

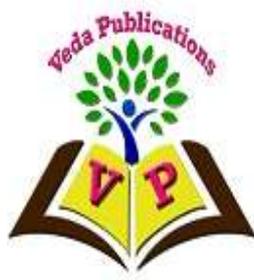


## INVESTIGATING DIFFICULTIES FACED BY THE STUDENTS IN WRITING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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### ABSTRACT



This study tries to investigate the difficulties faced by the students of the preparatory year in writing in English. The population of the study consists of teachers and students. The students' sample was chosen purposely from two groups studying in the target year (in Almandaq College) where the researcher works and this facilitates the process of the experiment. The sample consists of (60) students in two groups. The teachers' sample consists of (14) teachers of English who teach the preparatory year students. This sample took part in some related discussions besides answering the questions of the questionnaire; their responses exposed the problems of writing. The student's samples sat for a pre-test (paragraph writing) the test results exposed the difficulties they had had in writing in English. Also, at the end of the teaching program, the same samples sat for a post-test and the results were compared with that of the pre-test in order to consider the hypothesis of the study. To achieve the goals of this study, the researcher designed a questionnaire in a way that it included three categories, the teachers' performance (methods of teaching), the students' ability and the curriculum. The tools used in the study pointed the difficulties facing the students in writing in English. In the part of recommendations, the researcher suggested preparing a rush training program to help in preparing new teachers to develop their experience and readiness for teaching in the target level.

**Keywords:** *Teaching English, Writing Skill, Teaching Methodology, L2 Users of English*

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**INTRODUCTION**

Students of the preparatory year undergo several difficulties in their learning process, particularly in writing which is one of the most complicated skills. This is because writing comprises all the aspects and devices of the language such as Syntax, Semantics, Lexical items, Punctuation ...etc. The role of writing is much more important in communicating messages, views and ideas. It is the natural outlet for the students' reflections. When students write, they develop confidence and sense of power over the language that none of the other skills likely to produce.

As a teacher of English language at the target level for one semester and the third level English Department for many years, the researcher has come across some areas of difficulties faced by the students of the preparatory year in English language in general and writing skill in particular, thus the researcher is trying to contribute in finding solutions to some of the problems. The research will be useful to those who work in the target level.

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

As a teacher of English in the target college, the researcher noticed that the students face a lot of problems in English language, particularly in writing skill. Some of these problems are as follows:

**A-Lack of interest and motivation:** Generally students are not highly motivated towards English, so they have difficulties in communicating their messages when the subjects don't motivate them or they have no interest in them. Lack of interest in the subjects derives from the fact that the subjects are not taken from the students' surrounding. Thus the students could not have good knowledge and they lack the standard variety of language expressions, which could help them in writing. In this regard, the subjects of writing should always be motivating and familiar to the students' life. Also students get good motivation and encouragement when their written works are known to others to read and to value them apart from their usual teachers.

**B: Mother tongue interference:** Both writing and speaking are useful skills for communication. But writing is usually formal. It uses standard variety of language and in any way it doesn't allow wrong and colloquial expressions, which are sometimes

common in speaking. Also writing is a learnt skill and cannot be acquired like speaking. However, preparatory year students' way of writing is greatly influenced by their mother tongue; in the words, the expressions and ideas they use in common life. Students borrow or translate words and ideas from their mother tongue, but in most cases these words and expressions are not properly assimilated into the English way of writing; so the new borrowed words and expressions spoil the required message and open doors for wrong assumptions and different interpretations.

**c- Redundancy:** The fact that preparatory year students' background in writing skill is very weak is evident because they could not avoid repetition and redundancy in their writing; this is due to inadequate knowledge and poor linguistic preparation. Students equip their writing with unnecessary and irrelevant ideas which spoil and devastate the message.

**D-Illustrations:** Due to limited resources for language acquisition, preparatory year students are poor in language so they get difficulties in making constructive illustrations to strengthen their views and ideas. The previously mentioned factors lead the researcher to try to answer the following questions:

**QUESTIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

- a. Why do preparatory year students have problems in learning English in general and writing in particular?
- b. What should be done to raise preparatory year students' acquisition of English language in all its branches?
- c. What training do preparatory year teachers get in order to have positive impact on their students?

**HYPOTHESIS OF THE RESEARCH**

- A. Preparatory year students face difficulties in English language acquisition which is clearly reflected in their performance in English in general and writing skill in particular.
- B. The teachers' performance is negatively affected by factors such as; crowded classes, lack of teachers training, irrelevant specialization, rare inspectors help, and poor standard.



- C. The ability of students writing is negatively affected by some factors such as: Arabicization, weak background, insufficient exercises, lack of self confidence and the position of writing in high school's syllabus.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

1. Focusing on the difficulties facing the preparatory year students in writing and trying to devise ways of solving them.
2. Finding ways that will encourage and develop students' acquisition of English language and reinforce language learning.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

1. The research is useful to teachers of English in the preparatory year. It makes them aware of the areas of difficulty in writing bear in mind that some teachers neglect teaching writing skill in their classes.
2. It is also useful to the planners and designers of English language syllabus to make more emphasis on writing skill exercises.
3. It is useful to the researchers in the area of English teaching as a foreign language.

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopts descriptive analytical and experimental methods.

*Terms:* The researcher has used the following terms in the process of this research:

- a- Preparatory year: (The freshman level (the first year in the University )
- b- Free paragraph: Refers to the topic that students are not provided with helping words, phrases or questions. So they are free to form ideas for writing on the topic.
- c- Guided paragraph: Refers to the topic in which words, phrases or questions are provided so students are directed and guided in expressing their ideas and views.
- d- Short training program: Short training program suggested by the researcher to help teachers to improve the standard of the preparatory year students.
- e- Pre test: It is a test given to the students at the beginning of the term.
- f- Post test: It is a test given to the students at the end of the term.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching the preparatory level drew the attention of the researcher to notice that many students find writing the most difficult skill to acquire. Even if they can meet writing demands made in a general English course, they find difficulty in handling the writing required for study to write ideas. In traditional English as a foreign language curriculum, teaching students how write is the least understood and the least researched area. Some researchers have contributed in this area. Reviewing their findings is important for adding some contribution.

For some years writing has been a neglected area of English language teaching. There are many books on the other areas of English such as reading, listening.etc, but scarcity of books on writing shows the imbalance. Comparison can easily be made between writing and the other areas. The fact is that materials and resources are available for the other areas, while writing is neglected. It is just recently the research on writing has offered thought provoking ideas about good writing and the ideas, which can assist the teachers and learners in developing writing activities (Marley 1988.p6).

Writing is the last and perhaps the most difficult skill students learn. Even teachers are sometimes confused about ways of approaching writing instructions. Many still see it as away to reinforce oral skill (Walters 1983.p 17). Bernard Shaw said "He who has nothing to say cannot write". This is the most important point in writing. It really shows that writing is the natural outlet for the students' reflections on their speaking, listening and reading experience in the second/foreign language. When writing freely without concentrating on grammatical errors, students develop confidence and sense of power over the language that none of the other skills is likely to produce until he advances in language study. In writing students write about what they think and what they are interested in. Writing is connected with desire and interest. Thus if it is difficult to function in a foreign language, it is much more difficult for students to write without interest. Although students have time to form and shape their ideas in writing, lack of information and desire prevent smooth writing (Leki. April 1991.p 8-9).



There is a considerable promise of useful information for language teaching profession.

**Firstly:** (i): weight can be given to teachers attributions of the cause of student errors. For example persistent errors may be due to some inherent difficulty in the new language transfer from the mother tongue. (ii): Limited exposure to a good and consistent model of the new forms. (iii): Lack of penalty in the form of communication failure or laziness. (iv): Research on the learners can help a teacher in considering a cause of an error produced by the learners. Therefore corrective feedback or other treatment can be given.

**Secondly:** Syllabus can be planned and sequenced in the light of hard evidence from real life of the learners. So far most of the literature focused and concentrated on the development of syntax and vocabulary.

**Thirdly:** Suggestions for changes in teaching methodology can be made where appropriate, on the bases of comparison with natural learning situation. Comparison is frequently required between the child learning his native language and foreign language. Language learners differ in the amount of time they spend on the task. It is sometimes difficult to know the exact language learning, so it is difficult to estimate the amount of time a child spends on it. Estimating the amount of time on language learning depends on learning situations, formal or informal. In formal situations the phonological, syntactic, or socio-linguistics rules of the language are exposed to the learner in an orderly fashion. In formal situations there is a chance for trial and error and overt feed back to the learner. On the other hand in formal situations any encounter may potentially involve any combination of the rules of the language. In this informal situation feedback is less obvious and may be quite absent (McDonough 1986.p 112-113).

Learning to write fluently and expressively is the most difficult skill. Writing is not a natural activity. People learn to speak a language yet they have to be taught how to write. It is displaced in time; written message can be received, stored and referred back to at any time. It is permanent. In the recent years, two different views on the nature of writing have emerged:

1-Product approach 2-Process approach.

Product writing focuses on the end result of the act of writing (composition, letter, story ...etc.) The concern of a teacher is to see that the end product is readable , grammatically correct and obeys the discourse conventions relating to main points , sporting details.....etc. In the class, the focus will be in copying, limitation, developing, sentence and paragraphs from models of various sorts.

Process approach sees the act of composition from a very different perspective, focusing on the means where by the completed text was created as on the end product itself. According to (Zamel. 1982): the writer starts the vaguest notion. The ideas are the refined, developed and transformed as the writer writes and re-writes. With this process, the writer reaches his final product.

#### **SUCCESSFUL WRITING INVOLVES**

- Mastering the mechanics of letter formation.
- Mastering and obeying conventions of spelling and punctuation.
- Using the grammatical system to convey one's intended meaning.
- Organizing content at the level of the paragraph and complete text to reflect new or given information and topic/comment structures.
- Polishing and revising one's initial efforts.
- Select an appropriate style for one's audience. (Nunan 1989.p 35-37).

Producing practical writing that many people do in the everyday life is one of the important values of writing, as a form of communication. This practical writing has both a clear purpose and specific audience. The everyday writing is mostly to get things done. Messages, form, invitations, letters and instructions are types of writing that any one might have to do at sometime. It is sometimes necessary to write a replay, apology, inquiry, complaint, thanks, congratulation, giving direction etc. If students acquire good experience in dealing with these practical writing tasks in the class room, then they will practice writing in the new language and learning a new culture.

Dealing with different writing situations provides the students with different skills of writing. For example, filling forms or questionnaire provide students with the opportunity of transforming



information from one format to another. This manipulation of language preserves the meaning, while varying the form allows for practice in forming concepts in the new language ( Raimes .1983.p 83 )

The goal of the English teachers is to encourage the students and to enable them to produce fluent, accurate and appropriate written English. Thus the following aspects need to be considered:

- a. Mechanical problems with the script of English.
- b. Problems of accuracy of English grammar and lexis.
- c. Problems of reading the style of writing to the demands of a particular situation.
- d. Problems of developing ease and comfort in expressing what needs to be said.

The main aim of writing can be defined as developing appropriate ranges of styles coherently and easily used. The teacher can bring the writing task to the level of class following some ways. She can grade the task in the following ways:

To limit the length of the written material in order to suit the students:

- a. She can increase the amount of time given to the class preparation.
- b. She can provide guidance on the final form of the written work.
- c. She can encourage students to collaborate in the actual process of writing.
- d. She can allow cross checking between the draft stage and the writing of the final Product.
- e. She can limit the complexity of the writing task.
- f. She can demand for quick or slow completion of the task. (Broughton & Others 1978. P116, 120-121)

Exams show that the student can learn from their mistakes. But the fact is that students hardly learn from their mistakes. Writing English is not the temporary activity. It is an activity, which will continue with her even after leaving school. The main stages of graded course according to J.A. Bright are:

**Stage One:** Is connected with mechanics of written work such as handwriting, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, word order and word division. This stage should have been completed before the

university level. This stage is to confirm and deepen the impression made by the oral work and to enable the pupils master these mechanics of written work.

**Stage Two:** This stage is again normally controlled in the secondary school, in this stage the sentence structure is normally controlled but students get some freedom in choosing the lexical level. Within this stage retelling story can be included.

**Stage Three:** In stage three students are provided with some help in sentence structure, but most of the sentences have to be framed by the pupils.

**Stage Four:** In stage four students become responsible for making structure, problems of arrangement, form ... etc.

**Stage Five:** In stage five the student is competent and independent. He can do many tasks by himself, he is an independent operator answering letters, or examination questions, writing minutes ... etc. (Bright. 1970 P130-132)

Preparatory year syllabus should include all the forms of writing, which are related to various situations. This is because the exposure to such texts will assist them greatly in learning a sort of language for a particular situation. On the other hand this lead to an improved grasp of the communicative function of the language. If students will ever need to write anything in the foreign language, it will probably make a letter; simply because they are one of the most spread forms of communications. Thus we have to devote classroom time for teaching letter writing. Teaching letter writing also gives us the chance to deal with a variety of forms and functions that are essential part of languages mastery. We write letters to invite, apply for Jobs, apologize, explain, and complain. Congratulate, inquire order, knowledge and thank. Each of these languages functions has its own associated vocabulary, connotations, sentences structures and an appropriate choice of words and tone to fit the audience. Within each function there are various levels of formality and informality. Letter writing tasks make students consider their audience as well as their encourage students to communicate with their pen pals friends from the other countries to make the letter writing a regular feature of the class. (Raimes 1983. P.84-89).

Lists are much neglected part of writing in a second/foreign Language syllabus, even though a lot



of writing that people do, so they write shopping lists, list of things to do tomorrow. ... etc. Lists are the basis for many conceptual activities. With a list people alphabetize, group and classify, it is important for students studying a foreign language to be aware of the classification system of that language (Raimes 1983. P. 89).

The controlled writing, the words and phrases are given down on a paper. This helps the students to concentrate on one or two problems at a time, thus they are spared from tackling the full range of complexity. Controlled writing task gives students focused practice. Also it consumes much less time, so more can be assigned. It fits in to a composition curriculum at any level of student ability in these two places:

1. Before free writing, when students practice a grammatical point or syntactic structure within a text. That text can also be used as a source of vocabulary, idea, idioms and organization; it can also help them to plan their own piece of writing.
2. After free writing when we know the problems our students are facing so we give them controlled writing so that they have practice with such problems (Raimes. 1983. P. 95-96).

In controlled writing exercises, which are few in the syllabus, students are not given a passage to work within. They were only given some sentences and were asked to do like this. They don't have to concern much with the content, organization, finding ideas and forming sentences. But they make few changes of grammatical or structural nature. This kind of writing focuses student attention on specific features of writing language. In fact it is a good method for reinforcing grammar vocabulary and syntax in context. In addition, as the students write the passage or the topic, they are using the conventions of written English such as indentation, punctuation, connecting words and spelling.

Composition is the system of grouping the grammatical rules, lexical item and rhetorical patterns that are needed by and individual to produce a finished text. So writing is the applications of these rules are the simplest of the three. Choosing the lexical item is sometimes difficult for a student

because so many words in one language do not have exact equivalents in the others. The most difficult of all to teach are the rhetorical, including cultural phenomena such as style, usage, and presentation of ideas paragraph cohesion or other ways of presenting written discourse. A student may be right in grammatical construction, but the writing may not be accepted in style, usage, idea, arrangement... etc. due to interference of the native language.

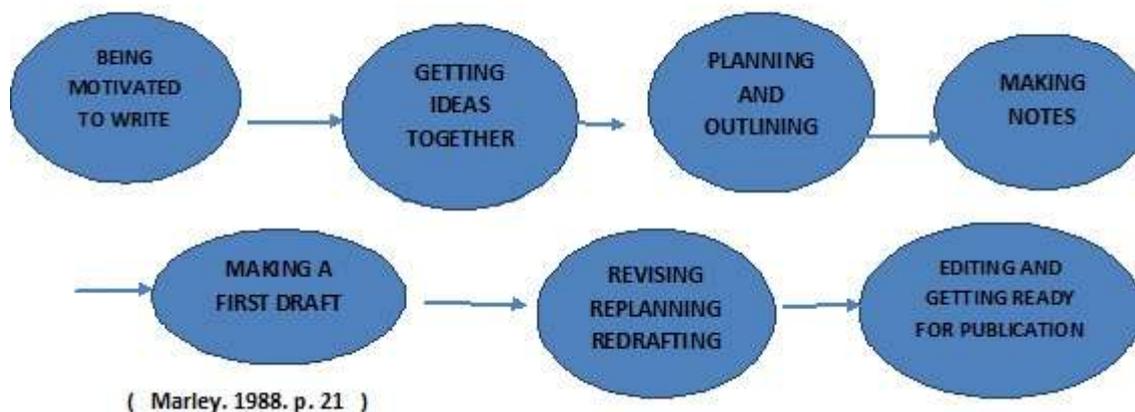
Most of the writing approaches have one problem that is they do not offer a starting point, for example free paragraph focuses on the final product without a detailed plan of how to produce. The assumption is that all students are excellent writers in their native language and the teacher's job is to transfer these skills to English making only a few adjustments in grammar (Walter. July 1983.P 17-18).

Free paragraph writing gives a student a great deal of freedom in the way of answering the question that he or she has chosen. Such a procedure is likely to have a depressing effect on the reliability of the test:

- Guided paragraph focuses on different grammatical items at the expense of viewing writing as the process of producing a text.
- Sentence combination focuses only on one aspect of the process.
- Functional approaches focus on the purpose of writing and not the actual steps involved (Hughes. 1989. P. 37-38).

Each of these approaches may have values, but none is a satisfactory way of viewing the entire writing progress. A proper starting point which would enable students to achieve immediate competency with a minimum of grammatical complexity and to avoid as much as possible, the use of grammatical structures and rhetorical patterns from their native languages. A simple sentence can be suggested as the starting point of any text. Learning to write is a step by step process where some mastery at one level is necessary before the students proceed to the next level. So they should start with leaning how to amplify them. The last step involves developing cohesive paragraph and multi paragraph texts that adhere to English rhetorical rules. (Walters. July 1983. P 18). According to Marley, writing is a process. It contains the following stages:

Fig. (1) STAGES OF WRITING



On the other hand Penny Ur summarized the writing process in the following:

1. Individuals vary: Different writers may produce good results through different processes.
2. Writing is a messy business: Progress is made through number of drafts before reaching in final copy. Learners should be advised not to worry much about spelling, grammar at the beginning. They should be encouraged to make drafts. It is an essential stage in writing.
3. Writing is potentially satisfying: When writing an interesting and enjoyable topic, the learner or the writer feels proud of his work and he wants it to be read by others.
4. You learn to write through writing, teachers should encourage students to write more, so that they learn from their writing experience (Ur. 1996. P. 168-169).

J.A. Bright sees that tertiary level syllabus should vary from university to another according to the particular needs of each university. Syllabus should always be connected with environment, experience, and abilities. She stated the following "It is best for each university to work out its own composition syllabus in a systematic, detailed progressive form". Without proper syllabus students are in danger of being exposed to vagueness of approach such as unnecessary repetition aimless and pointless writing. It is not always possible to fulfil all the conditions below, but the more they are fulfilled, the better the students write successfully:

1. Give a problem to the students and see how they give their written solutions.
2. The problems define the purpose of the writing and the reader. The reader is the writer's target.
3. The student attention, experience and imagination must be drawn by the problem. So they became ready to make a draft.
4. Students must know the techniques of solving problems. They have to develop an interest in how writers solve problems and make use of word in various jobs.
5. The writing course should cover the largest area of different writing techniques.
6. More useful teaching can be done after a piece of work has been written than before. Writing should be a cooperative endeavour. Students have to learn to be responsible for the accuracy of their own work; they should read their work and give their judgment.
7. All original work should be published and to be Displayed. In this point Bright commented: "Painting and pots are displayed why do we normally discriminate against things made of word "this display gives practical advantages and encouragement to the students.
8. Grammar should be relevant to writing process.
9. To make students know what are they writing about, paragraphs should be based to local materials.



10. Most of the writing topics must be drawn from student's experience.

11. We must take the pupils in our confidence. We must make her seek for help from his friends. We must make her know that we are not ready to take her burdens (Bright. 1970. P. 141-144).

Summary is one of the common questions for English as foreign language examination. It can be seen as a complex test, which combines sophisticated comprehension and selection skills. The intention is to isolate the main ideas of a passage with advanced writing skills and to reproduce these in an original manner. Summary has to continue existing in the syllabus because it is one of the needs in real life, which cannot be avoided. The problem with summary is that, it is frequently taught badly. The techniques that many teachers use are just giving believe that summary cannot be taught, it depends on the students, standard. Good students can do it and the poor cannot. So any attempt to produce a generalizable technique for students to enable them to handle summary writing would constitute cheating.

In the deletion process, the original text is kept, while the non- essential sentences, clauses, phrases.....etc. are removed. So the passage is pared down to essentials, which form the summary. The procedure for the students requires these steps:

- Reading the passage and delete the elaboration of the core sentence.
- From the remains, delete the unnecessary clauses and phrases.
- Delete all extraneous lexis replacing the remaining words with students own expressions.
- Re- write affair copy (Chambers& Brigham. Jan. 1989. p . 43-44).

To avoid confusion these steps must be practiced separately in the early stages. On the other hand J.A. Bright sees that summary is an easy question to set and easy to mark, but it is not easy for students whom English is their second language. He also sees that there is no need to separate summary from the other part of the English syllabus. He sees summary as a kind of composition. It becomes easier because the words are already in the passage, but becomes

more difficult when students are asked to use their own words, not the original words of the writer (Bright. 1970. P.169).

Writing differs from speaking in the following points:

1. Permanence: Because written text is fixed, and stable, it can be done at any time and at any speed. But spoken text moves on in real time.
2. Explicitness: Written text makes clear the context and references.
3. Density: The content is more densely in writing.
4. Detachment: The writer normally works alone and may not be in contact with his readers.
5. Organization: Written text is usually organized because the writer has time and chance for editing.
6. Slowness of production, speed of reception: Writing is slower than speaking, but it can be understood faster.
7. Standard language: Writing is usually formal .It uses standard variety of the language.
8. A learnt skill: Writing cannot be acquired like speaking. It has to be learnt.
9. Sheer amount and importance: In spoken text there is repetition, redundancy.....etc, but written text tries to avoid them (Ur. 1996. P. 159- 161 & Ponser. 1982. p. 25).

#### **A TEACHER'S ROLE IN A COMMUNICATIVE METHODOLOGY**

In a communicative methodology, a teacher's roles are:

1. To facilitate the communicative process between all the participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and the texts.
2. To act as an interdependent participant within the learning – teaching groups (Hall& Hewings. 2001. P. 17-18).

These two main roles imply a set of other secondary roles for the teacher.

- a. As an organizer of resources and as a resource himself.



- b. As a guide within the classroom procedures and activities.
- c. As a researcher and a learner – with much to contribute in terms of appropriate knowledge and abilities.

As an interdependent participant in the process, the teacher needs to share the responsibility and teaching with the learners. The teacher must assume that learners can reach to a particular objective through different ways. She has to accept that different learners learn different things in different ways and at different time so she has to be patient. Learners of a language are faced by the task of discovering how to learn the language. Learners may start with differing expectations about the actual learning. But each learner will be required to adapt himself to what is being learned. She may discover the need of replacing the earlier strategies. Thus all learners in their own ways have to adapt the role of negotiation between themselves, their learning process and the gradually revealed object of learning.

#### **THE RESEARCHER'S VIEW POINTS**

The researcher has been a teaching staff of English in the target college for many years. She has taught all the English courses, so she is acquainted with most of the problems of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. In this part, the researcher throws light on some of the problems according to his own observations and viewpoints bearing in mind the syllabus used in the target level.

#### **TEACHERS' PROBLEMS**

Teachers are the bases of the educational process, so problems affecting them have negative reflection on learning and teaching. Some preparatory years teachers are not ready to teach writing skill. Justifications for this vary, but the researcher sees that:

- Some teachers have limited knowledge in writing due to inadequate training. So they could not carry out oral work before writing task.
- Some teachers escape from teaching writing because students' background is weak and there is no response.
- Some teachers consider writing as a tiresome activity (a lot of ideas, views,

vocabulary, rough work, marking...etc.) all these processes make the teachers tired so they tend to avoid it.

- Some teachers assume that preparatory year students should have good writing ability (from high school), so they give the writing task straight forward without giving them steps and procedures.
- Some teachers do not have wide knowledge in English because they do not read books, journals or attended related seminars, so they are incapable to help their students.
- Weak background and crowded classes discourage the teachers, so they do not give sufficient assignments.
- Comments of some teachers when marking writing tasks work as a discouraging factor, remarks like: this is not English, your tenses are bad, etc., and they represent a kind of self criticism because students couldn't improve their writing alone but only with their teachers.

An inspector of English language in charge of the preparatory year pointed out that some teachers have been discouraged by the poor standard, so they decided indirectly to stop teaching and correcting much writing tasks. Hence they took part in weakening the writing competence.

#### **STUDENTS' PROBLEMS**

Preparatory year students face a lot of problems in writing. The researcher thinks that there are some reasons for the poor performance in writing skill:

Poor base in English language foundation, students come from the high school with very poor standard especially in writing. Some factors contributed in this situation, such as:

- Late beginning of English language in the basic school level.
- Lack of teacher training in high schools.
- Lack of exposure to the language. Students use the language only in the classroom. They do not write wall magazines in English, pen friends...etc.

#### **SYLLABUS AND EXAMINATIONS**

Writing is to some extent neglected in the syllabus as well as in the exams:



- In the syllabus exactly that of the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) writing exercises are inadequate.
- Teachers are not provided with clear steps of teaching writing skill as a result they differ in teaching writing skill in the preparatory year.
- Weak standard of English language in preparatory year shows that there is a common cause which needs to be considered, that is syllabus review and evaluation especially ESP syllabus.
- The claim that the syllabus was teaching all the skills with equal emphasis was not true. It didn't help the teacher to deal with writing task as other skills. Also the syllabus depicted the students' environment, they didn't link the English language with the environment so as to reinforce student to concentrate on language usage.
- The teachers in the target level teach the students in a way that they prepare students to pass the exam and not to deal with the exam in the proper way. The test delivered to the preparatory year students is a standard test, but the standard of this test has been reduced to fit the standard of the students. So instead of devising ways and means to promote the standard of the students, the test standard is reduced to fit students' level of performance.

#### USING ARABIC TO TEACH ENGLISH

Some researchers have suggested using the first language (Arabic) in teaching English. The idea is not new. Some teachers have been following this method in their teaching. However using Arabic in teaching English has negative impact on both teachers and students such as:

- Lack of continuous practice reduces the fluency of both teachers and students.
- It will be difficult for the students to use the language without the interference of Arabic.
- Students will always think of translating vocabulary, sentence and ideas from Arabic into English, where as some phrases do not correspond. It strengthens the lack of self-confidence in language mastery. It is true that languages enrich themselves. But

competent people who have mastered the two languages can manipulate the languages to enrich themselves but, preparatory year students do not reach this level of competence.

#### THE RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATIONS

The researcher sees that some reasons contribute in the deterioration of English language in the preparatory year. Some of them are:

1. Lack of training for the preparatory year teachers (Some of them are not teachers with experience in teaching).
2. Students are not motivated to learn English language.
3. Writing is overlooked in the preparatory year syllabus and examination. The writing tasks are not enough in the text books.
4. No supplementary materials to provide the preparatory year students with useful vocabulary.

#### THE PREVIOUS STUDIES

Reviewing the contribution of some other researchers is important for having clear picture, which helps for giving suggestions and contributions. Therefore, the researcher in this part reviews the contribution of some other researchers in the related area of teaching English as a foreign language.

**STUDY (1)** By Osman Asma Mohammad:

**The title:** "Attitude and Motivation in Foreign Language Learning". Presented to University of Khartoum Faculty of Education. 1996.

**THE OBJECTIVE:** To investigate the factors that affect English language learning, and to consider them as a starting point for developing learning and teaching techniques in order to improve the standard of English language. The study emphasis was on attitudes and motivation as one of the important factor in foreign language achievement, but they are neglected in curriculum development. Thus, investigating the socio-psychological factors that affect learning and achievement in English was so necessary.

**-The methodology** adopted; was a case study of some students using questionnaire.

The research came out with the following results:

- The study has filled a gap in the area of socio-psychological linguistics.



-It brings to light the significance of the effective variables (attitude and motivation) in foreign language learning.

-It has supported the previous studies of attitudes and motivation.

Similarities and differences: The two studies are similar in the sense that both deal with foreign language learning. Also in studies, attitudes and motivation were pointed as one of the important aspects of learning a foreign language. On the other hand, the two studies differ in methodology and approach. Also the two studies are from different Universities.

**STUDY (2)** By Mohammad Ibrahim El-Tayb.

**THE TITLE:** "Students' attitude to words using language 1 in teaching reading comprehension in (EFL) classrooms". Presented to University of Khartoum Faculty of Art .1999.

**- THE OBJECTIVES**

-The use of Arabic in (EFL) classroom by the teacher or the learner.

-Students' attitudes to words using the monolingual or bilingual dictionaries and use of Arabic in explaining certain linguistic areas in a reading text

-The long –term goal:

-Establishing the role Arabic can play in EFL, monolingual classes especially in teaching reading comprehension.

-Helping teachers to make use of students' first language to facilitate second language learning.

-Identifying the linguistic areas where Arabic can be used effectively.

**The Methodology:** Full description of the data collection techniques, Questionnaire was an instrument for the data collection.

**The Results:** EFL students preferred Arabic to be used in EFL classes, but it should be about 25 % of the classroom time especially in the starting lectures at the beginning of the orientation year.

The obvious different between the two studies is that every study looks in to the mother language differently .The previous researcher considered mother language is a helper and facilitator in learning English .But the current researcher regards Arabic interference is not for the welfare of English learning specially in writing. This difference in views is important. It will help the

researcher to look for further ideas to support their views.

The great benefit from related studies including these two studies is that, it hinted the problem of teachers training.

**THE CRITERIA OF WRITING**

Writing is a learnt skill. The other skills can be acquired .But students have to learn some devices to enable them write. Writing is standard. It uses standard and formal language. This fact makes it different and the most difficult skill. Good writing should comprise the following criteria (Nunan 1989. P. 35).

1-Motivation and interest; 2-Clarity; 3-Linguistic aspect; 4-Organization; 5-Level of appropriation; 6-Relevance.

2-The main difficulties facing the preparatory year students in writing: Preparatory year students face a lot of difficulties in writing. Some of these difficulties should be connected with teachers' inadequate training, students' weakness, syllabus....etc. The following are some of the difficulties facing preparatory year students noticed by the researcher while teaching the target students. Supported by what has been discussed in the literature review.

**1) LINGUISTIC DIFFICULTY:** The fact that writing doesn't use other methods of communicating a message such as signals, stress, speed, intonation, pauses, expressions, of the face....etc .makes writing a difficult task . Preparatory year students also get difficulties in manipulating the linguistic items to form good sentences constructions. Overcoming this difficulty depends on teaching vocabulary, structures, and cohesive devices, which are needed for writing.

**2) COGNITIVE DIFFICULTY:** Preparatory year students get difficulty in forming logical written argument supported by reasons, examples ...etc. thus their written work doesn't attract and convince the reader. So students are to be directed to learn the logical development in writing English.

**3) MOTIVATIONAL DIFFICULTY:** Preparatory year students get difficulties in expressing themselves fluently, due to lack of knowledge and information. This fact is clearly seen when students write on compulsory topics where they have no chance for choice. However .in free topics they chose the topic according to their desire to chose topics that they



previously written by teachers help. Such topics motivate them to write. Thus the researcher suggests that students should be given different topics.

**4) PSYCHOLOGICAL DIFFICULTIES:** Preparatory year students lack self confidence when writing in English. They are not sure that they can express themselves fluently. This negative feeling has negative impact on the students' psychological mood. Analyzing the written text can help students. Discussions and continuous encouragement can reduce the difficulty.

**5) MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE:** Preparatory year students could not express their ideas clearly due to mother tongue interference. Mother tongue interferes in their vocabulary, sentence construction, ideas, etc.

**6) WEAK BACKGROUND IN ENGLISH:** Preparatory year students are weak in writing and this is caused by teacher's inadequate training. Also students are not exposed in the English materials such as literature, so the foreign language becomes unfamiliar with them.

#### THE RESEARCH PROCEDURES

To investigate the difficulties facing preparatory year students in writing skill, the researcher followed some steps. Thus this chapter deals with the procedures of data collection from the population and the students' sample, using the tests for students and the questionnaire for the teacher, as the necessary tools beside discussions with inspectors for this process.

#### THE POPULATION

The preparatory year students came from the same area, having the same traditions, cultures and different schools having the same environment help in excluding many factors may affect the difficulties. The methods of teaching represent similar difficulties. The population of this research consists of:

- a- Preparatory year students in Almndaq College of Science and Arts (girls branch).
- b- Teachers of English in the preparatory year.
- c- Teachers of English in the E. dept. who teach the target level.
- d- Some inspectors in charge of English language in the preparatory year.

#### THE SAMPLES

Choosing the sample is one of the fundamental procedures for providing answers for the questions raised by the study. Moreover, it helps in availing data, which satisfies the reality and validity of the hypothesis. In this connection, the teachers' sample is the teachers who teach the preparatory year in Almndaq. This sample consists of ( 14 ) teachers who have taken part in providing the necessary data through the questionnaire. Also other long experienced teachers and technical inspectors of English language in charge of the preparatory year, they are involved in the study by considering their views, comments and judges on both the test and the questionnaire. Another sample for this study is the students' sample. In this sample ( 60 ) students were carefully and purposely chosen from Almndaq College because the researcher works there and this facilities the process of carrying the experiment. The ( 60 ) students were taken from three groups in the college.

#### THE RESEARCH TOOLS

In this research the following tools were designed to collect the data:

- 1-The test: It was divided into pre-test and post-test.
- 2-The questionnaire: Its questions were also divided into personal questions, methodology questions, questions related to teachers and questions about the students.

#### A-TEST DESIGN

The test was set to examine the students' ability in writing, pre-test and post-test were designed to include the principles and criteria of writing and how the students could show differences in performance before and after learning the criteria writing through the English language courses which consist of 20 hours of teaching per week. The test materials were selected to be suitable to their syllabus, the test items were related to the students' interest even the words used, were also within the students' vocabulary. The first test was a pre-test; it was free and guided paragraph which the students did before learning the principles of English language. The second test was a post test on free and guided paragraph, which the students did after acquiring the principles and criteria of writing. In guided paragraph the students were provided with some words, phrases or questions, which were the sources of



knowledge and information. However, these privileges did not exist in the free paragraph. Before the students could sit for the test, it was exposed to some technical inspectors of English language and some teachers of the preparatory year, to give comments and judgment on the test whether it was feasible or not. The teachers and the technical inspectors forwarded their views, comments and observations on the test and they were strongly accepted and considered by the researcher. Consequently, some changes were made on the test to suit the students' standard. After this process, the test became feasible for the preparatory year.

**Test reliability:** After collecting the students' marks on every test, the computer instrument was used to calculate the reliability of the test. Thus the reliability of every test was as follows:

**Test Validity:** The test validity was calculated by using judges. The test was exposed to technical inspector and some teachers. The result was that some changes were made on the test.

The final version of the test: The test in its final version was feasible, reliable and valid. It consisted of pre-test and post-test.

**1-The pre-test** consisted of free and guided paragraph to measure the students' ability in writing before acquiring the principles and criteria of English language including writing skill.

**2-The post-test** also consisted of free and guided paragraph tended to measure the progress made by the students after learning and acquiring the principles of English language including writing skill. The application of the final version was preceded by some useful information and instructions to the students:

- The students were reminded about the importance of the test in discovering their areas of difficulties so that genuine solutions could be devised.
- The students were given examples on writing free and guided paragraphs.
- The time was fixed for every test.

## B- QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The questionnaire was designed to elicit information about the problems facing the students in writing. The questions targeted the influential areas of educational process (The methodology, the

teachers and the students with reference to the syllabus used.) 30 questions were included in the questionnaire to investigate different problems, which contributed in the deterioration of writing skill. Before the questionnaire could be given to the teachers, it was exposed to technical inspectors and some long experienced teachers to judge the questions included in the questionnaire (Appendix-1). **The Questionnaire reliability:** The computer instrument was used to calculate the questionnaire reliability.

**The questionnaire validity:** The questionnaire validity was calculated by the judges of the technical inspectors and long experienced teachers who gave comments on the questions included in the questionnaire. Some appreciated the questions and described the questionnaires as comprehensive. However, others gave some observations, which were considered by the researcher.

**The final version of the questionnaire:** The judgment and comments of the judges gave the questionnaire its validity so it became a suitable tool for collecting information. The feasible questionnaire consisted of (30) questions, which were distributed as follows:

- Personal questions from (1 - 7).
- Questions on methods of teaching and teachers performance from (8-16).
- Questions on the students ability in writing from (17-28).
- One question on the syllabus (29)
- The last one is an opened question to add more information by teachers if it is found.

The final version of the questionnaire was applied as one of instruments for collecting data, so it was given out to (14) teachers of the target level to give their ideas and views, the teachers' performance and students' ability.

**Mean:** The questionnaire and the pre and post-tests, which had been given to the teachers and the students respectively, provided the result, which was subjected for discussion and analysis. The researcher used the questionnaire, which was general survey to get teachers responses on the problems of writing. Also the researcher applied pre and post tests as experiment to confirm the problems of writing. Thus



this chapter deals with analysis and discussion of the obtained results.

**The Questionnaire:** The questionnaire questions were divided into three main groups, (the methods of teaching questions, the teachers' performance questions, and questions about students' ability in writing) these questions were in favour of the hypothesis of this study.

#### **Hypothesis (1)**

- Preparatory year students face difficulties in English language acquisition which is clearly reflected in their performance in English in general and writing skill in particular.

The results of both pre and post test show the weak performance of the students in English in general and writing skill in particular. Also it is clearly seen that the performance of the students in the post test are not distinctively different from the pre test, there is no significant progress after three months of study.

#### **Hypothesis (2)**

The methods of teaching and the students' motivation have a negative effect on students' performance.

- The teachers' performance is negatively affected by factors such as; crowded classes, lack of teachers training, irrelevant specialization, rare inspectors help, and poor standard.
- The level of students' performance in English had a negative effect on teaching and learning writing. To verify this hypothesis, the researcher set (9) questions to investigate the negative effect of the method of teaching followed by teachers.
- BC-The ability of students writing is negatively affected by some factors such as: Arabicization, weak background, insufficient exercises, lack of self-confidence and the position of writing in high school's syllabus.

### **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS**

#### **DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA**

The seven introductory questions of the questionnaire (1-7) reveal the background of the teaching staff of the target level. The total of the teachers who teach the students and ran the questionnaire are (14 teachers). Six of them are experienced teachers , they teach only one credit

hour of ESP per week, this group does not face any difficulties in dealing with students, except they are complaining of student's low level of performance ,they represent (43%)of the total of the teachers . The rest are (eight 8) teachers who teach the rest of the course. they are new graduates , who have no experience in teaching or in methodology ,they only have (B.A)in English which is inadequate for teaching in the foundation year of the University ,this starting and basic level needs good teaching experience, this group represents( 57% )of the total group of teachers.

Question nine meant to check , to what extent do teachers find it important to have an idea about the syllabus content beforehand .All of them assured that it is very important to do that ,there responses were as follows,(10) of them who represent 55.6% answered by strongly agree ,while ( 8) of them who represent 44.4% answered by agree ,so both answers advocate the importance of the concept of knowing the syllabus beforehand.

Question ten meant to check the importance of having inspectors visits during teaching program for direction and inspection as well ,the responses came as follows , ( 8) of the teachers who represent 44.4% answered by strongly agree, and ,(10) of them who represent 55.6% answered by agree. The researcher would like to note that this is the only type of follow up practiced with the new teachers ,one or two visits during the whole semester is not enough to train and develop new teachers performance. Generally teachers' responses reflected their need for a kind of training before starting and during teaching to give an effective outcome.

Question 11 was meant to check the relationship between teachers methods of teaching and students' acquisition of writing skill, writing is one of the difficult skills which has certain techniques and methods of teaching, thus responses shows that (8) of the teachers ,the new ones ,have no any idea about the techniques and methods of teaching in general, and of writing skill in particular, so it is clearly seen that this will hinder students' readiness for acquiring and learning how to write in a perfect way.

Questions (9-12) meant to check, to what extent do teachers discuss the writing topic before writing, ( 9 )



of the teachers responses who represent 64.3% came as that ,they were strongly agree with the strategy, even the other (5 ) they said that they were agree with the idea. The teachers added that the students' level does not help them to make use of such strategies.

The following group of questions from (12-16) were meant to check the teaching strategies used by the teachers in teaching writing skill. Question 13 was meant to check whether guided topics have advantage for the students and help them by vocabulary required in the writing tasks. Questions 14 was meant to check whether the teachers provide suitable exercises needed in writing to fill the gab which is found in the syllabus. The responses of the teachers negated the idea by saying that they used to stick to the syllabus and also they said that they do not find enough time to do so. So ,(8) of the teachers who represent 56.6% of the total group answered by disagree and strongly disagree, for that they have no experience to do so, while the rest of the group who represent 44.4% answered by saying that they used to provide extra tasks and exercises to fill the previously mentioned gab .

Question 15 was meant to check the concept of using the writing topics related to students' environment and interest in order to help them to express their ideas easily. The teachers with less experience were disagreed with the idea. Accordingly results came as that, (8) of the teachers who represent 56.6% of the total group present apposite response while the rest who represent 44.4% presents a negative one. Question 16 meant to check the effect of the teaching strategies used in teaching writing skill, the experienced teachers advocate the idea of using the strategies of teaching writing skill, while the rest of teachers mentioned that they have no idea about such strategies , which has a clear negative effect on students acquisition.

The group of questions from 17-28 were focused on the students, their level of performance, back ground and their attitudes .Besides the factors affecting learning writing skill such as motivation, mother tongue and large classes. The responses showed that the students are not motivated to study English in general and writing in particular (6) of the

teachers who represent 44.4%of the teachers disagree with the idea (8) and strongly disagree, so the responses are negative ones .

Question (18), this question meant to check the level of student background in English particularly in writing.

Also the responses reflect that their background is clearly weak. Accordingly (Q.19) check whether the weak background of students forces teachers to use Arabic in their teaching, most of the teacher's responses said that they used Arabic in their teaching . So this technique should not be widely used, it may be used in a very narrow space, because it may hinders students' desire to acquire the foreign language. They will not be encouraged to understand and try to use the foreign language; they will depend on translation which will kill their efforts to use target language. (Q.20) meant to check the difficulties facing the target students. It shows that they face difficulty in expressing their ideas in English language. Another factor may affect learning in the target level is the crowded classes, the group consists of 30 students which is to some extent imbed checking their writing and their assignments and correction of writing works. This point was discussed by (Q.21).

Q. (22) meant to check whether it makes different, if the topics used for writing were taken from students' real environment or not. The responses showed that it is a positive idea if they are taken from their environment, because their concentration will be limited to the language accuracy rather than comprehensive one in composing correct sentences .Accordingly responses of teachers agreed with the idea.

The question group 23-28were meant to check the reasons behind students believes to consider writing skill the most difficult one, which is assured by the responses of question 23 .The responses of the teacher for q25showed that one of the difficulties is students' limited vocabulary. Another reason is clearly seen in the responses of q 26 is lack of students' self confidence in writing in English. Besides, the students avoidance of making common mistakes in writing in English, in their spelling, punctuation, and word/sentence order etc .This is vividly approved through the responses of q



27.Q.28 discussed the last factor which affect students writing in English is the negative effect of the mother tongue. All these factors together lead to the bad results of students in both mid and final exams. The responses of q24 clarify this result.

The question before the last check if there are other helping sources for writing besides the text book, but the responses assured that the text book is the only source for writing in English, and the writing tasks are limited and in adequate for helping students writing, so students' standard is automatically affected.

Q.30 meant to take into consideration teachers comments on the topic, some comments occurred by few teachers were taken into consideration through the discussion of the questionnaire.

### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this research is to investigate the difficulties facing the preparatory year students in writing in English.

### FINDINGS

The research has concluded to the following findings:

1. Students' performance is to some extent better in the post test than in pre test (but it is not in the target intended scale) this shows low level of effectiveness of the teaching program in general.
2. The investigation shows that students' level of writing is not highly developed, due to some factors, which affect the teachers' performance and the students' ability.

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into consideration the obtained results of this research, the researcher recommends the following:

- There should be an orientation rush course for the teachers before start teaching. This course should focus on certain domains help in the progress and development of the students in this year. { If the people in charge have appreciated the suggestion of the orientation course ,the researcher is ready to design and teach it for the expected teachers.
- Teachers of English language in the target level should be given special and adequate

training courses in methods of teaching English in general and writing skill in particular.

- English language in the foundation level should be taught by the specialized graduate teachers, with effective characters.
- Students should be provided with suitable learning materials with adequate practice directed to promote their ability in writing.
- Teachers' view and ideas should be taken into consideration when integrating the syllabus.
- Questions on writing skill should be given weight in the practice exercises as well as in the exams.
- Setting up realistic tasks, which are relevant to students' life.

### FOR FUTURE RESEARCHES

The result of this study has opened chances for future researches as the researcher recommends:

- The problems of students' weak background of English language.
- Comparative study of similarities and differences of writing problems in both high school and University level.
- Exploring literature (through reading passages) to teach and improve students' ability in English as a foreign language.

### CONCLUSION

The objective of this research is to investigate the difficulties facing the preparatory year students in writing in English. The researcher concludes that there are main factors works together affecting students' performance. The first one is serious teacher training courses. The second one is the way teachers deal with real and effective activities beside rich practice. The third one is the syllabus used, and the last one is the competence of the target students.

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