

**Investigating EFL students' problems in writing skill at secondary level**  
**A case Study of EFL Students at Secondary Schools - Gezira State - Hasaheisa**  
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**بحث مشاكل مهارة الكتابة لدى طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية في المرحلة الثانوية**

**دراسة حالة طلاب المرحلة الثانوية ولاية الجزيرة – الحصاصيصا**

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**الملخص**

تعتبر مهارة الكتابة واحدة من أصعب المهارات التي يعاني منها طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية في المرحلة الثانوية. رغم أنها إحدى الطرق التي تقيس قدرات الطلاب في إتقانهم للغة وثقافتها. لذلك الهدف الأساسي لهذه الدراسة هو بحث المشاكل التي تواجه طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية في المستوى الثانوي في مهارة الكتابة اتبعت الدراسة المنهج التحليلي الوصفي جمعت البيانات لهذه الدراسة بواسطة الاستبيان والذي وزع على (50) من اساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية في المرحلة الثانوية. كما أن هناك استبيان آخر للطلاب بمدرسة الحصاصيصا الثانوية ولاية الجزيرة، السودان. استخدمت الدراسة نظام (SPSS) الحزم الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية لتحليل البيانات. توصلت الدراسة إلى عدد من النتائج الهامة. معظم طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية لا يستطيعون تكوين جمل معبرة ومتراكبة ومرتبطة ترتيباً منطقي، متابعة الأساتذة تحسن من أداء الطلاب، كما أن قراءة النصوص الأدبية تعزز مهارات الطلاب الكتابية. على ضوء هذه النتائج توصى الدراسة بالآتي: يجب تحفيز طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية ليكتبوا إنشاء مترابطة، كما ينبغي للأساتذة متابعة أداء طلابهم وتصحيح أخطائهم، يجب على الطلاب قراءة النصوص الأدبية لتحسين مهاراتهم الكتابية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** مشاكل، مهارة الكتابة، طلاب، اللغة الإنجليزية، المرحلة الثانوية، ولاية الجزيرة – الحصاصيصا.

**Abstract**

Writing skill at secondary stage is considered one of the most difficult skills that, most EFL at secondary level students suffer from. Though, it is one of the most important ways that measure student's ability of mastery of the language and its culture. Therefore, the main objective for this study is to investigate the problems that face EFL students in writing skill at secondary level. The study followed the descriptive analytical method. The data for the study was collected by means of the questionnaire which was distributed to (50) of secondary EFL teachers, and another questionnaire for student at Hasahisa secondary school, in Gezira state - Sudan. The study used the (SPSS) statistical package for social science program for analyzing the data. The study reached many important results. Most EFL students are not able to produce expressive, coherent and logically, sequenced sentences in their writing. Teachers' follow up improves students performance and also reading literary texts enhances students writing skills. In the light of these results the study recommends that: EFL students should be motivated to write coherent composition. Teachers should follow up their student performance and correct their mistakes. Student should read literary texts to improve their writing skills.

**Keywords:** problems, writing skills, students, English, secondary school, Gezira state - Hasaheisa.

**1.0 Background**

Writing skill has now become an essential part of every student's life, starting with the simplest content to the most complex writing pieces. At this point, students are asked to craft different types of essay, research papers and other kinds of creative tasks. Writing is skill students will need for the future which is why it is crucial to develop it to the proper level. Unfortunately, the majority of students fail to

develop their writing skill even after finishing school. The reasons for this is: lack of vocabulary, lack of writing practice, weak argumentation, failing structure ideas effectively and peer grammar and syntax skills. The main objective of this study is to investigate these problems. It also aims at casting some light on it's importance.

### 1.1 Statement of the problem

It is noticed that most EFL students at secondary level perform the writing task with difficulty and many of them are not able to write only a complete meaningful sentence. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to investigate the problems in writing skill at secondary level. Moreover, to cast some light on it's importance.

### 1.2 Objectives of the study

This study aims to :

- 1- Investigates EFL students problems in writing skills.
- 2- Help EFL learners improve their writing skills through reading literary texts .
- 3- Extra practice for writing improves learners writing ,reading and performance .

### 1.3 Research Questions

The study will answer the following questions :

1. What are the problems of EFL students in their writing skills ?
2. To what extent does teaching literary texts improve learners' writing skills ?
3. What the usefulness of extra practice written texts for EFL students?

### 1.4 Hypotheses of the study

The study suggests the following hypotheses :

1. EFL students face difficulties in their writing skills.
2. Teaching literary texts improves learners' writing skills.
3. practice extra written texts improves EFL learners writing skill.

### 1.5 Methodology of the Study

The study will adopt the descriptive analytical method. The researcher will use a questionnaire as a tool to collect the data from the EFL teachers and another questionnaire for students at secondary level. Collected data will be statistically analyzed with SPSS program.

### 1.6 Significance of the study

This study directs the teachers' attention towards the importance of teaching literary texts in EFL classroom. The study intends to help teachers develop learners' abilities in their writing skills. It is also expected to be useful for syllabus designers and trainee teachers.

### 1.7 Limits of the study

The study will be limited to investigate the problems of writing skills at secondary level. during the academic year (2017-2018), Hasahisa secondary school in Gezira state - Sudan.

## Literature Review:

### 2.0 Introduction

This paper investigates EFL student's difficulties in writing skill. It also investigates essay types and steps of writing . It also casts light on reading literary texts as an effective technique that improves EFL writing skills and also suggests some practical ways to solve the problems of teaching writing assignments .

### 2.1 Definition

Writing a composition is defined as a literary written from. In other words, it is a type of essays on a subject expressing a personal view. Writing an essay is a complex activity that includes the mechanics of writing, including handwriting, spelling, and the basics of language knowledge (i.e., word morphology, syntax, and vocabulary). It consists of the introduction, the body and the conclusion.

### 2.3 Importance

According to Bello (1997 : 83) writing, as a productive language skill, plays an essential role in promoting language acquisition as learners experiment with words, sentences, and large chunks of

writing to communicate their ideas effectively and to reinforce the grammar and vocabulary they learn in class. Bello (1997 : 83-85) explains that " *one of the major failing in the traditional curriculum could be attributed to lack of attention given to writing, which is an important avenue for thinking* ".

As for writing in EFL, French and Rhoder (1992 : 70) argue that, writing could be viewed as the main area in the curriculum that we associate with creativity, noting that writing is one of the most tasks that we can be asked to perform. Thus, improving students' composition writing is believed to be important skills which EFL learners need to develop throughout their schooling.

### 2.3 How composition should be taught ?

Peha (2003 : 7) points out the following aspects of affective writing:

1. **Ideas :** They are the soul of writing. One cannot achieve writing without ideas. The first step of writing is to choose a topic sentence which is the controlling idea. The controlling idea could be an effective beginning which attracts the attention of readers. The next step is to develop the controlling idea. To be explicit, ideas should logically be arranged and coherently to each other. Thus, readers can easily understand the presented information and get interest in it .
2. **Grammar and spelling:** They are essential for communicating correct and clear meaning. Abbot (2007:6) states that .

" *a clear thinking could not be written clearly without using words according to definite rules* "

Moats (2005 : 1) show the importance of spelling for writing and say that some writers restrict their writing to the only words that they knew. In some specialties like medicine, law, and commerce, misused grammar or spelling may often cause problems and terrible losses.

3. **Punctuation :** Batham (2011 : 37) points out that " *Punctuation is more important than spelling* " Punctuation marks give meaning to words as pauses and change in note of speech do. Several studies have revealed that punctuation marks may change the meaning of words if they are incorrectly used, and they may reveal mystery when they are correctly used .

4. **Handwriting :** Rosenblum et al (2003 : 41) Explains that " *in business, you might be impressed by one's personality through her/his handwriting . For students, handwriting is a reason of failure or success because teachers do not waste time to decipher what a student has written* ".

However, readability of letters and good spacing between words and within the word lead to legible handwriting . Moreover, the right direction of drawing letters without lifting the pencil helps accelerate writing. Children who are slow writers find it difficult to transfer the information held in their memory for they may forget it before achieving of transference into writing .

5. **Paragraphing :** It is important to avoid too much eye strain. A piece of writing has to be interesting to attract the reader to new pieces of information. A good paragraph is achieved when a topic sentence is intelligently chosen ; the knowledge of choosing a good topic sentence for each paragraph helps students arrange the sequence of their information in a logical order.

### 2.4 Essay Writing : The composition consists of the following parts

**2.4.1 The introduction:** According to Colantone (1998 :71) the purpose of the introduction is to introduce the reader to the composition. It tells the reader what the written text is about and why he or she should read it. From reading an introduction, the reader should be able to determine the thesis statement of the composition and the main points that will be discussed, and the order in which they will be discussed. The thesis is a clear concise statement of the position that the writer will defend in the composition. It also contains the focus of the essay and tells the reader what the essay is going to be about. The thesis statement is usually stated clearly in one or two sentences at the end of the essay's introduction. Through body paragraphs, the reader gets more specific information and can form an opinion. Paragraph must be logically arranged and provide a seamless framework for ideas. Each paragraph should include a topic sentence indicating the main idea of the paragraph.

The conclusion provides the reader with a relevant information of the writer .

**2.5 Essay Types:** According to Khalil et al (1985 : 342) essay could be classified into four type :

- a) The Expository .
- b) The Description.
- c) The Argumentative .
- d) The Narrative essay.

The expository type, which is also called the analytical or information essay, is that kind which explains and analyzes a specific issue. It requires students to investigate an idea, evaluate evidence, expound on the idea, and set forth an argument concerning that idea. This can be accomplished through comparison and contrast, definition, the analysis of cause and effect, etc. On the other hand, the descriptive composition is that kind which describes an object, person, place, experience, emotion, situation, etc. As for the argumentative composition, it is that one which attempts to persuade the reader of the writer's point of view. The writer tries to convince the reader of the validity of his/her opinion. Finally, the narrative composition is that kind which tells a story. Generally the narrative is conversational in style, and tells of a personal experience. This composition could tell of a single, life-shaping event, or simply a daily experience .

### **2.6 EFL students' writing difficulties**

According to Arikan, (2006 : 105) writing is a generally difficult skill to that , writing is not a spontaneous activity but has to be learned. It involves some consideration of the nature of writing, and the difficulties of L2 teaching and learning, it is important to continue to explore the ways or strategies to minimize the difficulties EFL students encounter and to help them overcome their fear of writing. Although some of the strategies teachers used to encourage their students to be creative and organized, that is not enough. Students must take into account many aspects at the time of writing such as : vocabulary, mechanics, grammar, organization and content and not only one of these items because to create adequate compositions students must take into account every single detail. The problem is that they do not care about the kind of essays they are creating and they do not follow the correct steps that will provide all the sources for their compositions. They just care about the grade they will receive at the end of a homework assignment.

However, the use of the essay as an expression of logical reasoning and argument is a totally foreign concept to many of EFL students. They see the essay as an opportunity to report everything they have read, often taking huge chunks of text from the original source and presenting it as their own. This problem arises when students fail to understand the importance of using quotation marks. Such as grammatical errors or spelling mistakes and quite committed to the given assignment Khalil (1985 : 346) argues " *semantic deviations are more likely to reduce the intelligibility and interpretability of utterances than are grammatical deviation. For the EFL teacher the implications are clear : not only must attention be paid to the teaching of syntax but also, and perhaps more importantly, the teaching of those meaning related skills that will enable the student to communicate effectively in English.* "

The logical steps then is for EFL teachers to emphasize the communicability of EFL students' essays, as opposed to merely getting them to produce a grammatically error-free paper. Because of the complexity of its demands, writing is considered by many students with and without disability to be their most challenging academic task. EFL teachers often comment on the inadequate writing proficiency of their students and even graduate ones.

### **2.7 Developing writing through Reading literary Texts**

Reading literary texts enables students to understand and appreciate other cultures, societies and ideologies different from their own, it encourages personal growth and intellectual. In reading literary texts, students can improve their language skills. To write effectively in English, it has been argued that reading literature has an important role to play. In other words, possession of the basic skills of reading can enhance the skills to compose and write ( Ross and Roe (1990 : 27) ) believes that reading and writing support complement and contribute to each other's development. Other authors such as Cox (2002 : 173) argues that, both reading and writing should be taught together.

According to Bello (1997 : 83) writing, as a productive language skill, plays words, sentences, and large chunks of writing to communicate their ideas effectively and to reinforce the grammar and vocabulary they learn in class. Bello (1997 : 83-85) explains that " *one of major failing in the traditional curriculum could be attributed to lack of attention given to writing, which is an important avenue for thinking.*"

Writing could be viewed as the main area in the curriculum that we associate with creativity, noting that writing is one of the most tasks that we can be asked to perform.

### 3.0 Sample of the study

The sample of the study has been selected from teachers of Ruffa secondary schools. The questionnaire has been distributed to fifty of them to fill.

### 3.1 The Tool of the study:

The study SPSS program for analyzing the data collected. The study used the questionnaire as a tool for collecting data. It composed of ten statements for teachers. Each statement has three options, they are: agree, neutral and disagree. For the presentation of the results the researcher used percentages, tables and figures for more explanation. This tool will be analyzed statistically with SPSS program me .

**3.2 The Procedures:** The questionnaire is designed and used as a tool to collect data for investigating the topic. Using Errors correction technique to promote learners' interaction, at secondary level this questionnaire is distributed to the EFL teachers at secondary schools level. The questionnaire statement options are agree, neutral and disagree to obtain information which related to the research .

### 3.2Validity and Reliability of the questionnaire:

To test the reliability of the questionnaire Pearson's correlation is used the statistical treatment.

Here the researcher followed and applied the "product-moment" correlation (Pearson's) by means of the split plot and the formula is.

0952478	CORREL
097566	RELLA
0987755	VALID

$$R = \frac{N(\sum Xy - \sum X \sum Y)}{\sqrt{N(\sum X^2) - (\sum X)^2} \sqrt{N(\sum y^2) - (\sum y)^2} - (\sum XY)^2}$$

Where:

R: Reliability of the test

N: Number of all items in the test

X: Odd marks

Y: Even marks

Σ: Sum

$$Relia = 2 * r / I + r$$

$$Ma40 = \sqrt{reliability}$$

$$\sum Xy = 61356$$

$$\sum X \sum y = 2250168$$

$$\sum X^2 = 59880$$

$$\sum y^2 = 63615$$

$$(\sum X)^2 = 2143296$$

$$(\sum y)^2 = 2362369$$

$$R = 40(61356) - 2250168$$

$$R = \frac{N(\sum Xy) - (\sum X \sum y)}{\sqrt{N((\sum X^2) - \frac{(\sum X)^2}{N})(\sum Y^2 - \frac{(\sum Y)^2}{N})}} = 0.95$$

$$R = \frac{40(261356) - (2250)(468)}{\sqrt{40((59880 - \frac{2250^2}{40})(63615 - \frac{468^2}{40}))}} = 0.95$$

$$R_{lia} = \frac{2*r}{1+r} = \frac{2*0.95}{1+0.95} = 0.98$$

$$= 0.98 = \sqrt{0.99} \text{ reliability}$$

### Validity:

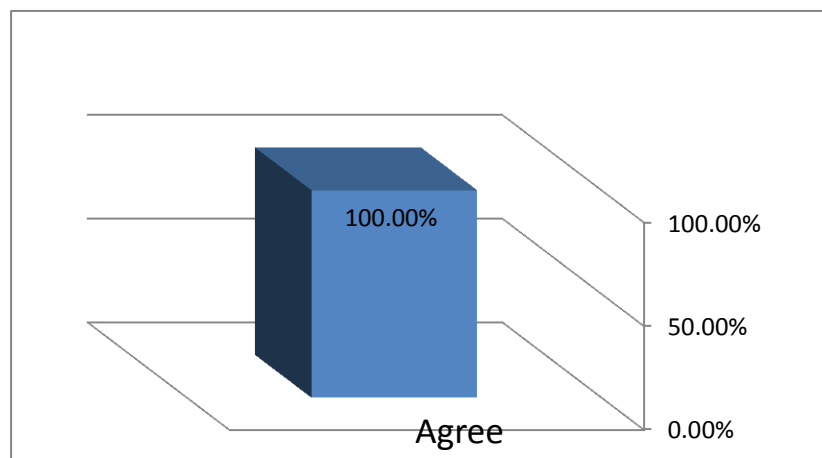
The calculated coefficient of correlation reached 0.95 which indicates agreement in results for reliability. This shows that this instrument of the test as a whole is reliable and stable.

### 4.0 The analysis of the Questionnaire statements :

**Statement(1)** Writing is the most important skill which EFL learners need to develop throughout their learning.

S1

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Agree	50	100.0



S1

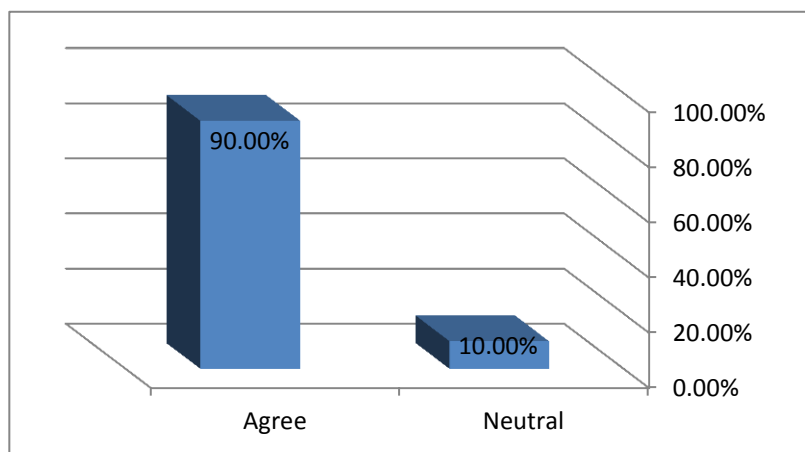
Table and diagram (4.1) shows that, writing is the most important skill which EFL learners need to develop throughout their schooling .

According to the statistical analysis of statement the whole respondents (100%) agree that, writing is the most important skill which EFL learners need to develop throughout their schooling. Therefore this statement is accepted.

**Statement (2) Most EFL students are not able to produce expressive, coherent and logically sequenced ideas in their writing duties.**

S2

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Neutral	5	10.0
Agree	45	90.0
Total	50	100.0



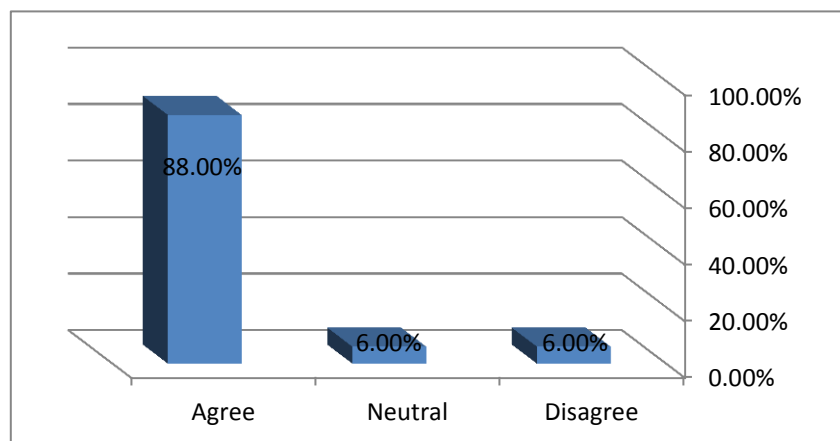
S2

Table and diagram (2.4) show that, most respondents (90%) agree and (10%) neutral that, most EFL students are not able produce expressive, coherent and logically sequenced ideas in writing. According to the statistical analysis of statement (2) the majority of respondents agree that, most EFL students are not able to produce expressive, coherent and logically sequenced ideas in writing composition. Thus the statement is accepted.

**Statement (3) Reading literary texts enhances students' writing skills.**

S3

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Disagree	3	6.0
Neutral	3	6.0
Agree	44	88.0
Total	50	100.0



**S3**

Table and diagram (4.3) show that, reading literary texts enhances students' writing skills. According to the statistical analysis of statement (3) most respondents (88%) agree, that, reading literary texts enhances students' writing skills. Only (12%) neutral and disagree. Therefore, this statement is accepted.

**Statement(4) Brainstorming techniques develop EFL students' essay writing skills.****S4**

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Disagree	6	12.0
Neutral	5	10.0
Agree	39	78.0
Total	50	100.0

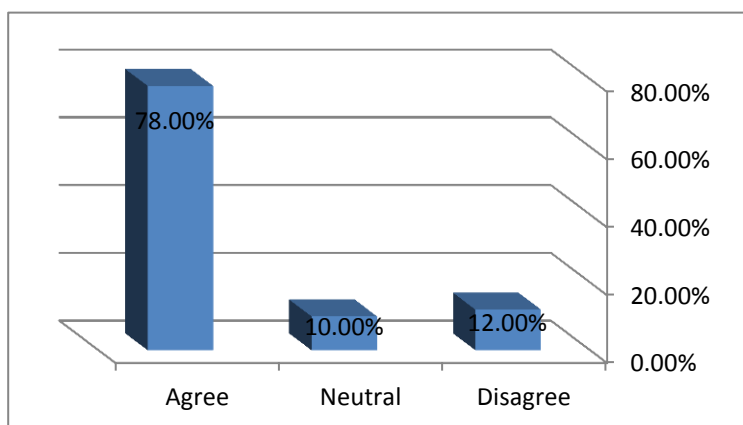
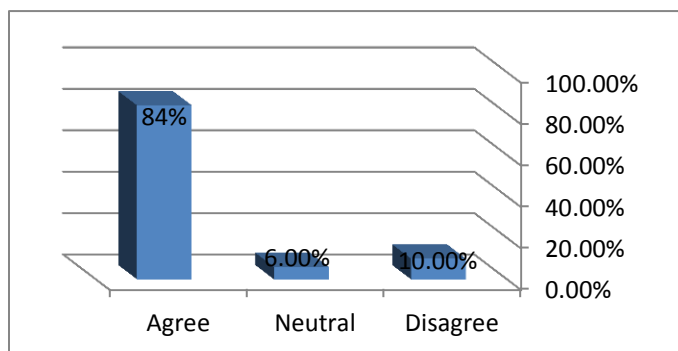
**S4**

Table and diagram (4.4) show that most respondents agree that, brainstorming techniques develop EFL students' essay writing skills. According to the statistical analysis of statement, the majority of respondents (78%) agree with the statement. Only (22%) disagree and neutral that, brainstorming techniques develop EFL students' essay writing skills. Therefore, this statement is accepted.

**Statement (5) Writing activities facilitate student'acquisition of the basic of the basic study skills needed for writing English texts .****S5**

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Disagree	5	10.0
Neutral	3	6.0
Agree	42	84.0
Total	50	100.0





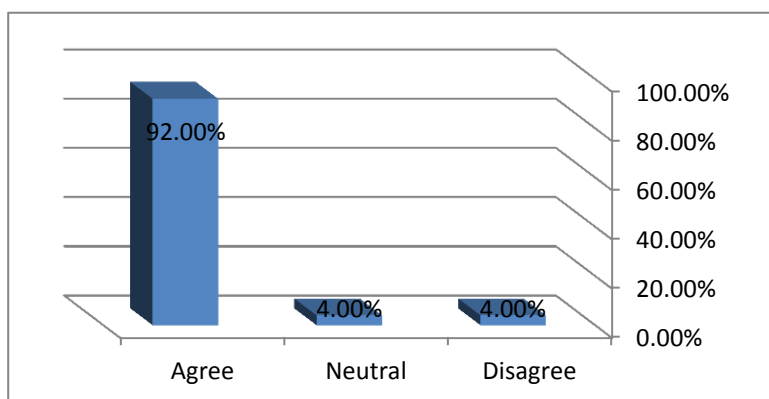
## S5

Table and diagram (4.5) show that most respondents (84%) agree that, writing activities facilitate student' acquisition of the basic study skills needed for writing English texts. Only (16%) disagree and neutral. According to the statistical analysis the majority of respondents (84%) agree that, composition writing facilitates student' acquisition of the basic study skills needed for writing English texts. Therefore, this statement is accepted.

**Statement (6) Collaboration offers the students the opportunity to interact on different aspects of writing .**

## S6

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Disagree	2	4.0
Neutral	2	4.0
Agree	46	92.0
Total	50	100.0



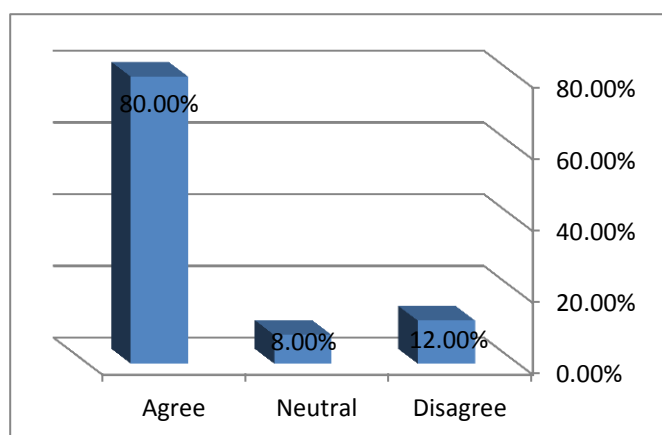
## S6

Table and diagram (4.6) show that, collaboration offers the students the opportunity to interact on different aspects of writing. According to the statistical analysis of statement (6) most respondents (92%) agree .Only (8.0%) offers disagree and neutral. Thus this statement is accepted..

**Statement (7) Literature widen students imagination for writing.**

## S7

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Disagree	6	12.0
Neutral	4	8.0
Agree	40	80.0
Total	50	100.0



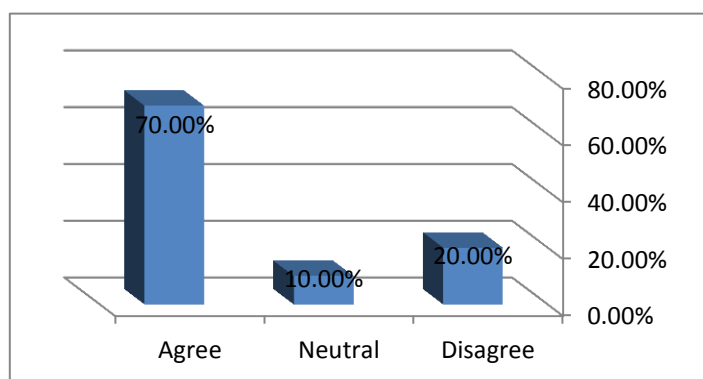
S7

Table and diagram (4.7) show that, most EFL students do not follow any systematic process in writing. According to the statistical analysis of statement (7) most respondents (80%) agree with the statement. Only (20%) disagree and neutral. Thus this statement is accepted.

**Statement (8) Reading literary texts motivates EFL learners to learn English Language better.**

S8

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Disagree	10	20.0
Neutral	5	10.0
Agree	35	70.0
Total	50	100.0



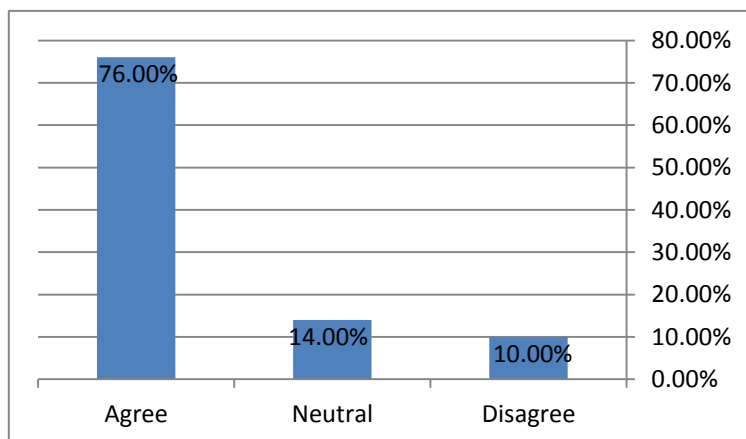
S8

Table and diagram (4.8) show that, reading literary texts motivates EFL learners to learn English language better. According to the statistical analysis of statement (8) most respondents (70%) agree with the statement. (30%) disagree and neutral. Therefore this statement is accepted.

**Statement (9) Overloaded classes impact teachers from teaching writing in classrooms.**

S9

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Disagree	5	10.0
Neutral	7	14.0
Agree	38	76.0
Total	50	100.0



**S9**

Table and diagram (4.9) show that, overloaded classes impact teachers from teaching writing in classroom. According to the statistical analysis of statement (4.9) most respondent (76%) agree with the statement . Only (24%) of the sample disagree or neutral. Thus this statement is accepted.

**Statement (10) Students do not peer review their written work .**

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Disagree	10	20.0
Neutral	5	10.0
Agree	35	70.0
Total	50	100.0

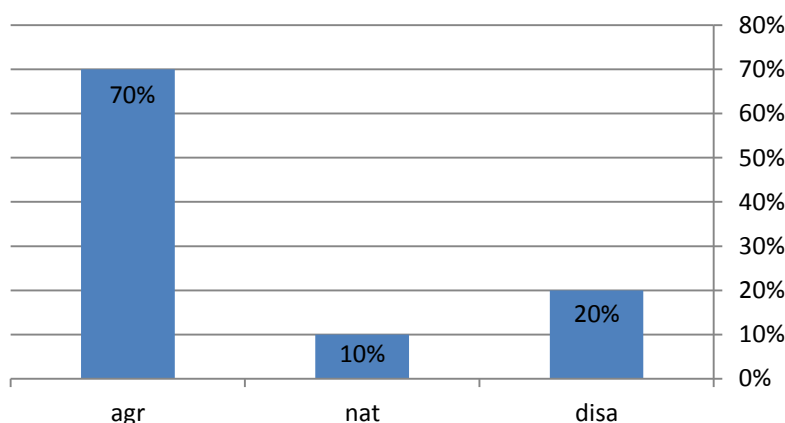
**S10**

Table and diagram (10) Show that, students do not peer review their written work. According to the statistical analysis (10) most respondents (70%) agree that, students do not peer review their written work. (10%) not sure and (20%) disagree that, students do not peer review their written work. Therefore this statement is accepted .

**4.2 Testing hypotheses**

The topic tries to ensure and test the hypotheses that may .

Answer previous question .

Hypothesis one : EFL students face difficulties in their writing skills.

According to the statistical analysis of table (4.2) most of the respondents agree with the statement, therefore, the hypotheses is accepted.

Hypothesis Two : Teaching literary texts improves learners'writing skills According to the statistical analysis of statement (7) most respondents agree with the hypotheses, therefore, the hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis three : Reading literary texts motivates EFL learners

According to the statistical analysis of table (4.8) According to the statistical analysis of table, most respondents agree with the hypotheses, so the hypothesis is accept.

**5.0 Conclusion**

Secondary schools students have difficulty applying some writing techniques because they do not know what those techniques are. Students of secondary level generally write a composition without any idea about organizing their ideas, even in their mother tongue. Expression in English. So this study is intended mainly to investigate the problems that face students at secondary level in writing skill. The researcher takes both the teachers and the students at Hashissa secondary school as a sample for the study. A questionnaire was given for each of them as a tool for data collection. The results proves that really students face many problems in writing skill.

## 5.1 Findings

Out of the data analysis the study has reached the following points :

- 1/ Most EFL students are not able to produce expressive, coherent and logically sequenced ideas in their writing .
- 2/ Students' written works need to be encouraged.
- 3/ Teachers' follow-up improve students' writing skills.
- 4/ Reading literary texts enhances students' writing skills.
- 5/ Brainstorming techniques develop EFL students' essay writing skills.
- 6/ Writing activities facilitates student' acquisition of the basic study skills needed for writing English texts.
- 7/ Collaboration offers the students the opportunity to interact on different aspects of writing.
- 8/ Most topic are difficult, and not interesting for students.
- 9/ Time is not enough for writing tasks.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings the study has recommended the following :

- 1/ EFL students should be motivated to write coherent composition.
- 2/ Collaborative writing activities should be used to encourage learners write composition.
- 3/ EFL students should follow a systematic process in writing composition.
- 4/ Teachers should use different teaching techniques to enhance writing skills.
- 5/ Feed back and follow-up strategies should be practiced in the writing process.
- 6/ Students should be given home works composition to write.
- 7/ Students should be given an easy and interesting text to write on.
- 8/ Students need extra time for writing and extensive exercise.
- 9/ Students need more encouragement and moderation so as to do the written tasks .

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I would be grateful to receive your responses to the following statements, which are intended to collect data for a study under the title: investigating EFL student's problems in writing skill at secondary level.

Thank you

**Read the following statements carefully, then tick (✓) your choice.**

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1) Writing is the most important skill which EFL learners need to develop throughout their learning.					
2) Most EFL students are not able to produce coherent and logically sequenced ideas in their writing duties.					
3) Reading literary texts enhanced students writing skills.					
4) Brain storming techniques develop EFL student's essay writing skills.					
5) Writing activities facilitate students aquiscoa of the basic study skills needed for writing English texts .					
6) Collaboration offers the students the opportunity to interaction different, aspects of writing.					
7) literature widen student imagination for writing.					
8) Reading literary texts motivates EFL learners to learn English language better.					
9) Over loaded classes impact teachers from teaching writing in classrooms.					
10) Students do not peer review their writing works.					

### ***A questionnaire for Students***

**Dear, students.**

I would be grateful to receive your responses to the following statements which are intended to collect data for study under the title: investigating EFL student's problems in writing skill at secondary level.

Thank you

Read the following statements carefully, then tick (✓) your choice.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1) I like an English writing activity.					
2) I like to share knowledge and opinions with friends by using writing words.					
3) I think writing is very difficult task.					
4) I agree that writing skill is essential and useful.					
5) I like writing process and I enjoy it with my classmates.					
6) The teacher insists to all of us to participate in the writing activity.					
7) time is not sufficient for all of us to participate.					
8) writing skill is simple to me.					
9) I hate the English lessons particularly any the writing tasks.					
10) The activities in the writing materials are interested.					