



Issues Encountered by Fourth Semester University Students when Writing Essay

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ABSTRACT

Many students believe that writing is the most difficult subject among the other language skill courses. The procedure of writing not only to write what students feel but also carry a message to the readers. Consequently, the students have problems to write in a good way. The purpose of this study is figuring out the problems faced by students in writing essay. This study took place at Zawia University, fourth semester students as a sample and writing teachers. This research emphasis on the causes behind their low proficiency in writing essay. The study come up with some possible solutions to help students overcome their problems in writing. The results of this research will help the students to improve their writing skills by practicing more in the class and even as homework. Also the outcomes push the teachers to explore more techniques on teaching writing.

Keywords: writing skill, low proficiency, writing practices, readers

مشاكل تواجه طلبة الجامعة للفصل الرابع في كتابة المقالة

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ملخص البحث:

يعتقد الكثير من الطلبة ان الكتابة هي المادة الأصعب من ضمن مواد مهارات اللغة الأخرى. عملية الكتابة ليست فقط ان يكتب الطالب ما يشعر به وانما ارسال رسالة للقارئ. وبسبب ذلك يواجه الطلبة مشاكل حينما يحاولون الكتابة بشكل جيد. هدف هذا البحث هو إيجاد المشاكل التي يواجهها الطلبة حينما يكتبون مقالة. أجريت هذه الدراسة في جامعة الزاوية وتم استخدام طلبة الفصل الرابع ومعلمين الكتابة كعينة للبحث. يركز هذا البحث على الأسباب التي تكمن خلف ضعف مقدرة الطلبة في كتابة مقالة. يأتي هذا البحث ببعض النتائج المحتملة لمساعدة الطلبة للتغلب على مشاكلهم في الكتابة. سوف تساعد نتائج هذا البحث الطلبة لكي يطوروا من مهارات الكتابة بالتمرين أكثر داخل الفصل وكواجب منزلي أيضا. علاوة على ذلك النتائج سوف تدفع الأساتذة لكي يكتشفوا أساليب أكثر لتعليم الكتابة. الكلمات الأساسية: مهارة الكتابة، ضعف المقدرة، تدريب على الكتابة، القارئ.

1. Introduction

writing is one of the four skills that students have to learn in order to communicate in English. It is essential means to communicate in international communications. It is the skill that is taught to students at Zawia University from the early stages. Cragge & Kaplan (1996) illustrate that many students in EFL (English as a foreign language) contexts will need English writing skills ranging from a simple paragraph and summary skill to the ability to write essays and professional articles.

At Zawia university, writing skill is taught gradually from a simple paragraph to writing professional Academic essay. However, theoretically the students are learning in steps but practically they write little. Thus give them little chances to practice expressing themselves in writing. Their low proficiency in writing is due to a lot of factors. Many researchers such as Harmer (2006) agreed that the students` problems in writing is due their less practice in reading, lack of stimulus, influence of the first language, grammatical flaw were the main factors behind their issue of essay writing.

Consequently, the emphasis of this search is to identify the difficulties in writing English essays that four semester students face at Zawia university and try to recommend some matching resolutions to deal with such problems.

2. Research Problem

Fourth semester students at Zawia University face obstacles when writing an essay in English. lack of vocabulary, grammar mistakes could be some of the most important causes of the students` problems when wiring an essay. Similarly, students encounter issues in writing such as poor handwriting and poor spelling skills. Coherence and unity could be an issue for the students even when finding the right words.

3. Objectives of the Study

The most important aim behind this study is to shed light on the problems that encounter fourth semester students in The Department of English at the faculty of Arts at the University of Zawia in writing an essay. Another aim is to identify the reasons behind the students` difficulties when writing an essay that might be causes like grammar mistakes, lack of vocabulary, and spelling problems.

4. Research Questions

1. What are the problems Zawia EFL university students encounter in writing English essays?
2. What are the causes behind these problems?

5. Significance of the Study

This study is important because it sheds light on an important part in the sector of English language teaching in Zawia. Writing essay seems to be one of the most significant skill in language education. Solutions proposed by the researcher to such problems would help both students and the teachers in the department while learning how to write essay. This study is significant as it purposes to offer such assistance to both teachers and students. Also, this research will aid other researchers to handle the same issue from numerous ways and different surroundings to make generalizations.

6. Literature Review

6.1 Writing Problems

Various researchers took care to writing skill as it is one of the important language skills which is essential for communication, expressing thoughts and ideas. Sherwin Cody (2006) said that diction is derived from the Latin dictio, a word, and in rhetoric it denotes choice of words. Nunan (2003) come even closer when he said that writing is an action of the mind and the body. It is a mental process human use to invent ideas and the way to express them and organize them into sentences and into paragraphs to be understandable to the readers.

As most of the researchers believe that learning how to write is one of the most difficult tasks students face. Writing in English as a first language or the second is a challenge for them. It requires a lot of sub skills to master writing as a skill. A. Mustafa, A. N. Arbab, A. A. El Sayed (2022) wrote in his research that students' main challenges are the lack of vocabulary, grammatical structures, failure to understand reading texts, and problems in summarizing and paraphrasing. Mastering all these skills pave the way to the students to learn how to write.

According to Kroll (2003) the two significant components that are most vital for improving student` writing skill in their writing tasks contains of providing feedback on students` assignments and

assessment. writing is a compound process of numerous skills that contribute to the skill of writing for language learners. Writing need tremendous quantity of patience and attention. M,Rashid (2020) finds out that teachers pay attention on precise use of grammar rather than increasing mastery of content and ideas organization. Also, teachers do not deliver feedback to students regularly and give less attention to individuals learning differences.

According to Trifanny Faradila, (2021) students face difficulty to arrange words correctly and determine the right pronouns when writing. Vocabulary is an issue as they find it difficult to determine the proper vocabulary. D, H. H, M. Nabila (2022) assumed that grammatical errors and word choice problems could be the reasons behind student deficiency in writing essay.

Beta Roskita (2022) stated that online learning is not the answer to the students' problems about writing. For the reasons that students experienced difficulties such as unbalanced internet connection in learning while the class was still in progress. Also, it is a little hard to provide explanations online as the students do not understand the material during online learning. Other researcher assumed that the problem with writing could be critical thinking, the punctuation, word choice, grammatical problems, and the structure of the essay. According to Hyland (2003), writing is seen as a production of words that is constructed by the writer`s command of grammatical and lexical awareness.

Meyers (2005) simplifies writing as consisting of key components which are presentation, body, and conclusion. These components need writing procedure that include drafting, editing, planning and final draft because writing skill is seen as planning, reflection and the organization of ideas. It is as a cognitive skill that needs not only to focus on grammar, sentence structure, lexical choices, spelling and punctuation, but similarly master the linguistic understanding and integrate ideas coherently and cohesively as well.

To sum up, writing is a productive skill that require various abilities such as linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence as well as information about language use such as grammar, structure and vocabulary. As a result, English language learners might be faced with a variety of hindrances in the writing process. According to C, S. A, R. Y, Suryanti (2020) some difficulties in constructing essay is

coherent and combining ideas in correct sentences. As coherence gives the essay the follow of ideas and the logical organization to deliver meaning to the readers.

6.2 Factors Effect Poor Writing

Motivation is one of the most important reason for the students to write. Students could be low motivated as they fear of failure or making mistakes.

As Harmer (2007) " extrinsic motivation is the result of any number of outside factors"

Obviously, low motive can be a hinder for the students to write at all. To overcome this challenge, teachers are required t to create writing habit among the students and inspire them to voice to express their thought.

Secondly, Reading could be a great factor behind students` failure in writing. In fact, it is confirmed that better readers are better writers.

Similarly, writing needs a lot of time to be mastered. Students need time to practice their writing in class and outside the class as homework. However, teachers always complain about time when teach writing as it requires a lot of time to check everybody`s draft. A. Ariyanti, Rinda Fitriana (2017) believed that the lecturer complained about limited time and big number of students in one class as these factors are the barriers to improve the quality of the students` essay. Hanna Novariana, Sumardi, Sri Samiati Tarjana, (2018) discovered that the external problems come from the students the lack of practice, and less feedback on their writing. In some cases, mother language is a problem to most of the students as they try to translate their own language to English then write it. They think in Arabic instead of thinking in English when writing. It is not always correct production as Arabic and English is different in grammar, word order and even vocabulary. The influence of the first language is truly a hindrance in English essay writing.

To sum up, Students' complications in writing essays must obtain serious attention from teachers and students as well. By knowing the problems of students in writing essays, teachers can take anticipatory steps to overcome this condition.

7. Methodology

The researcher used qualitative approach. The researcher used the students` essays to analyze the data needed. Also, interviews with the teachers were employed. Ten students of the 4 the semester at department of English language, faculty of Arts at University of Zawia were the sample of the research. Five of writing teachers of the same university were asked to conducted the interview.

7.1 Methods of Data Collection

7.1.1 The Students` Essay

The researcher used this method to achieve the study goals. The researcher asked the students to write a three paragraphs essay of a topic they choose to focus on the content, grammar, spelling, and vocabulary of their essays. It is used to rate students' ability of writing. The researcher asked the students to write the essays at home and bring them another day. Ten participants voluntarily cooperate as other students refused to contribute as they say they can't write. The researcher asked the students some questions about their essay.

7.1.2 The Teachers` Interview

The researcher communicated with the teachers online to conduct the interview. Teachers were asked about their obstacles when giving writing classes activities and also when explaining a new lesson in writing. The researcher expected to attain additional support method from teachers' responses in their background information about writing classes. Similarly, the interview spotted light on the syllabus, teaching techniques, the time of classes, and their interaction with the students inside the class.

8. Research Design

The strategy of teaching writing classes for the fourth semester at the department of English has been the same for years. The class was taught using the traditional technique, students practice at the class is very rare. The students attended lecturers and study writing theoretically not practically. The teachers explain the lesson while the students sit silently listening to what`s given. Homework assignments are asked by the teachers but with rare feedback. Thus, some of the teachers tried hard to develop their ways of teaching yet still time and student` number were the problem to conduct such classes. The researcher asked the students to write an essay and bring them another

day. Only 10 students accepted to write as other excused. As the researcher was the teacher of writing class required to have resolutions to the students` low performance in writing. Therefore, the students` essay and the teachers` interview used to collect data to help both the students to learn better English and be good writers also for the teacher to conduct a fruitful class in writing.

9 Discussion

This study discusses the difficulties of the fourth semester students of Zawia University in writing essays and the factors that cause them. Based on the outcomes of the study, the researcher discovers that almost every student had problems in writing essays. These complications designate that students do not have adequate ability in writing essays, and this is due to several factors. The discussion of the research results below illustrates the difficulties of students in writing essays and the factors that cause them. Additionally, the outcomes of the teachers` interview reveal the obstacles that faces teachers when giving writing classes.

9.1 Result of the Students' Essays

The essays the students asked to write were analyzed by qualitative approach to detect the students' issues in writing to develop them. Most of the students or even all of them faced problems in grammar. Sentence structure and grammar are mainly effect their way of writing. Word choice is another obstacle as 50% of the students chose their vocabulary in a wrong way it sounded like they translated from Arabic into English. the researcher found out that the students think and google in Arabic before writing into English when she asked them after analyzing their essays. L1 interference made their writing lack of word choice and grammar and even form as the two languages are different. As for cohesion, and coherence, this area does not seem to be challenging as only 30% only who mislead the researcher while analyzing their essay. However, results show that over 60% had a problem with the right choice of pronouns as they chose the wrong pronoun when developing their ideas through the essay. Also, the subject pronoun (I) is misspelled to (i). The researcher noticed a lot of capitalizing problems but the students didn't see that as a problem because it seemed that their teachers before never correct the more highlighted such mistakes.

Introduction and conclusion are the least difficult, only 20% of the students who did not have a clear introduction and connect it to their conclusion. It appears that the students used google to write their essay but of course they used it in Arabic which made their essays had supporting paragraphs yet the meaning is hard to gain. All of the previous problems such as grammar, word choice, pronoun, and translation were all contributing to providing low writing ability.

9.2 Result of the Teachers` Interviews

Teachers were asked in the interview some questions about the obstacles that they face when teach writing. One teacher said that "students write the same way of Arabic. In other words, they write randomly similar to their Arabic writing". Another teacher assured that "time and assessment criteria lead to focus on my watch rather than giving my class". While others believed that the students low proficiency in grammar as well as lack of vocabulary could make their job incredibly hard. H, Novariana, Sumardi, S, S, Tarjana, (2018) found out that the students face problems in writing such as low motivations, difficulty to choose the appropriate words, lack of vocabulary, difficulty to arrange words in the appropriate order, and the trouble to spell the words. Some other teachers mentioned punctuation, writing format could make students writing difficult to read. Other believed as the researcher believed that student google their subject in Arabic then translate them in to English which make their writing full of flaws and sometimes meaningless.

The researcher asked them whether the students know how to write a paragraph. The answers were that students face a hard time even constructing a single paragraph" students face problems to write a clear topic sentence and find it hard to develop the main idea in to supporting sentences as there is no coherent in their writing". Some teachers believed their lack of writing a paragraph could be a result of not learning how to brainstorm or outline their writing before starting a draft. Teacher believed that not all the students could not write but to be fare they said 3 out of 10 students can write a little.

Essay is also such a headache to both teachers and students as teachers trying and suffering from the students' low proficiency in writing at all. Teaching writing essay to students having a hard time to write a paragraph is such a hard task. According to Smalley, R.L. & Ruetten, M.K. (1986) essay writing activity demonstrates about

writing a paragraph and evolving it in an idea that is discovered through a fairly limited paragraph. Finally, teachers were asked whether they check the students' writing and giving them regular feedback. Some teachers confirmed they do so but others explained that it is a hard task that depends on the time, the learners' levels and the number of the students in the class.

10. Conclusion

To sum up, we should bear in mind that writing essays in English is not a simple mission to do and needs much time and effort. Henceforth, the present study is an attempt to examine major writing difficulties faced by English-major students at Zawia university. Problems students have would help the instructors have a full vision on the students' different difficulties that prevent them from writing effective essays. Moreover, it is found that factor such as less practice in reading, lack of motivation, impact of the first language, grammatical weakness, etc. were the common reasons behind the students' writing problems. Here are some of the main problems:

1. Grammar especially tense is one of the main problems that face students when writing essay.
2. Organization and arranging words correctly in sentences are also difficult for the students to manage.
3. Determine the right pronouns and capitalizing the pronoun (I) is also an issue.
4. Vocabulary and the right choice of words is a hard job for the students when writing an essay.
5. Issues behind the students' difficulties in writing essays, less interest in writing activities, lack of motivation, unfocused or lazy, and lack of confidence.

11. Recommendations

Based on the results stated in the discussion and the conclusion, the researcher would like to give some recommendations and advices to both the teachers and the students to overcome difficulties in writing classes.

1. For students, it is suggested that they endure to progress their writing skills by paying attention to four essentials components related to writing activities, which are organization, vocabulary, grammar, and content.

2. For teachers, it is commended to emphasize on learning about teaching writing through activities or methods that are more attractive to students' motivation to learn.

12. Appendix

The teachers` interview

Dear teacher,

Thank you for accepting to participate in this interview. It is a research that is intended to investigate students' problems in writing skill. The information provided will only be used for research purposes and will never be revealed to any party under any circumstances.

Teacher background

Name (if possible)

Age.....

Year(s) of experience

Degree

Specialized in.....

The interview questions

What are the main obstacles that you face when you teach writing classes?

Do students have a good background on how to write a paragraph?

Do students have good vocabulary to write on a given subject?

If you answered (No) on number 3 can you mention the reasons?

Can students write a simple three paragraph essay?

Do students have good use of grammar?

If you answered (No) on number 5 can you tell the reasons?

Does time enough for you to give a particular lesson and feedback for the students?

Do you check the students` writing regularly?

Can you mention any further information about the subject?

Thank you

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