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**Exploring Some Difficulties That Affect EFL Students'**  
**Achievement In Paragraph Writing**

**The Case of Second Year students at the department of English-Khenchela University**

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Requirements for the Degree of Master in Language and Culture*

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## **DEDICATION**

*This work is dedicated specially to the most precious people in my heart, to the ones who gave me birth and a meaning to my life, to my parents, the source of my encouragement and love, my dear mother and beloved father may god have mercy on him.*

*This work is also dedicated to my brothers and sisters, my nephews and nieces, the candles that have enlightened my family.*

*To all my friends and Teachers at the University of Khenchela.*

*To all who were there for me, thank you for ignoring my faults and encouraging my merits*

*To all those who have been supportive, caring and patient, sometimes beyond their strength, I dedicate this simple work,*

## **Dedication**

*I dedicate this work to*

*My precious and lovely parents who always believed in me and pushed  
me forward to complete my studies successfully*

*To my dear brothers and sister*

*To my Online Teacher "Terriche Abdallah Amine" who guided me,  
shared with me his valuable knowledge and helped me*

*To all my friends and teachers who have always encouraged me*

*To everyone who sets me on my path*

*To all my classmates, even those who I met once and shared few  
moments.*

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*Last, but not least, our thanks go to the members of the jury who have kindly accepted to examine the present dissertation.*

## **ABSTRACT**

This study aims at exploring EFL students' writing difficulties in their English writing. The participants in the study are 30 randomly selected from 2<sup>nd</sup> year students of English at the University of Khenchela (Abbes Laghror). To achieve the research aims, we have conducted a qualitative study with two research instruments, Through the students' questionnaire, the first instrument, we have tried to shed lights on students' views concerning different points which are related either to writing in general or to the paragraph as a piece of writing. Through the second instrument, teachers' interview, we have tried to mirror teachers' perceptions towards a lot of issues concerning paragraph writing as a current problem that affects their students.

The results obtained revealed that the majority of students encountered difficulties in vocabulary, grammar and mechanics in addition to the reasons that lead to students' low achievement in paragraph writing.

Based on these findings, teachers are advised to take into account students' writing problems, and the elaboration of more writing sessions are among the pedagogical implications.

**List of abbreviations and symbols**

**2<sup>nd</sup>**: second

**L1**: First language

**L2**: Second language

**ESL**: English as a second Language

**EFL**: English as a Foreign Language

**C.1**: Clause one

**C.2**: Clause two

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## **1. Introduction**

Writing is the most difficult skill for students to master because they must balance multiple issues in their writing such as generating and organizing ideas, purposes, audience, vocabulary, and mechanics which means using the right punctuation, spelling and capitalization. Writing in a second language is even more difficult because it is “a complex, challenging, and difficult process.”(Alsamadani, 2010).

Students need to translate the ideas in their mind into readable texts. So, writing a paragraph is considered effective, concise, and clear as the same way as building an efficient house which is established with each room to serve a clearly definite purpose. Each paragraph should concentrate on a separate topic. Wallace, Stariba and Walberg (1986, p. 16) state: “writing is the most difficult skill that learners of any foreign language may face. To be good, learners must be aware of the difficulties they encounter when producing a piece of writing. As the students in this stage are extremely in need of producing not only proper and good written texts at university, but as they need them for their career, so students can improve and develop their levels in writing by doing some efforts, our study aims to help students identify their problems in writing paragraphs, and try to make teachers take these problems into consideration. Therefore, they will adopt the appropriate methods and choose the suitable conditions.

### **1. Statement of the problem**

Sperling and Fredman (2001) seek to define the nature of writing as a set of sub processes that includes planning, translating, and reviewing. But there are still other few things to keep in mind besides the steps mentioned before like the addressee you are writing for and the quality of language one is using in addition to the grammatical and vocabulary rules. As it is well known, writing is an important skill in our daily life because it has been largely influenced by the media and social communication. Nowadays, students are exposed to a variety of language sources; this may have a bad influence in student’s writing

achievements. In our universities English is considered to be a foreign language. So it is used and practiced inside the classrooms with a little possibility to be developed outside. Second year students of English in the University of Abbess Laghror Khenchela, have various problems in their writing and their level is unsatisfactory since students are unable to produce an accepted paragraph they still share common errors like low proficiency in vocabulary use, mistakes of capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and grammar... These problems have been the main motive to carry out this study. Accordingly, this research at English department at the University of Abbes Laghror Khenchela mainly focuses on exploring the difficulties that affect student's achievement in paragraph writing.

## **2. Aim of the study**

This study aims at investigating writing difficulties of 2nd year students of English at the University of Khenchela. The main purpose behind this study is to unveil some factors that limit students' achievement in paragraph writing, we attempt to provide teachers of the actual situation in the writing classrooms, and offer some suggestions and recommendations for this issue hoping to improve students' writing at an advanced level.

## **3. Research questions**

This study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1-What are the writing difficulties 2nd year EFL students at the University of Abbes Laghror usually suffer from?
- 2-What are the main factors that make students fail in paragraph writing?
- 3-What are the suggested solutions to these problems?

## **5. Research methodology and Design**

### **5.1. Choice of research method**

This research aims to identify the impediments for low performance in writing for students. To reach our objective, we need to focus and rely on one specific method. Qualitative method seems to be suitable to our research. This method is to gather non-numerical data; it refers to characteristics and description of things.

### **5.2. Population and sample**

Participants for this study will be 2<sup>nd</sup> year students of English in the University of Abbes Laghror. There will be 20 students, they will be asked, and their writings will be controlled in order to know their levels. Since most students encounter difficulties in paragraph writing, a random sample seems to be suitable for our research, so each individual is chosen by chance, and she/he has the same probability of being included. Thus, randomization reduces bias, saves time and enhances objectivity.

### **5.3. Data Gathering tools**

In order to collect the needed information for our study, a questionnaire is designed for students (it consists of varied questions), In addition to a semi-structured interview which is designed for teachers to know their views concerning the situation of their students. There will be 30 students chosen randomly. They will be asked, and their writings will be controlled in order to know their levels.

## **4. Organization of the study**

The present study is composed of two chapters. The first chapter is the literature review part, whereas the second is meant to the data gathering and analysis part. Chapter one is divided into three sections. Section one contains a review background of writing skill, in addition to teaching this skill to the learners of English as foreign language. The second section sheds light on paragraph writing; it deals with paragraph definitions, elements,

characteristics and its main types. Section three provides deep discussion about the problems that impede students when writing a paragraph. It provides an insight on the difficulty of writing in a second or foreign language and the main causes of such difficulty. Chapter two is entirely devoted to the practical part of our study. It contains a detailed analysis of students' questionnaire and teachers' interview.

*Chapter one:*

*Literature review*

## SECTION ONE: WRITING SKILL

### Introduction

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**Conclusion**

## **Introduction**

The writing skill is one of the essential skills in teaching and learning English as a foreign language. In this sense, Suleiman, (2000, p. 155 in Abedin et al, 2013) states that “Writing is a central element of language”. During the learning process, learners do not only focus on being a good writer but also to understand what a good writer is. As it was claimed by Joseph Defazio et al (2010, p .1), “there is a significant need for students at all levels not only to be a good writer communicator but also to understand the importance of good writing skill”.

Writing has been neglected in teaching English as a foreign language for many years and remained, for most of its history, a minor occupation. This is in part because almost all human beings grow up speaking their first language and sometimes their second language, or foreign language. Therefore, writing has to be learned. In this respect, to write, to learn how to write correctly and to be an effective writer are the most important objectives for both teacher and learner, especially at university.

### **I.1.1. Definition of Writing**

Writing is an important productive skill. It has been defined from different perspectives. Byrne (1988) claimed that writing is the act of forming, using, and arranging graphic Symbols into words or sentences in a particular order according to certain conventions, and those symbols can be letters that have a relation with the sounds we speak.

Hylland (1996) states: “writing is among the most important skills that second language students need to develop, and the ability to teach writing is central to the expertise. ... Learning how to write in a second language is one of the most challenging aspects of second language learning “(p.01).It means writing in a correct and good form is a big challenge for non-native students, especially to EFL learners.

Writing is a complex cognitive activity in which the writer is demanded to demonstrate control of a number of variables simultaneously at the sentence level including control of content, spelling, and letters, formation, and beyond the sentence structure and integrate information into cohesive and coherent paragraph and text (Bell & Burnbay cited in Nunan, 1989, p.36). In addition, writing is more than acquisition of copying language into Linear signs; it is a matter of reflection as its stated by White and Arndt (1991; p.3 in Sapkota, 2012),

“Writing is far from being a simple matter of transcribing language into written symbols: it is a thinking process in its own right .It is a permanent record, as a form of expression and as a means of communication”. Hence, writing is not only a matter of joining utterances and sentences, but it is a matter of reflection which include several steps.

### **I.1.2. Reasons for writing**

Rivers (1968 in Sapkota, 2012) asserted that the main goal of the writer in the writing step is to have the capacity to improve and express himself in a polite language .He seeks the use of his own vocabulary, since writing means the exposition of thoughts in a linear manner to control and order the language. In other words, the learners use the writing skill in order to express their ideas and feelings in a written form using their personal vocabulary and respecting the chronological order and the connection of ideas.

Harmer (2004, p.3) claimed that: “thus, we no longer have to ask ourselves whether writing is a good thing or not. We take it as a fundamental right”. In other words , Harmer means that we learn to write to fulfill our social needs , and being educated gives people the impression of self esteem over those who are not so fortunate .In addition , Reid ( as cited in Damayanti , 2009 ) identifies three main reasons for writing which are : to explain , to entrain and to Persuade.

All in all, we come to understand that before starting to write, a writer as primary stage needs to give deep thoughts to the purpose of writing.

### **I.1.3.The importance of writing**

According to Graham (2006\_ cited in Graham et al 2012, p 3) writing is an extremely versatile tool that can be used to accomplish a variety of goals. In fact, writing can improve students' abilities during the learning process, and it allows them to transmit their ideas effectively using the appropriate words and forms. This position is supported by Kellogg (2008\_cited in Muhammad. J, 2013) who argues that writing is an essential elements for students 'academic success; because it helps to reinforce the grammatical structure, enhance the students' vocabulary and assist other language skills namely, reading, listening and speaking . In addition, Pack (2003: xvii) highlights the importance of writing in which he says that: Learning to write well is learning to think, learning to become an educated person. Written is essentially the vehicle by which our ideas and feelings are expressed and articulated in the first place. Writing at once defines and constitutes our identity.

### **I.1.4. Elements of writing**

Raimes (1983\_ cited in Khan, 1999) provides an over view of the major components that are involved in writing skill; namely, syntax, grammar, mechanics, word choice, content, organization, the writers' process, the purpose and the audience. Mastery of these micro-skills helps learners to have good control over writing (Henry, 2000).

**I.1.4.1. Grammar:** it is defined by Harmer (2007:32) as “knowledge of what words can go where and what form these words should take”. Besides, it is expressed by Crystal (2004\_ cited Sharif2011: 13) as “the structural foundation of our ability to express our selves. The more we are aware of how it works, the more we can monitor the meaning effectiveness of the way we use language”. That is to say; grammar is the application of the rules.

**I.1.4.2. Mechanics:** they are the rules of punctuation, spelling and handwriting. In the same Respect, Kane (1988:15) sustained that “in compositions, mechanics refers to the appearance of words, to how they are spelled and arranged on paper”.

**I.1.4.3. Word choice:** choosing the appropriate words is the heart of writing which helps the writer to express what he/she exactly wants to convey and to ensure that the reader or the audience understands the intended meaning. Indeed, choosing the right words is one of the best ways to accurately convey ideas in any writing product (Starkey, 2004). So, a well written sentence or paragraph should be clear and interesting.

**I.1.4.4.The content:** the extent to which the writer is original and clear in his work. That is to say; to use personal ideas and words and avoid plagiarism, and to brief and concise and avoid useless details.

**I.1.4.5. Organization of Ideas:** Writing organization refers to organization words into sentences and sentences into paragraphs to convey a coherent, cohesive meaning. Starkey (2004: 2) demonstrates that “the organization of ideas lets the writer see how his developing ideas fit within a framework”. Hence the former is defined by Das (1978\_ cited in James 1988: 161) in terms of “communicative function involving the writer’s intention and the reader’s interpretation”. That is, it refers to how to shift from one idea to another. The later is declared by Yule (2006:125) as referring to “the ties and connections that exist within text”. So, cohesion is how to shift from paragraph to another.

**I.1.4.6. The purpose:** To have a better understanding of the aim of the topic. That is, to master the goal that you want to achieve or that you want your reader to gasp.

**I.1.4.7.The audience:** refer to the reader. The audience has some expectations; they expect to be persuaded, informed and have a clear understanding of the topic.

As a result, writers have to take into account these important elements before starting.

### **I.1.5. Writing process**

Many researchers argue that when writing, student go through different stages which are recursive and cyclical (Bae, 2011). To illustrate, Zamel (1990) claims that skilled writers seem to be aware of the writing process as exploring ideas and constructing meaning (as cited in Ferjani, 2010). In other words, writing is a complex task that involves many processes such as thinking, evaluating and monitoring one's thoughts. This is explained by the writing process.

### **I.1.6. Stages of writing**

**I.1.6.1. Prewriting:** Prewriting is an important stage that the student has go through before writing anything. It is a good technique, which allows the learner to explore and develop his ideas. Parson (1985, p.115) said: “students who are encouraged to engage in an array of prewriting experiences have a greater chance for writing achievement than those enjoined to ‘get to work’ on their writing without this kind of preparation”. This means that teachers should make their students aware of this stage and give them more time in order to prepare their ideas since prewriting needs brainstorming, reading, drawing, asking, and note taking...

**I.1.6.2. Drafting:** Drafting is the second stage where students try to have their first capture of ideas on paper (Johnson, 2008).In this stage; the students discover what he wants to say without paying attention to spelling, grammar or punctuation mistakes. Drafting should not be final because it is just a way to put the ideas you want to get across in your paper as (Galko, 2002, p.49) said: “drafting means writing a rough, or scratch, form of your paper. It is a time to really focus on the main ideas you want to get across in your paper”. Thus, students should know that drafts are not perfect and are just for the writer him/her self.

**I.1.6.3. Reviewing / revising:** reviewing or revising is the third stage where the writer looks at his/her paper with a reader eye. In contrast to drafting, which is for the writer revision is for the reader. Grenville (2001, p.153) said: “[as you revise] you will be looking for changes that will help readers understand information better or be more convinced by your argument. Once you have found the places that need fixing, you have decided whether to cut, add or move”. It means the writer goes through this step taking into consideration the readers, the purpose and the paper form; and sees what to keep and what to change.

**I.1.6.4. Editing:** while revising focuses mainly on the clarity of your ideas, editing focuses on making your document meet the conventions of Standard English. Johnson (2008) noted that editing aims at making your writing clearer through using the appropriate grammar, spelling and pronunciation. In this guise, Johnson (2008, p.167) defined it as the following: Basically ‘editing’ means making your piece as reader friendly as possible by making the sentences flow in a clear, easy-to read away. It also means bringing your piece of writing into line with accepted ways of using English; using the appropriate punctuation and spelling, and appropriate paragraphing.

**I.1.6.5. Publishing:** publishing is the final stage of writing process. It may include turning in a paper to your teacher, entering an essay context, posting a piece of writing on internet...Johnson (2008) described publishing as a stage where learners make of their writing visible. He said: “having an audience responds to your writing makes it comes alive” (p. 1999).

### **I.1.7. Teaching writing**

Writing is a complex activity, understanding this complexity is the key to effective teaching of writing, which is an essential element of every teaching program at all levels, for the purpose of making students master the writing skill and became independent writers,

though “teaching writing can be frustrating and challenging but it can also be rewarding and a breath of fresh air in a rather stagnant educational context” (Kirby & Crivitz, 2013, p.9). Therefore, as mentioned in NSW board of studies the teaching of writing need to be explicit in distinguishing between Academic and community purpose (p.21). Additionally, writing not only word choices, sentence variations, punctuation choices, and other linguistic tools for cohesion and coherence, but also it requires several aspects to be satisfied. Students are supposed to understand both the purpose and the context of their writing in order to succeed at written texts .Despite the fact that students may become independent writers, there still other issues and challenges they face, “no one is ‘native speaker’ at writing” (Leki ,1992 ,p.10). Teachers need to let students know that there are no native standards when it comes to academic writing.

In teaching writing, it is useful for teachers to enhance their knowledge about the various approaches to teaching writing. In addition, students need to be personally involved in writing tasks in order to make the learning experience effective and valuable (Adas& Bakir, 2013).

### **I.1.7.1.Approaches of teaching writing**

The teaching of writing is based on various approaches that emerged through time, each attempts to explain writing for better teaching and learning. According to Raimes (1993 in Albersher, 2012), there are three main approaches to writing: the product approach that is interested in the form, the process approach that focuses on the writer, and the genre approach that looks at the reader.

#### **I.1.7.1.1.The product approach:**

The product approach is the oldest and one of the most practiced approaches around the world (Palpanadan, Bin Salam & Bte Ismail, 2014) in the teaching of writing .This approach is predominantly focusing on the final results of writing, and considers linguistic knowledge,

syntax, vocabulary, and cohesive devices as basic features of the writing product. Pincas (as cited in Badger & White, 2000). Students in this approach are encouraged to imitate modeled text provided primarily by the teacher, where the main objective is to acquire linguistic knowledge. The product approach in teaching writing based on several principals; for teachers put a great emphasis on the teaching of features of grammar and sentence. Additionally, teachers regard the provision of modeled texts for students as the main tool for students to avoid committing mistakes (Là Zaro, 1996, p.92). Therefore, students are generally relying on mode samples in order to compose grammatically and syntactically correct pieces of writing.

#### **I.1.7.1.2. The process approach:**

The process approach to teaching writing is defined as “cyclical approach. In this approach, students are needed to move back and forth while going from one stage to another stage and taking part in writing activities” (Palpanadan , Bin Salam & Bte Ismail , 2014 ,p.790). Similarly to the process of writing which is “recursive” (Harmer , 2004) , the process approach tend to focus on the explicit instruction of the writing stages to students. In the process approach, researchers identify different stages writers go through, yet the most commonly stages agreed on suggested by Harmer (2007: 326), “writing as a process refers to the different stages that learners follow when constructing any piece of writing and among them pre-writing phase, editing, redrafting, and finally producing a final draft”. This means the focus is on how to write and not on what to write.

All in all, the process approach to teaching writing characterized with students as active participants in learning to write provides a good opportunity for them to develop their writings, and with the help of teacher as monitor, and a facilitator, this approach is considered to be efficient.

### **I.1.7.1.3.The genre approach:**

The genre approach is considered as a useful way to help students reach different purposes in their writing. In this sense, Ann (2003) summarizes the genre approach in this way:

In one side, genre is viewed as a type of text or writing text. It is typical model of writing product having different features and characteristics. On the other side, it is judged as one model or approach or strategy to teaching and learning writing (in Dirgeyasra, 2016, p.46).

Students in the genre approach are exposed with different types of writing, and write for various purposes. Genre in writing mainly refers to the distinct structure of texts, the different use of language in terms grammar, vocabulary that writers use to convey their ideas (Luu, 2011). Moreover, this approach argues that successful writing occurs when students take into account both the context and expectations of the readers in the terms of grammar, organization and the context (p.123). As for the role of the teacher, Luu claims that the teacher is generally a guide who provides students with careful support during writings activities, so they will achieve a mastery over the genres (p.124).

As a result, students in the genre approach are first acquainted with the different features of texts, purposes for writing while considering the context and the needs of the readers before they can engage in writing.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude with this chapter, we can say that writing is a complex process that many students find difficult and challenging; however, it can be attained through learning some strategies and practicing them. Teaching writing should not be limited to the outcome product, but has to comprise the process through which writers go in order to produce a piece of writing.

## **SECTION TWO: PARAGRAPH WRITING**

### **Introduction**

I.2.1. Defining a Paragraph

I.2.2. Elements of a Paragraph

I.2.2.1. Topic sentence

I.2.2.2. Supporting sentences

I.2.2.3. Concluding sentence

I.2.2.3. Characteristics of a Good Paragraph

I.2.3.1. Coherence

I.2.3.2. Cohesion

I.2.3.3. Unity

I.3.4. Completeness

I.2.4. Types of a Paragraph

I.2.4.1. Expository Paragraph

I.2.4.2. Narrative Paragraph

I.2.4.3. Argumentative Paragraph

I.2.4.4. Descriptive Paragraph

### **Conclusion**

## **Introduction**

In its simplest form, writing may be just using graphic symbols or reproducing in a written form something which has been heard or read. When writing, students begin to learn how to write a paragraph by taking several sentences and organize them around a common topic. Writing a paragraph means understanding which ideas go together to construct a unified and coherent paragraph that is based on logical sequence and appropriate transitions. Thus, students must master the graphic system of language, its grammatical structure, and select the appropriate vocabulary related to the subject matter. Learning how to develop a paragraph means making a form of expression and communication which enables learners to communicate ideas, feelings, and different attitudes in a written mode.

### **I.2.1. Defining a paragraph**

Lunsford and Louis (1984, p. 116) views a paragraph as a group of sentences or a single sentence that forms a unit. This is further explained by Scott and Denny (1990, p. 22) in the following passage: “A paragraph is a unit of discourse developing a single idea. It consists of a group or series of sentences closely related to one another and to the thought expressed by the whole group or series.” A paragraph is a group of sentences that convey one Idea. All sentences in a paragraph work together as part of a unit to create an overall thought or impression. (Karen Blanchard & Christine Root, 2004, p. 5).

### **I.2.2. Elements of a Paragraph**

We can divide a paragraph into three parts, topic sentences, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence.

**I.2.2.1.The Topic Sentence:** The topic sentence is always the first sentence in the paragraph it expresses the paragraph’s main idea and helps the reader to understand the paragraph’s purpose; it contains the subject and the main idea of the paragraph.

**I.2.2.2. Supporting sentences:** The role of supporting sentences is to make up the body of the paragraph they usually give details that support or explain the idea expressed in the topic sentence.

**I.2.2.3. Concluding sentence:** It's the last sentence in a paragraph. Reid (1994, p. 42) states that: "The concluding sentence summarizes the material, offers a solution to the problem, predicts a situation, makes recommendation, or states a conclusion."

### **I.2.3. Characteristics of a Good Paragraph:**

**I.2.3.1. Coherence:** Gred Dorchies (as cited in Raimes, 1983, p.69) states that: "Coherence is the intangible glue that holds ideas together if a paragraph is coherent; each sentence flows so smoothly into the next without obvious shifts or jumps that the reader can understand easily." Coherence is an important process during natural language understanding it can be established in the paragraph, when ideas are properly connected by the relevant transitions, and appropriately sequenced.

**I.2.3.2. Cohesion:** Good cohesion leads to good coherence, to make it simple we can define cohesion as the degree to which sentences are connected so that the flow of ideas is easy to follow. In order to establish good cohesion, a student need to know how to use cohesive devices, which are certain words or phrases that serve the purpose of connecting two statement, usually by referring back to what you have previously written or said. (Bamberg, 1983, p. 27)

**I.2.3.3. Completeness:** Boardman and Frydenberg (2004, p. 47) state that: "Your paragraph is complete when it has all the major supporting Sentence...fully explain the topic sentence and the entire minor Supporting sentences...to explain each major supporting sentence." Completeness in a paragraph means that the controlling idea is developed thoroughly by the use of the necessary information. Thus, completeness is relative to how complex or general

the topic sentence is. It means how many words a paragraph needs in order to achieve the sense of completeness.

## **I.2.4. Types of paragraph**

There are four main types of paragraph; each type depends on the way of developing an idea.

### **I.2.4.1. Expository paragraph**

Expository paragraphs are used to show the reader the steps that enable them to do something. Boardman and Frydenberg (2004, p. 7) state that: “The goal of expository writing is to explain something to the reader. You can explain something in many ways...comparing two things...showing the steps in a process...analyzing something.” In an expository paragraph, give directions to show how something is done.

### **I.2.4.2. Narrative paragraph**

Narration can be used to entertain or to inform. Walter Fisher (1987, p. 23) defines narration as any verbal or non verbal account that has a sequence of events. He has proposed basic aspects for narration:

**Purpose:** The reason behind telling a story.

**Context:** Establishing the context of narrative early.

**Point of view:** A narrative paragraph may be written in the first person or third person (he, she, and it) point of view. Do not use second person (you). If you were part of the action, the first person provides the best perspectives, but if you are telling other’s events, uses the third person point of view. Once you have decided upon a point of view, stay consistent with it.

**Details:** Include enough details for clarity; however select only the facts that are relevant.

**Organization:** A narrative paragraph usually follows a chronological order; however, you may find flash backs. Most narrative paragraphs are told in the past tense. You should keep tenses consistent.

### **I.2.4.3. Argumentative paragraph**

Argumentative paragraph presents point of view and provides evidences to support it. It addresses a specific position on an issue with the intention of persuading readers by using person's experiences, statistics, confirmed facts and expert researcher's findings. The objective of persuasive paragraph is to improve your idea or point of view and to convince readers.

### **I.2.4.4. Descriptive paragraph**

A descriptive paragraph describes a thing, a place or a person. It includes details that appeal to the reader's senses (sight, taste, touché, smell and hearing) in order to give the possible detailed description. Writers necessitate a lot of vocabulary to draw the image perfectly for readers, so allowing them to see who or what is being described. More details help the reader to create a vivid mental picture. For this reason, one should own a relatively large repertoire of adjectives.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, we can say that this section is one step for clarifying the structure and the function of a paragraph. A successful paragraph is more than just a collection of sentences that are related to the same topic. Paragraphs need a topic sentence, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence; other paragraph traits are used to make it more effective. Moreover, students have to set their aim before starting to write in order to choose the appropriate paragraph type that suits the desired aim.

## **SECTION THREE: STUDENTS' PROBLEMS IN PARAGRAPH WRITING**

### **Introduction**

I.3.1. Difficulties faced by EFL learners

I.3.2. Writing problems

I.3.2.1. Grammatical problems

I.3.2.2. Mechanical problems

I.3.2.3. Spelling problems

I.3.2.4. Content problems

I.3.3. Problems of sentence structure

I.3.3.1. Sentence fragment

I.3.3.2. Sentence Run-on

I.3.4. Usage problems

I.3.4.1. Arabish

I.3.5. Problems in paragraph construction

I.3.5.1. Unaccepted topic sentence

I.3.5.2. Mixing a number of ideas in one paragraph

I.3.5.3. Repetition

### I.3.6. Causes behind student's low achievement in paragraph writing

I.3.6.1. Lack of motivation

I.3.6.2. Lack of practice

I.3.6.3. Lack of suitable feedback

### **Conclusion**

## **Introduction**

Writing is the main language skill; it plays the greatest role in expressing student's ideas, thoughts, attitudes and opinions, but it requires a lot of efforts.

Manny students face several types of writing problems which may occur because of many factors. Raimes (1983, p. 13) thinks that :”when students complain about how difficult it is to write in a second language, they are not talking only about the difficulty of finding the right words and using the correct grammar but also about the difficulty of finding and expressing ideas in a new language.”

Paragraph writing is considered as a challenge for native speakers and non native speakers alike. Accordingly, this section is an attempt to identify the kind of problems which hinder the student to write a coherent paragraph. The aim is to make students aware of their problems in paragraph writing. Roya khoi (2015, p. 493) states that:”the difficulty of writing becomes even more pronounced if students are not aware of their problems.”

### **I.3.1. Difficulty faced by EFL learners**

It is a note worthy that writing is a very complicated subject; it is seen as one of the most difficult skills in learning and practicing English language. That is to say, writing problems in a second language occur for even the most experienced students.

Most writing difficulties are shared among students who are learning English as a foreign language. Huwari & AL-khasawneeth (2013, p. 12) states that “EFL learners showed that they have many problems when writing in English...that’s because they rarely write in English.” In addition, “students do not write very often and most of what they write is classroom bound.” (Adas & Bakir, 2013, P. 254)

When writing, students should overcome the influence of various factors that they have in their native language, “student’s first language affect the target language. This is why EFLs make certain mistakes and repeat them.” (Dana Adas & Ayda Bakir, 2013, P, 255)

Generally speaking, students are often not interested in the criteria that constitute a good piece of writing, but they are concentrating on the contents and ideas. Instructors continuously complain about the lack of knowledge and certain skills that are necessary for academic writing among non-native speakers of English. Some of these skills involve outlining, paraphrasing and summarizing. (Arkoudis & Tran, 2010, p. 175). Furthermore, Aragon, Baires and Rodriguez (2013) argued that students who have low interest in writing mostly have low writing proficiency (p.1). Another research which confirmed writing difficulties was conducted by Salem (as cited in Huwari & Al-Khasawnah. 2013), in which he concluded that EFLS encounter difficulties impeding them to write effectively.

### **I.3.2. Writing problem**

Actually, many students are considered poor in the skill of writing. They even neglect its influence on the other skills. But, mistakes are common parts of the learning process, and neither the teacher nor the student can deny them. The writing problems may be related to features like grammar, syntax, coherence and cohesion or others. Furthermore, student’s writing difficulties may be a result of different factors because “...not only self-strategies influence student’s performance, but also the effectiveness of the methods and techniques that teachers apply in their English composition courses.” (Aragon, Baires & Rodriguez, 2013, P. 1)

#### **I.3.2.1. Grammatical problems**

Students face several problems in their attempts to write in the second language, because they are facing a foreign language with new rules. “As verbs take different forms depending on

tense and subjects they are used with, they create problems for second language writing students.” (Tyner, 1987). (Harmer, 2001, p.12) proposed a detailed definition of grammar that is “the description of the ways in which words can change their forms and can be combined into sentences in that language.” These ways are called “Grammar rules” which mainly include various rules such as tenses, prepositions, word class, voice and many others. These rules stand as a problem for many students in writing. The main writing difficulties students find in relation to grammar is the low understanding of grammar which results later on in difficulties in arranging proper writing. (Bahri & Sugeng, 2010)

### **I.3.2.2. Mechanical problems**

Mechanical problems are those problems which are linked to spelling, punctuation, and capitalization; they are commonly shared among students. Mechanical errors may be a result of a quick writing where the concentration is on the content. These errors may lead to misunderstanding and they reflect a bad impression concerning the writer’s ability.

### **I.3.2.3. Punctuation problem**

Punctuation presents a problem in writing, so EFL students need to learn some aspects of the English punctuation system. Carroll and Wilson (1993) represent a problem linked to punctuation. This is that punctuation rules are not totally exact, punctuation is complex, and it depends on one’s style to determine the meaning. The way a student punctuates writing can change the meaning completely, because each punctuation mark is a distinctive way of interpreting the meaning; According to Byrne (1988), the fact that punctuation has never been standard to the extent as spelling. Similarly, Carroll and Wilson (1995) state “student’s writing encounter punctuation problems as there are no universal rules of punctuation.” These mistakes are due to the lack of clear understanding of what a sentence is, so they lead to many

problems. So, students need to pay attention to the way they punctuate, which is in most cases a problem for them.

#### **I.3.2.4. Capitalization problem**

Learners have problems in using capitalization properly. The rules of capitalization are not universal and classifying nouns as proper and common nouns is difficult for students. Many learners tend to use capital letters for everything that seems to be important. One of the common problems of capitalization is that instead of capitalizing all words in the title (except coordinating conjunctions, articles, and prepositions), many students tend to capitalize only the first word (Ann Humes, 2012, P. 5)

#### **I.3.2.5. Spelling problems**

Spelling mistakes are made by both ESL students and native speakers, learning to spell words correctly is expected to take place in the earliest stages of language teaching, yet it is not always the case for spelling may become difficult in some instances. Frith (1980, p. 496) argues that “learning to read should imply learning to spell, and learning to spell should imply learning to read. “However, spelling mistakes do not usually prevent the reader from understanding what the writer is trying to say, but they can create a negative impression. “Spelling words in English is challenging work. As a matter of fact... natives of English have problems with spelling correctly. One of the main reasons for this is that many English words are not spelled as they are spoken. This difference between pronunciation and spelling causes a lot of confusion.” (Kenneth Bear, 1997, p. 49) Additionally, (Banchara, 2013, p. 4) explained that spelling mistakes may occur when students are less concentrated due to tiredness or carelessness about the correctness of word. While Harmer (2001) indicates that the reason spelling is difficult for students is “... the fact that not all varieties of English spell the same words in the same way.” For example, the way American English pronounced the word “

behavior “ , differs from British English “behavior “. In this sense, extensive reading in English is a very good solution in the longer term for learning English spelling because it allows the students to memorize the correct spellings of words.

### **I.3.2.6. Content problem**

In writing, students must make their ideas clear and readable not only for themselves but also for the readers. Thoughts must be presented so that the audience will get what you are trying to say. Learners of English as a foreign language face several problems of exploring ideas to communicate with others (Clifford, 1987) among these problems is that students are not able to explore what they want to say in a manner that others will understand Clifford (1987) suggests that teachers should encourage students to focus on the message, ideas or thoughts they wish to convey rather than grammar, spelling, punctuation and others.

### **I.3.3. Problems of sentence structure**

Sentences reflect various syntactic structures (Reid, 1983). However, incapable learners use some syntax errors which affect mainly the text. Additionally, students who don't have a well understanding of what a sentence is often include sentence problems in their writing.

#### **I.3.3.1. Sentence fragment**

Alice Oshima and Ann Hogue (1998, p. 169) define sentences fragments as an incomplete sentences or parts of sentences. Remember that a complete sentence must contain at least one main or independent clause. On the other hand (Jack Lync, 2007, p. 79) define fragment as a sentence without a verb, a subject or both, but it is punctuated as if it were a complete sentence. As a result, a fragment is a group of words or a phrase (a dependent clause) used as if it were a complete sentences (an independent clause) For example

\_ “His first step” Is a fragment

“it was his first step” is a complete sentence. Students can detect fragments through reading their writing. Identify the main components of each sentence, and correct the fragment by adding the missing element.

### **I.3.3.2. Run-on sentence**

Run-on sentences are series of short sentences which are not separated by a punctuation mark or not linked by a conjunction. The student can identify the run-on sentence, when there is no corresponding punctuation mark in his writing, this can be fixed by appropriate conjunction, or a certain punctuation mark.

Example of a run-on sentence:

I have to go home; I need to get some rest.

**C.1**

**C.2**

There is no conjunction or punctuation between these clauses; this makes it a run-on sentence.

Alice Oshima and Ann Hogue (1998, p. 170) state that: A run-on sentence is two or more independent clauses joined without the necessary punctuation separating them or the appropriate conjunction...long sentences are sometimes necessary, but you must join your ideas in a way that will not confuse the reader.

### **I.3.4. Usage problems**

Type of mistakes that often seen in EFL learners' writing, it does not affect rules of grammar but it is a string of words that a native speaker would never use to express the particular meaning that the ESL student is trying to convey. Oller (as cited in Anchalee & pongrat, 2008, p. 37) states that “semantic errors are undoubtedly the most common type of errors, and they are the hardest to find and correct.”

### **I.3.4. 1.Arabish**

When the students translate Arabic into English; they usually transfer the stylistic features of Arabic as their first language. For instance, the degree of explicitness and implicitness; Arab writers usually avoid conveying their messages explicitly, assuming that readers are responsible for understanding the message. They also tend to transfer their first words, meaning, patterns of thinking in their first language that may cause misunderstanding and confusion. (Dana Adas & Ayda Bakir, 2013, p. 256) indicates that the short-term solution to usage problems is to ask a native speaker to check the work, and the long term solution is to do lots of reading in English.

### **I.3.5.Problems in paragraph construction**

When constructing a paragraph, students emphasize grammar and punctuation rather than content and organization of ideas. They have been exposed to the rules of writing and grammar without developing their ability to express their ideas. So that student faces several problems.

#### **I.3.5.1.Unaccepted topic sentence**

The starting point which is the topic sentence is the most challenging point in paragraph writing although they have a lot of ideas in mind. Alice Oshima and Ann Hogue (1998, p. 17) state that: “the topic sentence states the main idea of the paragraph. It does not only name the topic of the paragraph, but it also limits the topic to one area that can be discussed completely in the space of a single paragraph. The specific area is called the controlling idea.” But we find that students often write a topic sentence without a controlling idea. Another mistake which students tend to mention an idea in the topic sentence without developing it further. They must explain it in the paragraph, by giving facts, opinions or both. In topic sentence some students tell the readers what to expect. For example, in this paragraph, the author is going to

talk about internet. Topic sentences which include specific details or a fact are wrong; instead they should be composed of general statements.

### **I.3.5.2.Mixing a number of Ideas in one paragraph**

Many students repeatedly mixed a lot of ideas in one paragraph; for example instead of only writing about the difference between different types of paragraphs, they write about differences, similarities and description of each paragraph. This may create a misunderstanding and confusion for readers about what is contained in the paragraph. Almost all the English paragraph writers unanimously were convinced that a paragraph must contain one idea; otherwise, it will be difficult for the reader to understand the point that are focused on in the controlling idea (Ostrom and cook, 1993)

### **I.3.5.3.Repetition**

Repetition is the result of the mixture of ideas in one paragraph, and the possibility of having a many extra words, unnecessary information and repetition is high (Azad Ali Muhammad, 2015, p. 25)

Repetition is one of the most common paragraph writing challenges for many students. But it can be a reduced by taking a range of actions such us practicing a lot, putting learners into groups, peer edition and demonstrating the way to avoid using them (Azad Ali Muhammad, 2015, p. 26)

### **I.3.6.Causes behind student’s low achievement in paragraph writing**

Norish (1993) states the following about the complexity of writing; “in written medium, information has to be transmitted without any aid from other sources than the language itself. It seems to follow from this that more attention is needed to be paid to the language as a code in short to the grammatical and lexical system than is the case with speech (p.65)” this shows

that writing is a complex process because it requires the mastery of grammatical devices, conceptual thinking and judgmental elements (Byrne 1988, Heaton 1990). Another researchers have tried to identify the secret behind those classifies the writing complexities into psychological, linguistic and cognitive problems.

### **I.3.6.1. Lack of motivation**

Al-khasawneh (as cited in Dana Adas & Ayda Bakir, 2013, p.5) argued that student's problems in paragraph writing are either related to the lack of student's motivation or teacher's interest. Davi (1998) thinks that learners will be encouraged to write if writing tasks motivate them and keep them interested. Students can develop their writing skill when their concerns and interests are acknowledged, when they are given numerous opportunities to write and when they are encouraged to become participants. In addition, Byrne (1988) believes that most of writers write less well if they are not obliged to write about something that they do not want to write about.

### **I.3.6.2. Lack of Practice**

Hedge (1988) states that: "my own experience tells me that in order to become a good writer, a student needs to write a lot." This shows that the best way to learn any skill would be to practice it. According to Davies (1998), "writing is essentially a creative process and good writers must learn to communicate their ideas clearly to an invisible audience." In addition, Grabe and Kalan (1996) believe that writing does not come naturally but rather gained through continuous effort and much practice.

### **I.3.6.3. Lack of suitable feedback**

Byrne (1988) thinks that if we are to be truly readers rather than judges, we should perhaps look not so much at what the learners have failed to achieve but rather at what they actually

succeeded in doing. This might help students who write to appreciate comments and use them in developing their abilities. On the other hand Ferris (1995) believes that teachers should not abandon constructive criticisms but should place it side by side with comments of encouragement. In addition to this, the corrections EFL teachers made were related to surface level problems, that is focusing on spelling, tense and punctuation forgetting content and organization of the writing that affect meaning and communication (Zamel, 1985; Cited in Alamirew, 2005).

## **Conclusion**

Paragraph writing is a challenge task for EFL students, because they face several problems. So, this study is an attempt to identify the writing problems of a sample of University students who study English as a foreign language in Abbas Laghror University. We are trying to make the learners know their problems in order to overcome many weaknesses, and to develop their writing skill, learners should not panic. Everyone experiences writer's block sometimes. They should be encouraged to go through writer's block and break it. This will help them master the writing skill.

*Chapter two:*  
*Data gathering and analysis*

# **SECTION ONE: STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

II.1. Questionnaire administering and description

II.2. Questionnaire Analysis and Presentation

II.3. Discussion of the findings

## **CONCLUSION**

## **Introduction**

The current study attempts to investigate some factors behind student's writing difficulties, and common errors second year students share in writing at English department (Khenchela University). In doing so, we need to gather the opinions of students, and to identify learner's views of writing.

A student's questionnaire was administered to be adequate for this kind of research. This section includes a description of the population from which the sample was selected. Moreover, this chapter includes all what is related to administering, analysis and presentation, in addition to discussion of the findings.

### **II.1. Questionnaire administering and description**

The first means of collecting data is the student's questionnaire. Fifteen (15) questions were distributed. Result from this questionnaire show that most questions were understood correctly by the students and answered normally.

The questionnaire is composed of fifteen (15) questions mixed between closed questions where students are required to choose 'yes' or 'no' answers, and with multiple choice questions where they are asked to pick their own answers. Moreover, questionnaire is categorized into three main types; the first five (5) questions are under the background information of the students. The second type, question (6) to (10) deals with student's perception concerning writing paragraph. The third part of the questionnaire (11) to (15) entitled students' perception concerning paragraph writing problems. Accordingly, thirty (30) students were asked to answer all the questions. Once answered, the questionnaires were collected and carried out to be analyzed.

## II.2. Questionnaire analyses and presentation:

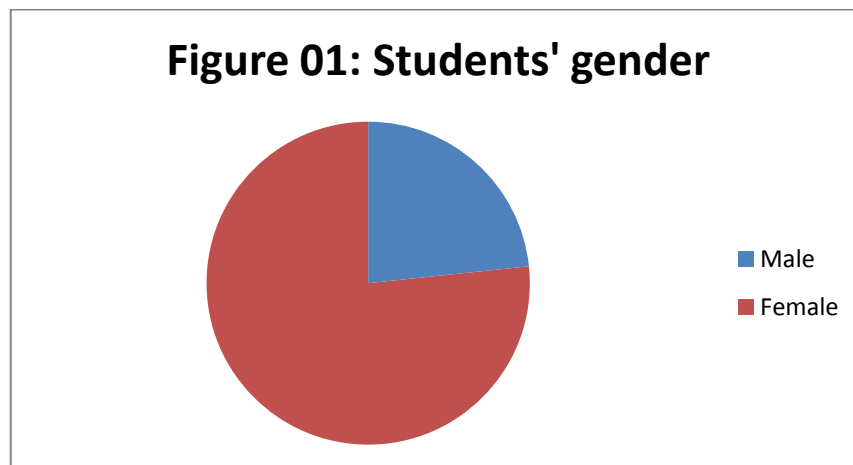
### PART ONE: Student's background information

#### Item 1: Students' gender

Table 01: Students' gender

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Male	7	23,30%
Female	23	76,60%
Total	30	100%

We can deduce from the chart above that the majority of the respondents to the questionnaire are females (76, 60%), whereas the remaining percentage represents the male respondents (23, 30).



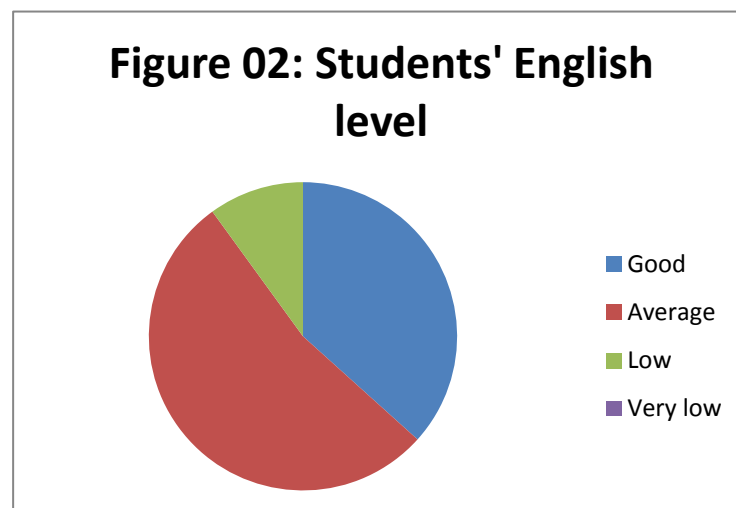
## Item 2: How do you evaluate your English level?

Table 02: Students' English level

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Good	11	36,60%
Average	16	53,30%
Low	3	10%
Very low	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

As it is noticed, the highest rate of respondents (53, 3%) claims to have an average level in English. Others (36, 6%) have declared to have a good level, while the remaining respondents (10%) appeared to have a low level in English.

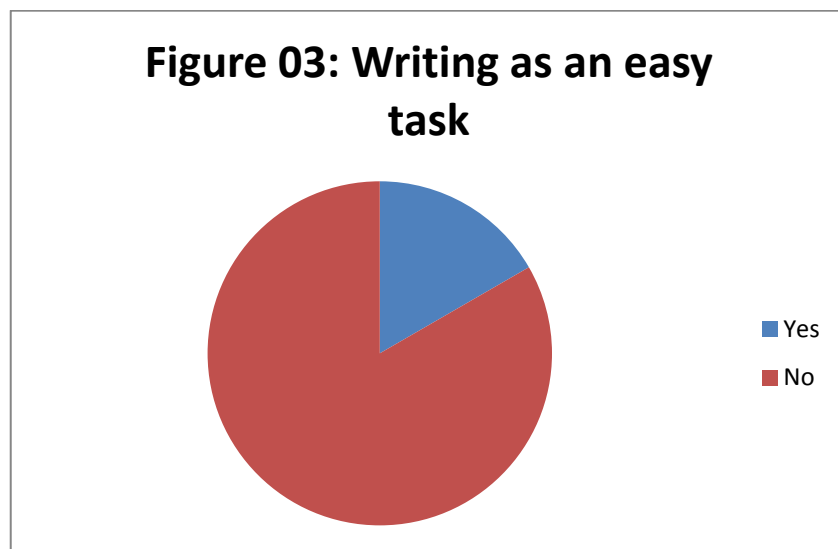
Students mainly link their level in English to their ability of understanding and using the different language skills (speaking; reading; writing and listening).



**Item 3: Is writing an easy task?****Table 03: Writing as an easy task**

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>16,6%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>83,3%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

Most of the students (83, 3%) claimed that writing is not an easy task, while the remaining (16, 6%) agrees that writing is an easy task.

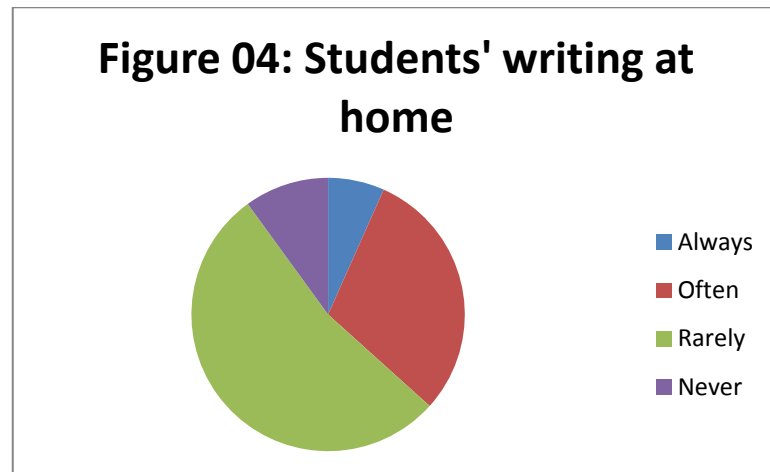


#### Item 4: How many times you write at home?

Table 04: Students' writing at home

Degree	Frequency	Percentage
Always	2	6,6%
Often	9	30%
Rarely	16	53,3%
Never	3	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

The results obtained show that most of students write rarely at home (53, 3%), (10%) never, (30%) answered often, and only (6, 6%) always.



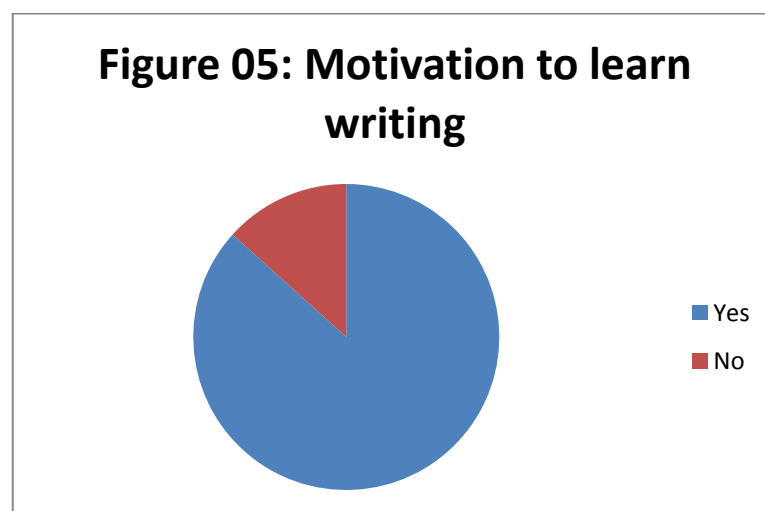
**Item 5: Are you motivated to learn writing?**

**Table 05: Motivation to learn writing**

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>86,6%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13,3%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

Results obtained from question (5) depict that the majority of respondents (26) assume that they are motivated to learn writing. As for the rest, the remaining respondent (4) has stated to be demotivated to learn writing.

The factor of motivation plays a significant role in learning this skill. These results could be interpreted in the way that most students like to practice writing, and they have a positive attitude towards it. Therefore, they are willing to learn writing and to improve their level.



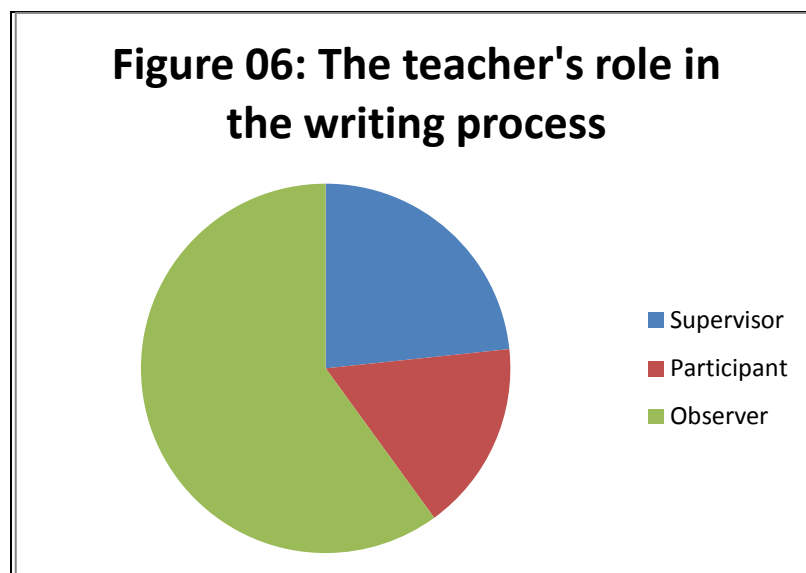
## PART TWO: Student's perception concerning writing a paragraph

Item 1: What is the teacher's role in the writing process?

Table 06: The role of the teacher in the writing process

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Supervisor	7	23,33%
Participant	5	16,66%
Observer	18	60%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

The results shown in the table above (6) clearly demonstrate that the majority of the students indicates that the role of the teacher is an observer (just see what they do), in the sense that 60% answered Observer, 23, 33% answered Supervisor (guide them), and only 16, 66% answered Participant (write with them).



**Item 2:** What do you think about the chosen topics for your written tasks?

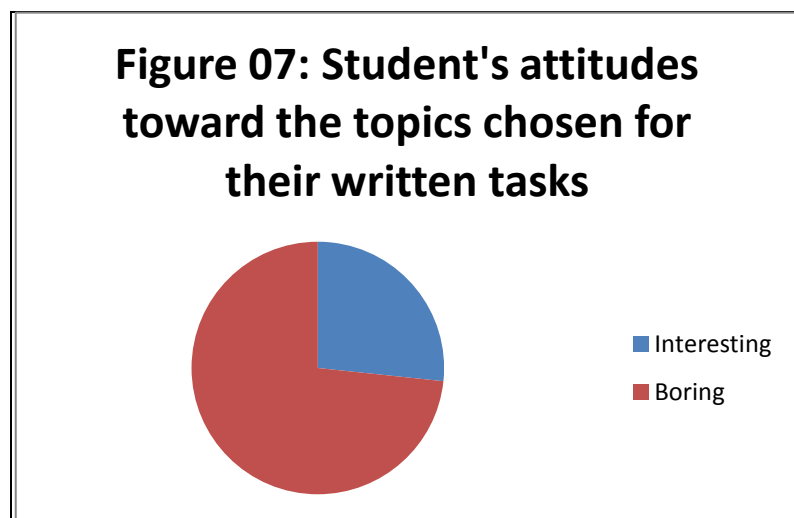
Table 07: Student's attitudes toward the topics chosen for their  
Written tasks

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Interesting	8	26,60%
Boring	22	73,30%
Total	30	100%

Table (07) reports whether the students find the chosen topics for written tasks interesting or not.

The data shows that the majority of students (73, 3%) consider the chosen topics in written tasks as boring topics, only (26, 6%) of the participants find the chosen topics interesting.

Considering the chosen topics in written tasks as boring topics explains the reason behind student's lack of motivation while writing.

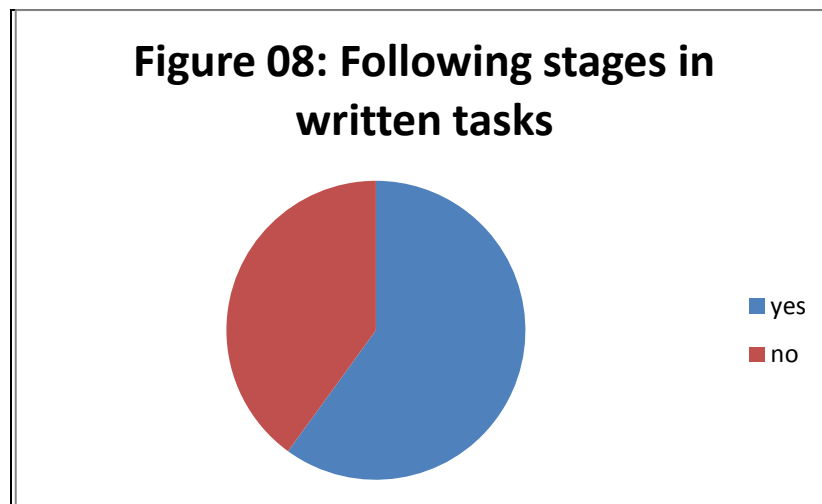


**Item 3:** Do you usually follow the stages of writing in your written tasks?

**Table 08:** Following stages in written tasks

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

Most of the students (60%) have confirmed that they follow strictly the stages of writing in their tasks. Whereas the rest of students (40%) disproved the statement. Results from the table (08) imply that most of students are aware of the significance of following the stages of writing, This factor is important in developing and refining students' written productions (Harmer, 2004).



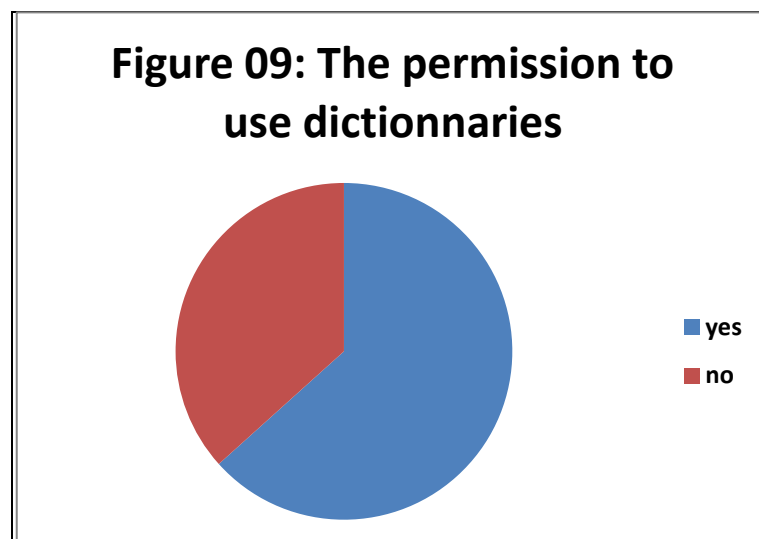
**Item 4:** Does the teacher allow you to use dictionaries in the writing sessions?

Table 09: The permission to use dictionaries

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	19	63,30%
No	11	36,60%
Total	30	100%

We can notice that the majority of students (63, 3%) claimed that the teacher allows them to use dictionaries. Unlike the rest (36, 60%) who stated that the teacher does allows them to use dictionaries during the writing session.

Students' use of dictionary could be a way to improve their writing level, and also foster them to compose.



**Item 5: Do you follow writing instruction your writing teacher taught you when you write in other modules?**

**Table 10: Following the writing instruction in other modules**

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>70%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

The table above shows that a high percentage of students (70%) confirmed that they follow what the teacher has instructed them when writing in other modules. On the contrary, (30%) of students said that they do not follow these instructions.

Students learn writing and its stages to be applied not only in the module of writing, but also in different types of assignments. The results obtained show that students are fully aware of teachers' instruction concerning writing and that they apply most of them in other modules.

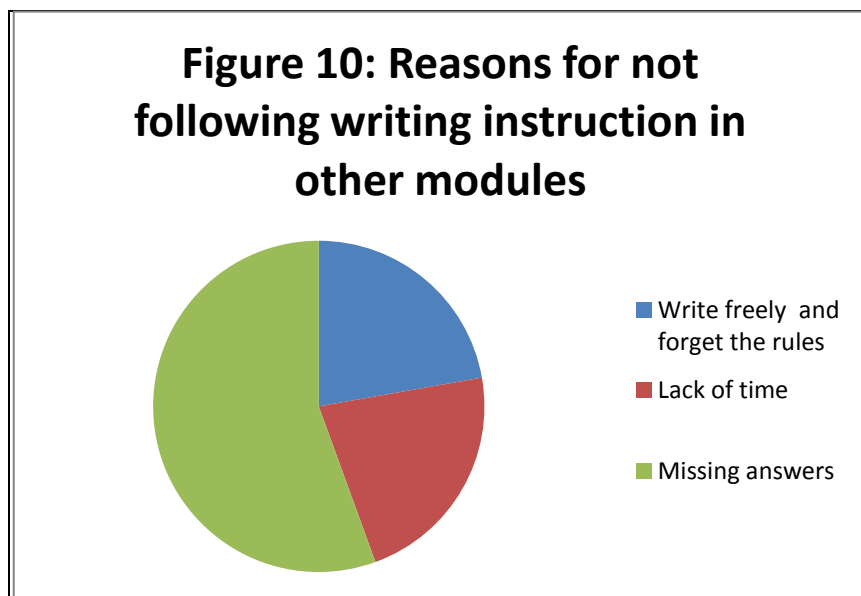
- **If no, is it because :**

**Table 11: Reasons for not following writing instruction in other modules**

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>percentage</b>
<b>Write freely and forget the rules</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>22,20%</b>
<b>Lack of time</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>22,20%</b>
<b>Missing answers</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>55,50%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100%</b>

The table above indicates students' responses about not following the writing instruction when writing in other modules. A large number of students (55, 5%) did not provide an answer. A percentage of (22, 2%) which represents 2 students explained that they like to write freely and often forget the rules. A similar percentage (22, 2%) associated the reason to the lack of time.

The results indicate that these reasons are the main cause of not following the steps of writing. First, providing students with less time to complete the writing assignment may stop them from respecting these steps and results in a messy composition. Second, when students develop a certain style in writing they may forget the basic instructions they have to follow. In addition, the complexity of some writing rules may push students to become more independent which makes their writing seem less organized.



### **PART THREE: Student's perception concerning paragraph writing problems**

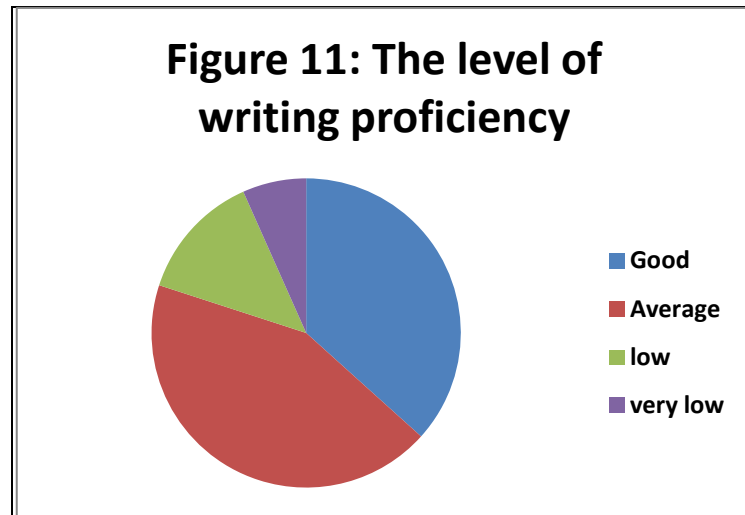
**Item 1: How do you evaluate your writing proficiency?**

Table 12: The level of writing proficiency

<b>Level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Good</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>36,60%</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>43,33%</b>
<b>low</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13,33%</b>
<b>Very low</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6,66%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

The majority of students (43, 33%) stated that they have an average proficiency in writing, whereas other students (36, 60%) indicate to be good arbiters. Moreover, few students (13, 33%) have identified themselves to be low proficiency writers, (6, 66%) very low writers.

The fact that most students have an average level in writing, as noticed from the aforementioned results, may be linked to students' lack of practice of writing. Unlike (36, 60%) of students who have declared to have a good level in writing probably practice writing more often. therefore, the more students practice, the more they will improve their writing skill and proficiency.



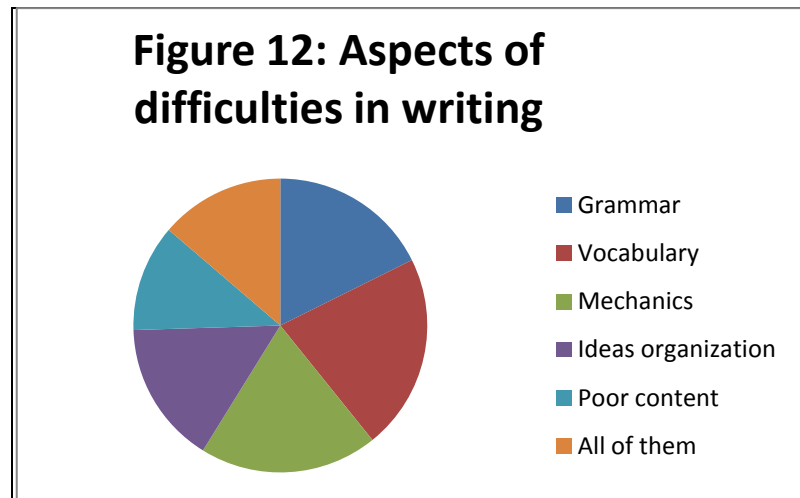
**Item 2:** What are the aspects that you find difficulties in when writing a paragraph? (You can choose multiple answers)

**Table 13: Aspects of difficulties in writing**

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Grammar</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17,64%</b>
<b>Vocabulary</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>21,56%</b>
<b>Mechanics</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>19,60%</b>
<b>Ideas organization</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15,68%</b>
<b>Poor content</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11,76%</b>
<b>All of them</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13,72%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>100%</b>

From table 13 it's clear that the majority (21, 56%) find problems concerning Vocabulary. Grammar and mechanics appear in the second position with a similar percentage, (17, 64%) find difficulties in grammar, whereas (19,6%) choose mechanics. For (11, 76%) of students poor content is the problem they face when writing a paragraph. (15, 68%) find difficulties in

the organization of their ideas. The last category of students (13, 72%) combines all the previous aspects to be the secret behind their poor products in paragraph writing tasks.



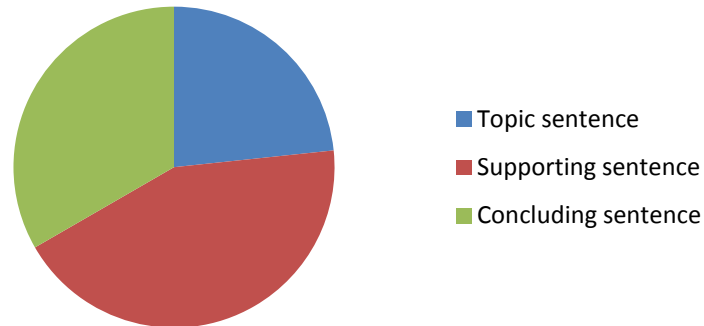
**Item 3:** Try to classify the following paragraph components in terms of difficulty

Table 14: Classification of the paragraph's components in terms of difficulty

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Topic sentence	7	23,33%
Supporting sentence	13	43,33%
Concluding sentence	10	33,33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

From the table 14, it is clear that the majority considers that constructing the supporting sentences is more difficult, in the sense that (43, 33%) chose its corresponding box, (33, 33%) answered concluding sentence and (23, 33%) select the topic sentence.

**Figure 13: Classification of the paragraph's components in terms of difficulty**

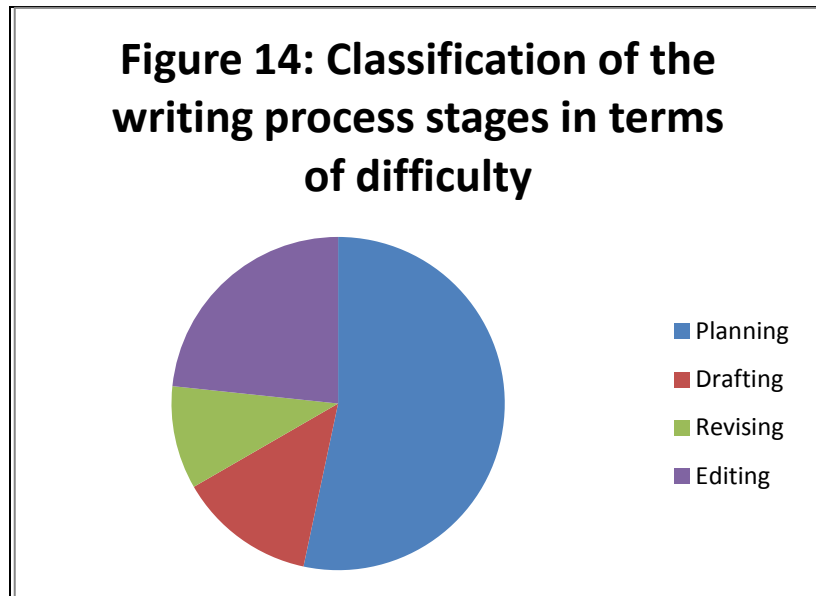


**Item 4:** Which stage of writing is more difficult for you?

**Table 15:** Classification of the writing process stages in terms of difficulty

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Planning</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>53,33%</b>
<b>Drafting</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13,33%</b>
<b>Revising</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Editing</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>23,33%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

The majority of our respondents (53, 33%) declare that Planning is the most difficult stage for them. Revising is seen to be the fourth stage in term of difficulty (10%) after Drafting (13, 33%) and Editing (23, 33%).

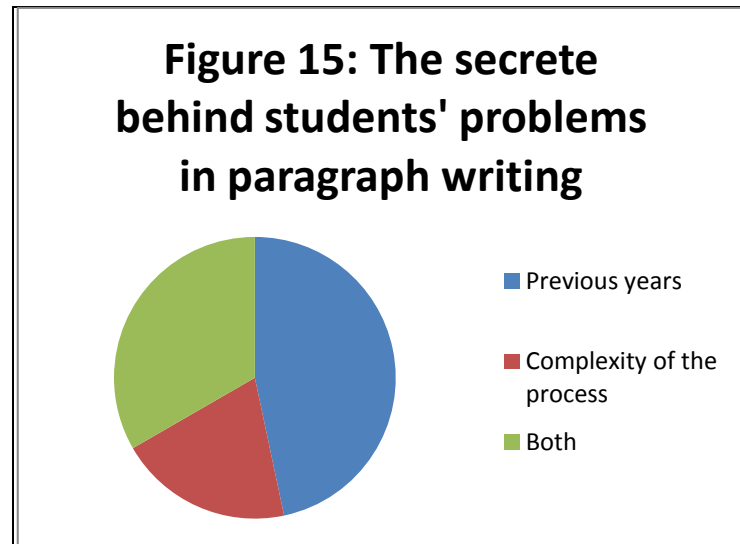


**Item 5:** Do you think that the secrets behind the problems you face when writing paragraphs are due to:

Table 16: The secrete behind students' problems in paragraph writing

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Previous years	14	46,66%
Complexity of the process	6	20%
Both	10	33,33%
Total	30	100%

The results obtained show that the majority of students (46, 66%) relates their problems in paragraph writing to previous years which means the lack of background information, (20%) answered complexity of the writing process and (33, 33%) combine both answers.



### II.3. Discussion of the findings

The analysis of students' questionnaire has revealed that the majority of students were interested in learning to write. The first part of the questionnaire shows that most of the respondents were female students, and that they have an average level in English. In the second part the majority of students (60%) claimed that they follow the writing stages in their written tasks, yet the majority of them stated that the role of the teacher is an observer, students state that they respect the steps they need to follow in writing compositions, whereas the remaining students who do not follow these steps linked the reason to the lack of time. In the third part, when inquiring about the aspects of difficulties students may face in writing, results revealed three main difficulties; vocabulary as the most frequent (21, 56%), Mechanics (19, 60%) and Grammar with (17, 64%). Moreover, students classify the writing stages in terms of difficulty as it follows, the majority ( 53, 33%) claimed that planning is the most difficult skill, the others choose editing as the second difficult stage (23, 33%). At the end most of the students linked their problems of writing to the previous years that means to the lack of the background information.

## **Conclusion**

The results obtained reveal many facts about the writing skill in general, and about how students view paragraph writing tasks. The results also make clear that students have many problems in paragraph writing tasks, and this is due to many reasons that we have tried to investigate in our questionnaire.

Accordingly, the findings indicate also that students' problems in paragraph writing can be minimized. This can happen only if teachers as well as students change some circumstances of teaching/learning paragraph writing.

## **SECTION TWO: TEACHERS' INTERVIEW**

### **INTRODUCTION**

II.1. Interview administering and description

II.2. Interview Analysis and Presentation

II.3. Discussion of the findings

### **CONCLUSION**

## **Introduction**

In order to make our work exact and really reflect the main causes behind students' low achievement in paragraph writing, we need to combine students' questionnaire with another data collection tool which is the interview. The interview is conducted to some teachers of written expression at Khenchela University. The interview is interested in reflecting teachers' opinions concerning the problem and determining their aspirations concerning what could be done to improve the situation.

### **II.1. Interview administering and description**

The chosen interview was a non-structured one. We have programmed a date with some teachers of written expression at the level of our department, the questions were asked spontaneously in accordance to the situation. Accordingly, each question is the result of the previous one. The interview was stored to be analyzed later.

### **II.2. Interview analysis and presentation**

We have asked the interviewed teachers three main questions in order to have multiple opinions these questions are:

- What are the problems and difficulties that face students when writing a paragraph?
- What are the causes behind these difficulties?
- How can students develop their writing skill?

To analyze what teachers said and suggested, we tend to summarize each interview in a passage.

#### **Teacher one**

Constructing a paragraph is considered to be a hard task for many students. Generally students do not find the appropriate ideas to include in their writing, yet if they have the ideas, they don't know how to organize them. Students also have many problems concerning the writing process itself; they don't take into account their audience (professionals, children...)

and their aim (entertains, inform...). Students find it difficult to write a paragraph because they consider this later as one block; they only take their pens and start writing.

Paragraph writing difficulties are the result of many factors. Students are interested only in the grades rather than developing their writing skill; in other words, students are not eager to learn the language skills. In addition, time allowed for written tasks is not enough.

Students can write better if they read because reading affects writing. When students read extensively, they become better writers. Reading improves students' grammar, provides them with knowledge and enriches their vocabulary.

### **Teacher two**

2<sup>nd</sup> year students find paragraph writing tasks very difficult. The majority of students usually misunderstand the topic itself, so they start by writing inappropriate topic sentence which results in damaging the whole paragraph. Students also find it difficult to maintain coherence and unity; because they think that this later prevents them from being creative.

Speaking in general, the previous problems are due to the lack of practice, guidance and back ground information; many students are unable to define coherence and unity. Also, students don't interest in the paragraph as a piece of writing with specific techniques to follow, but they consider it as a block of ideas and information. In addition, the classroom is a mixture of personalities, so it is difficult to choose a topic that interests all of them.

To minimize the difficulties students face when writing a paragraph, we are supposed to motivate them and give to each student the opportunity to unveil his/her weak points and suggests the desired solutions.

### **Teacher three**

Students have a lot of problems concerning paragraph writing. Many students are unable to write a full sentence; they do not know yet the meaning of the sentence and its structure. In addition, students encounter a lot of difficulties in grammar and vocabulary.

Concerning the reasons of such difficulties, the majority of students focus only on the listening skill, so they only listen to English songs and watch movies without taking into account the writing skill. Other students study English as a prestige; they have few words in their minds, and they are not careful to practice and develop their writing ability.

To enhance students' writing ability, it would be better if students read books and write more at home because this later leads them to write a well structured piece of writing. In addition, timing should be enlarged for paragraph writing tasks.

### **II.3. Discussion of the findings**

It is clear that teachers give different view concerning the situation. They all agree that paragraph writing is difficult to be mastered by students. As expected, teachers shed light on the common problems such as, grammar mechanics and vocabulary which are considered to be the basis of any piece of writing. Teachers also claim that many students do not understand the subject itself, and they do not take audience into account, so their writing will not achieve their goal.

Teachers relate the previous problems to many reasons. They agree that the lack of practice, guidance, and background information are the secret behind students' poor achievement in paragraph writing because this later is a process which needs special interest from both teachers and students; however, they disagree if the student is the one to be blamed in such situation because he/she is not eager to learn the writing skill; therefore, he/she is much more interested in grades and prestige. Teachers also claimed that time are a significant factor that affects the writing process; students can't gather and organize ideas if time is not enough.

Teachers emphasize reading and writing at home as solutions to the problems, because reading allows students to enrich their vocabulary, grasp native speakers' expressions and improve their writing proficiency in general (the more you read, the more you write).

Teachers also highlight the importance of motivation and the necessity of reminding students with the basis of writing from time to time. When students are motivated they can automatically do anything as reading and writing at home. Sharing written paragraphs with peers is also one of the suggestions that could be of a great benefit in developing students' paragraph writing, in the sense that students learn and store the information easily when exchanging ideas with each other.

## **Conclusion**

The obtained results confirm what have been presented in the previous section (students' questionnaire). The causes that we thought were responsible for students' low achievement in paragraph writing have been confirmed through teachers' interview. What is interesting here is that teachers proposed different solutions to improve the situation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of what has been said, some recommendations are proposed to improve the situation.

Reading is the first process which helps in learning how to write; the more you read the more you write. Students need to be aware of different elements included in the writing composition such as the language rules, the organization of writing and so on. Usually, the limited period for the writing session is insufficient to present all these features, therefore teachers should include more sessions in students' program. In doing so, teachers can cover different aspects in the teaching of writing; additionally this will give them the opportunity to explain the lessons for students. More importantly, activities must be a part of the writing session, allowing students to practice all what they have learned, and to explore new techniques in writing. It also gives them the chance to improve their proficiency in writing inside the classroom while the teachers monitor their progress, and provides with proper guidance and feedback.

In the teaching of writing teachers are encouraged to test students' writing proficiency. This procedure is useful to obtain valid information about the difficulties students are experiencing, and will permit the teacher to transform the way he teaches writing to meet the needs of his students. Following this process, teachers will be able to use a variety of activities addressing different aims regarding students' difficulties. Therefore, teachers are going to help students overcome these difficulties, and effective teaching of writing will take place.

In this study, it's noticed that 2<sup>nd</sup> year EFL students don't have a module of reading comprehension. Knowing the connection between reading and writing, and the importance of reading in enhancing writing skills. Therefore, its highly recommended for teachers to promote learners to read different text types particularly in English. Raimes (1983) asserts

that “the more our students read, the more they become familiar with the vocabulary, idioms, sentence patterns, organizational flow”.

It’s for this reason, teachers at Department of English Khenchela should encourage the inclusion of reading module in students program in order to improve students ‘skills in reading which will reflect on their writing abilities.

Students should be aware of their problems to improve their writing abilities, and they should vary the type of their writing activities such as: writing diaries. Students also should be more interested in developing their writing skill rather than grades.

## **General conclusion**

The present study is a total of two chapters, the first chapter is considered as a theoretical part, contains three sections which shed light on the writing skill, paragraph writing and the problems students face when producing a paragraph. The second chapter constructs the field work that depends on two data gathering tools (students' questionnaire and teachers' interview).

Improving students' writing skill is a challenging task especially in the case of foreign learners. The complexity of writing as a cognitive process requires profound consideration to the rules, and careful use of the target language. During writing composition, students generally hesitate to write, for they strive to find the proper words, struggle with the grammar of the language, or they may find punctuation difficult.

The finding of this research reveal that 2<sup>ND</sup> year students at the university of Khenchela Abbes Laghror have different writing difficulties, According to the results obtained from the questionnaire, students seem to have main difficulties concerning vocabulary, grammar and mechanics. Therefore teachers are advised to use these findings for an effective teaching of writing in the future, whereas students are encouraged to use the findings in developing their writing proficiency

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**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX 01 : Students' Questionnaire**

**APPENDIX 01****Students' Questionnaire**

Dear students.

This dissertation deals with some difficulties behind students' low achievement in paragraph writing. We try to identify some factors that impede students to improve their paragraph writing. Through conducting this questionnaire, we aim at getting a close view about the main points that will guide us to the right direction. Your answers would be a great help.

Please, tick (✓) the corresponding box or give a complete answer

**Thank you for cooperating**

**Part one: Students' Background Information**

1. Gender

A) Male

B) Female

2. How do you evaluate your English level?

A) Good

B) Average

C) Low

D) Very low

3. Is writing an easy task?

A) Yes

B) No

4. How many times you write at home?

A) Often

B) Sometimes

C) Rarely

D) Never

5. Are you motivated to learn writing?

A) Yes

B) No

Part two: Students' perceptions concerning writing paragraph

1. What is the teacher's role in the writing process?

A) Supervisor

B) Participant

C) Observer

2. What do you think about the chosen topics for your written tasks?

A) Interesting

B) Boring

3. Do you usually follow the steps/strategies of writing in your written tasks?

A) Yes

B) No

4. Does the teacher allow you to use dictionaries in the written session?

A) Yes

B) No

5. Do you follow writing instruction that your teacher thought you?

A) Yes

B) No

If no, please explain why?

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**Part Three:** Students' writing proficiency and perception concerning paragraph writing problems

1. How do you evaluate your English proficiency?

A) Good

- B) Average
- C) Low
- D) Very low

2. What are the aspects that you find difficulties in when writing a paragraph ( you can choose multiple answers)

- A) Grammar
- B) Vocabulary
- C) Mechanics
- D) Ideas organization
- E) Poor content
- F) All of them

3. Try to classify the following paragraph components in terms of difficulty according to you?

- A) Topic sentences
- B) Supporting sentences
- C) Concluding sentences

4. Which stage of writing is more difficult for you?

- A) Planning
- B) Drafting
- C) Revising
- D) Editing

5. Do you think that the secretes behind the problems you face in paragraph writing are a result of previous years or difficulty of writing or both of them?

- A) Previous years (no background information)
- B) Complexity of the writing process
- C) Both