction.

2.5 Types of Composition

Burton (1982:79-83) assures that EFL students should learn the following types of compositions so that students can properly utilize the necessary skills in composing a paper. He mentions four different types of composition as they are discussed below in detail.

1. The narrative composition

The narrative composition is a kind of writing in which the writer talks about what happened to him/her or what he/she witnessed). It conveys a



story. Some narrative compositions tell fascinating, mysterious stories, while others depict everyday life circumstances. Narrative writing focuses on a single core concept or lesson learnt. EFL students should think about the essential themes before they begin writing to make the story more fascinating.

2. The Descriptive Composition

Descriptive compositions explain processes, things, locations, atmospheres, and situations. To write a description of any of the above, the writer must first have a clear mental image of it. The writer must explain the picture in words such that he or she may see, hear, taste, and smell it. In conclusion, the author should provide thorough information on what is being discussed.

3. The Argumentative Composition

The argumentative composition is a type of writing in which the writer attempts to persuade the reader to believe and support his or her concept or position. To compose this style of writing, the writer needs follow the stages listed below:

1. Identifying the main idea or point of view of the writer.
2. Understanding the reader's mind in order to write a good argument.
3. Identifying the strongest supporting points of the writer's argument.
4. Identifying the most important opposing viewpoints.
5. By explaining and forcefully arguing with the opposing point of view, the reader will believe and support the writer.

4. The Expository Composition

The expository composition explains or informs the reader with knowledge and information concerning a certain subject. By explaining the topic to the reader, the writer is demonstrating his/her knowledge. In writing an expository composition, the writer uses words such as first, after, next, then, last, etc. This shows that one idea follows the other in a correct. The second-person pronoun "you" is also used.

2.6 Features of a Good Composition

Many English teachers are uncomfortable when teaching the method of writing composition. EFL students frequently grow irritated since they are required to write more and their writing is graded. Composing written



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material necessitates an understanding of the topic, awareness of the audience and context, and the ability to utilize acceptable conventions for those audiences and contexts. A good composition must have the following characteristics: focus, organization, development, style, content, audience awareness, and creativity. (Harmer, 2004:94)

3. Methodology of the Study

Because of the multiple challenges that arise throughout the process of learning and using a foreign language, numerous types of contrastive analysis studies have been conducted, including contrastive phonological analysis, contrastive morphemic analysis, error analysis, and so on. In this study, a sort of error analysis is used to reach the research's main goal. According to Richards and Schmidt (2002: 258), error analysis is the process of "locating, counting, and categorizing errors to discern patterns of error in written texts." The researcher gathers data and information from EFL students. She instructed them to create a composition. The researcher will be able to examine and investigate the areas of difficulty in this research.

3.1 Participants of the Study

The study's population consists of undergraduate (second-year) EFL students from the English Department at the College of Education for Girls / University of Mosul during the academic year 2023-2024. EFL students in their second year are chosen because they studied written composition in the first grade at college and have received extensive training on sentence structure. They are also acquainted with the fundamentals of producing a piece, implying that they have developed their writing skills quite well.

3.2 Instrument of the Study

To fulfill the study's goal and prove its hypothesis, the research is tested and examined. To objectively assess the ability to write an essay, the researcher gives EFL students a number of various topics and asks them to write a composition of approximately 100 words. This test will enable the researcher to discover whether students' language is highly constructed or not. The researcher will also be able to identify the areas of difficulties that EFL students face when they are going to write a composition.

4. Results and Discussion

In this section, an error analysis of (15) EFL students' compositions is conducted in five different stages. The researcher uses statistical tables that indicate EFL errors, their frequencies and the percentage of the incorrect occurrences from all the selected compositions.

4.1 Error Analysis of the Spelling Difficulties

Spelling difficulties arise when a pupil fails to focus effectively due to a lack of attention to word accuracy. Another cause is that first language interference, as Arabic differs from English, notably with the orthographic system. The difficulties that EFL students' face at this level fall into two major points: wrong spelling and confusing sounds and letters. Table (1) below will illustrate the frequencies with the percentages of the errors.

Table (1) Spelling Difficulties

Composition's No.	Total No. of words	Frequency	Percentage
1	102	3	3 %
2	92	1	1 %
3	113	Null	0 %
4	88	2	2 %
5	129	3	2 %
6	107	1	1 %
7	76	2	2 %
8	104	Null	0 %
9	95	3	3 %
10	135	1	1 %
11	110	2	2 %
12	98	1	1 %
13	119	3	2 %
14	127	3	1 %
15	112	4	3 %



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<i>Total</i>	1607	27	24 %
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As it shown in table (1) above, the frequency of EFL errors concerning wrong spelling and confusing sounds and letters is (27) and the percentage is (24%). Spelling errors in English can be caused by the educational system and syllabus, which may not emphasize spelling rules and techniques. Additionally, the interference between English and the learners' native language, i.e. Arabic, can lead to spelling errors. Lack of vocabulary, reading habits, and poor development of self-concept and motivation can also contribute to spelling errors.

4.2 Error Analysis of the Grammatical Difficulties

Grammar is not an easy subject; it is challenging and intricate. EFL students' faults at this level are divided into nine categories: misuse of tenses, subject-verb agreement, articles, word order, prepositions, plural, negative, irregular verbs, and pronouns. Table (2) shows the frequency and percentage of such errors in relation to the total number of words used in each composition.

Table (2) Grammatical Difficulties

Composition's No.	Total No. of words	Frequency	Percentage
1	102	4	4 %
2	92	7	8 %
3	113	2	2 %
4	88	Null	0 %
5	129	9	7 %
6	107	5	5 %
7	76	3	4 %
8	104	4	4 %
9	95	2	2 %
10	135	8	6 %

11	110	5	5 %
12	98	9	9 %
13	119	11	9 %
14	127	8	6 %
15	112	Null	0 %
<i>Total</i>	<i>1607</i>	<i>75</i>	<i>71 %</i>

As it shown in table (2) above, the frequency of EFL errors concerning grammatical errors is very high (75) and the percentage is (71%). It seems that the reasons behind such errors are related to the influence of the mother tongue, lack of knowledge of grammatical rules and absence of language learning strategies.

4.3 Errors Analysis of Punctuation Difficulties

Punctuation marks give words significance and, if used incorrectly, can modify their meaning. When EFL students try to write, they should follow the standards of punctuation and capitalization. However, EFL students face numerous obstacles. Table (3) displays the occurrences and percentages of various issues.

Table (3) Punctuation Difficulties

Composition's No.	Total No. of words	Frequency	Percentage
1	102	Null	0 %
2	92	2	2 %
3	113	1	1 %
4	88	Null	0 %
5	129	2	1 %
6	107	3	2 %
7	76	2	3 %



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8	104	1	1 %
9	95	1	1 %
10	135	3	2 %
11	110	2	2 %
12	98	1	1 %
13	119	3	3 %
14	127	4	3 %
15	112	1	1 %
<i>Total</i>	<i>1607</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>23 %</i>

Table (3) above shows the frequency and percentage of EFL difficulties concerning punctuation and capitalization, which is (26) and the percentage is (23%). These errors are caused by confusion or a lack of awareness of English punctuation standards, particularly the usage of commas, full stops, and so on.

4.4 Error Analysis of Handwriting Difficulties

Handwriting is a means by which EFL students communicate their language, or a tool for expressing their ideas. Good writing comprises letter size, shape, and style, as well as word spacing. EFL students' handwriting issues can be grouped into the following:



Table (4) Handwriting Difficulties

Composition's No.	Total No. of words	Frequency	Percentage
1	102	1	1 %
2	92	2	2 %
3	113	Null	0 %
4	88	1	1 %
5	129	3	2 %
6	107	1	1 %
7	76	1	1 %
8	104	Null	0 %
9	95	2	2 %
10	135	3	2 %
11	110	Null	0 %
12	98	1	1 %
13	119	Null	0 %
14	127	Null	0 %
15	112	Null	0%
Total	1607	15	11 %

The analysis of handwriting difficulties in table (4) indicates that EFL students' problems is very low (15) and the percentage is (11%). This reveals that they do not suffer from bad handwriting i.e. they have developed their motor skills.





4.5 Error Analysis of the Structural Difficulties

As we have mentioned in the corpus of this study, a good composition consists of three different types of sentences (a topic sentence, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence). In this section the researcher explores EFL difficulties and table (5) below illustrates them with their percentages.

Table (5) The Structural Difficulties

Composition's No.	Total No. of words	Frequency	Percentage
1	102	2	2 %
2	92	1	1 %
3	113	1	1 %
4	88	2	2 %
5	129	Null	0 %
6	107	Null	0 %
7	76	1	1 %
8	104	2	2 %
9	95	Null	0 %
10	135	1	1 %
11	110	2	2 %
12	98	Null	0 %
13	119	2	2 %
14	127	2	2 %
15	112	Null	0 %
Total	1607	16	16 %

As seen in table (5) above, EFL students tend to commit fewer errors in writing the three types of sentences that form the composition. The frequency is very low (16) and the percentage is (16%)

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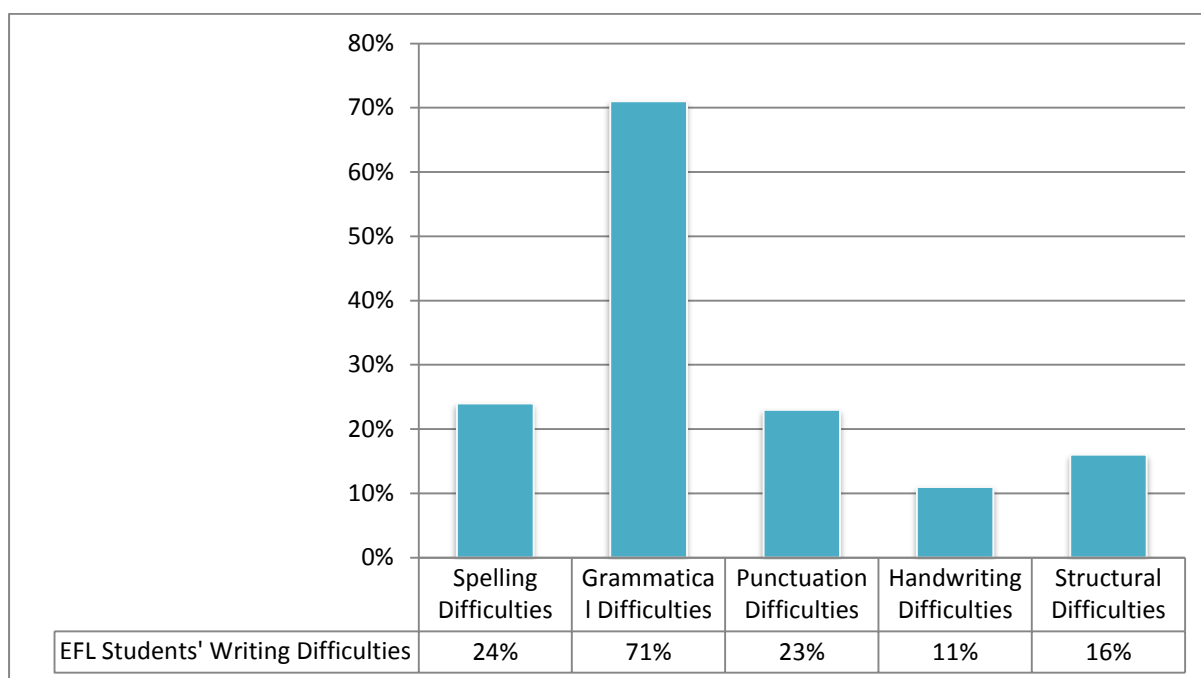


Figure (1) EFL Writing Difficulties

Figure (1) shows that the main problem that EFL students face is related to grammar (71 %) in comparison with the other difficulties. The spelling errors are (24%) which are equal to the punctuation difficulties (23%). The structural difficulties are (16%). Finally, the handwriting difficulties are the fewest ones (11 %).

5. Conclusions

Writing is a crucial skill for EFL students to master when learning any language. The primary goal of this research is to identify the challenges that Iraqi EFL students face in learning English as a second language, particularly in writing. It demonstrates that second-year students at the Department of English, College of Education for Girls, University of Mosul face several writing challenges. The researcher believes that students' faults might be characterized as grammatical, punctuation, spelling, and handwriting errors, as well as compositional structural issues. English teachers need to discover effective solutions to these difficulties.

The researcher suggested that future research should use a qualitative approach, observing EFL courses in Iraq and investigating how writing lessons are learned. Close observations of the classroom will help to discover the challenges that teachers experience when teaching written composition. Furthermore, future studies should investigate the attitudes of EFL students to the tactics used by English professors in order to understand the issues that EFL students experience.





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6. Recommendations

The researcher recommends the following:

1. Investigating EFL students' level and background knowledge in writing compositions and essays.
2. Encouraging EFL students to write as much as possible which help in their process of English language learning.

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