

Hawlyat Al-Montada

**A Refereed Quarterly Peer - Reviewed Jurnal
for Academic Promotion**

No. 64 - September - 2025





**Structural and Sociocultural Barriers
to EFL Writing Instruction:
A Case Study from Basra, Iraq**

**العوائق البنيوية والاجتماعية الثقافية في تعليم مهارات
الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية:
دراسة حالة من البصرة، العراق**

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المديرية العامة لتربية البصرة

الكلية التربوية المفتوحة

تاريخ النشر: 2025/9/1

تاريخ القبول: 2025/5/5

تاريخ الإستلام: 2025/4/25

Receieved: 25 / 4 / 2025

Accepted: 5 / 5 / 2025

Published: 1 / 9 / 2025

Abstract

Teaching English writing skills was found a difficult endeavor since it required proper circumstances so that teachers could carry out their tasks successfully which would effectively increase the learners' linguistic and communicative competencies. Comprehensively, EFL instructors in general, and Iraqi teachers in particular,

faced several difficulties while teaching writing. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate these challenges that accordingly affected the learners' writing performance and outcome. The study adopted a qualitative research design with a case study approach. The data was collected by interviewing 20 English teachers who lived in Basra Province, South of Iraq,

and taught at either private or public secondary schools. Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted. The collected data were analyzed descriptively and tabled to summarize the results. The findings showed that some factors were contributing to the challenges that the teachers confronted which were resembled, successively, by the educational/ institutional, sociocultural, psychological, and economic factors. The study results would assist teachers and administrators in considering these problems in teaching writing skills and devising strategies for overcoming them in the future.

Keywords:

Sociocultural perspectives of writing, Iraqi educational context, Difficulties of learning writing, Teachers' challenges of teaching writing

الملخص

يُعدّ تعليم مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية مسعىً صعباً نظراً لحاجته إلى ظروف مناسبة تمكّن المعلمين من أداء مهامهم بنجاح، مما يؤدي بدوره إلى تعزيز الكفاءات اللغوية والتواصلية

لدى المتعلمين. وبشكل عام، يواجه مدرسو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، والمعلمون العراقيون على وجه الخصوص، العديد من الصعوبات أثناء تدريس مهارات الكتابة. وعليه، هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التحقيق في هذه التحديات التي أثّرت على أداء المتعلمين في الكتابة ونتائجهم.

اتبعت الدراسة منهجاً بحثياً نوعياً باستخدام أسلوب دراسة الحالة. تم جمع البيانات من خلال مقابلة 20 مدرساً للغة الإنجليزية يقيمون في محافظة البصرة، جنوب العراق، ويُدرّسون في المدارس الثانوية الحكومية أو الأهلية. أُجريت عشرون مقابلة شبه منظمة، وتم تحليل البيانات وصفيّاً وتنظيمها في جداول لتلخيص النتائج.

أظهرت النتائج أن هناك عدة عوامل ساهمت في التحديات التي واجهها المعلمون، وتمثلت هذه العوامل على التوالي في: العوامل التعليمية/ المؤسسية، والعوامل الاجتماعية الثقافية، والنفسية، والاقتصادية. من شأن نتائج هذه الدراسة أن تُسهم في مساعدة المعلمين والإداريين على فهم هذه المشكلات في تدريس مهارات الكتابة ووضع استراتيجيات لتجاوزها

مستقبلاً.
الكلمات المفتاحية:
المنظور الاجتماعي الثقافي للكتابة،
السياق التعليمي العراقي، صعوبات
تعلم الكتابة، تحديات المعلمين في
تدريس الكتابة .

1. Introduction

Writing is critical not just for academic performance growth, but also for social-emotional development. In today's competitive environment, writing is a crucial talent for success. Students' failure to write well may jeopardize their future educational prospects. For many English Second Language teachers, teaching writing skills require them to increase their students' linguistic competence, which they may consider to be a challenging task.

Teaching writing skills in the Iraqi environment poses several challenges that prohibit teachers from doing their duties adequately. While the difficulties encountered by Iraqi teachers are similar, to some extent, to those encountered by teachers in other Arab and non-Arab countries, some of the

issues encountered by the former are unique. This owes to a variety of variables like those related to society, cultural, economic, and cognitive challenges that will be examined in greater detail later in this research.

Aside from the linguistic and stylistic manifestation in the production of a piece of writing, it is still demanding that writing is a socially created process. In other words, writers mentally generate images of the social milieu in which they write about and at the same time are capable of establishing a social environment to make texts satisfactory to the social criteria of their group (Rubin & Rafoth, 1988 & Williams, 2004, Hyland, 2007). Furthermore, the writers' sociocultural background knowledge and personal experiences may influence their L2 writing (Hinkel, 2009). In other words, students' race, ethnicity, culture, and economic levels are identified as aspects that contribute to their understanding which, in turn, result in their output. Additionally, Bhatia (1993);

and Ahmed & Myhill (2016) underline the importance of the psychological dimension of writing as it offers writers with pertinent, non-linguistic responses to the reason why members in a given community reflect themselves the way they do; stressing on the psychological reflection in writing. Closely related, there are specific cognitive factors that contribute to enhancing students' ability to correctly transfer their thoughts into written texts, and help predict their development in writing performance. These factors may include orthography (Juel, Griffith, & Gough, 1986; Berninger et al., 2006), topic knowledge (McCutchen, 1986; Kellogg, 1987; Olinghouse, Graham, & Gillespie, 2015), (Kellogg, 1996; McCutchen, 1996-2011), and motivation ((Mavrogenes & Bezruczko, 1993; Troia, Harbaugh, Shankland, Wolbers, & Lawrence, 2013). In the current study, the researchers will address the writing obstacles, from Iraqi teachers' perspectives, that they encounter in teaching writing materials. The purpose

of this study is to demonstrate the multiple macro challenges associated with the social, sociocultural, psychological, and cognitive aspects that could affect learners' writing ability. Significantly, secondary school students struggle to write adequately for a variety of reasons. These difficulties are likely to be observed in the interviews with secondary school teachers. Therefore, this study will attempt to signify these barriers and determine how far they impede students' ability to produce quality writing.

1.2 Sociocultural Perspectives of Writing

Drawing on Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) sociocultural theory, it has a substantial effect on education and second language teaching, proposing that higher-order cognitive processing are socially mediated within particular cultural settings and can be better understood when studied throughout history. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a frequently cited



Vygotskian concept in which “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving” and “the level of potential development as determined by problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” are linked together (Vygotsky, 1978: 86). In a socio-cultural context, recent characteristics of writing define it as a sort of social behavior that involves a sophisticated dialogic and shared process of discovery, facilitated by cultural and historical artifacts (Schult & Fecho, 2000; Razafar & Gutierrez, 2003; Bazerman & Prior, 2004; Prior, 2006; Behizadeh, 2014).

According to Rish et al. (2015), there are four tenets of a sociocultural writing theory. The first states that social context affects both the style and quality of writing. The second assumption asserts that writing is virtually always collaborative and that co-authorship is a frequent occurrence. The third one demonstrates how writing is a mediated innovation process.

That is, writers make use of some information and tools to inform and influence their work. The fourth tenet is concerned with the dialogue and structure of the text (Bakhtin, 1981). In other words, writers lend and borrow ideas, language patterns, and lexical materials from other writers' publications and discourses in a broad sense.

1.3 English Language Learning in the Iraqi Context

The Iraqi environment in which the study will be conducted is unique and distinct from other settings where English is taught as a foreign language. It is distinct in several ways, including the importance Iraqi EFL learners place on English and the quality of education. The majority of Iraqi EFL students view English as a means to an end. This approach to prioritizing the English language diverts students from building intimacy with the language and its speakers, which can facilitate the growth of English competence. Learners' desire to pass the examinations may impede students from studying

diligently and reaching lengthy language objectives. Additionally, failing examinations indicates that students are not meeting short-term goals, in this example, performing well on language assessments. As a result, motivation has a reduced effect in this scenario.

The quality of schooling itself may also contribute to similar outcomes. In other words, English is not taught interactively in a foreign environment such as Iraq. It is typically viewed and taught like any other school topic that should be completed, yet not acquired as a medium for communication. Students spend nearly 12 years studying rather than acquiring the English language. Nevertheless, the nature of language learning is based on the conventional method of teaching English, which promotes text translation and a strong focus on grammatical rules in addition to vocabulary acquisition. This is mostly owing to the class size (about 60-70 students) and the restricted time available to offer teachings. Consequently, implementing a teaching approach

that is dependent on interpersonal connection is a challenging undertaking.

1.4 Difficulties of Learning Writing in Iraq

Iraqi students face a variety of difficulties while writing short or extended paragraphs. To help students enhance their writing skills and aptitude, instructors should first address sentence construction concerns in order to create well-formed and ordered paragraphs. Al Fada (2012) notes that the transformation of ideas into written forms is a common writing issue for EFL students. Students assume that if they can form sentences and paragraphs in their mother language (L1), they will consequently be able to do the same in the target language (L2). Writing is a difficult and challenging skill to learn because of the cultural differences in how the academic register is regarded and interpreted in multiple countries (Klimova, 2014).

Alfaki (2015) highlights several linguistic challenges and issues that EFL students encounter during



the writing process, including grammatical issues, mechanical issues, sentence construction issues, and diction issues. Additionally, societal factors might affect writing as well. They may include negative attitudes toward the target language, a lack of motivation to progress in their L2 learning, social and psychological barriers between them and the L2 culture, and a lack of effective practical motivation for their learning (Klimova, 2014).

Muhammed et al. (2016) demonstrate that EFL students may encounter a variety of writing issues and problems during their schooling. These impediments may be linguistic, psychological, cognitive, or educational. Kellog and Raulerson (2007) argue for the necessity of 'cognitive control' in writing, citing evidence of purposeful practices in the training of college-level students. Likewise, they address the issue of performing deliberate activities in writing. According to them, students/writers should practice rather than be instructed in order

to develop an understanding of proper spelling, punctuation, syntax, diction, thesis statements, topic sentences, and coherent paragraph relationships (Kellog & Raulerson, 2007). All of these characteristics are critical, yet they are insufficient for quality writing. Without practice, it will be challenging to integrate what individuals already know, and their competence will remain inactive when they perform any piece of writing. Mohammad (2018) argues that the learners' errors are since English is not Arabic and has a plethora of unique rules, patterns, and structures. Therefore, all these essences should be considered while teaching writing skills.

2. Literature Review

There has been recently a wide range of studies targeting the challenges that Iraqi instructors encounter in teaching writing skills at universities. These research papers mainly focused on issues related to the methods of teaching, social effects, economic issues, etc. However, the secondary school environment has been very rarely

investigated, particularly to the foci of the current study.

This section is dedicated to exploring the accessible studies that examined the challenges and difficulties that teachers and students faced in developing the latter's writing ability. To begin with, Jasim (2012) conducted a study to determine why Iraqi EFL learners were incapable to produce qualitative writing. The purpose of the study was to detect whether Iraqi EFL teachers in Misan Province (south of Iraq) view writing as a process and a product. Thirty male and female teachers participated in the study. All of the participants were teaching at different secondary schools in Misan with teaching experience ranging from 7-15 years at the time of data collection. The researchers designed a questionnaire among the participants for collecting his data, and a Chi-Square Test to analyze the data. From the participants' perspective, the study revealed that most of the teachers in secondary schools were unaware of the value of teaching

writing in their classes due to the poor curriculum syllabus. The findings also indicated that lacking technical equipment in classrooms hindered teachers to help learners develop their writing skills.

Abdulkareem (2014) investigated the challenges that Iraqi EFL learners faced in writing compositions. The research aimed to diagnose these difficulties that weaken the learners' ability to write effectively. It also attempted to recognize if these complications were equally encountered by learners who were studying at the scientific branch and literary branch – preparatory stages. Two hundred and fifty-nine (142 from the scientific branch and 117 from the literary branch) students participated in a questionnaire juried by 12 specialists in EFLT. The study concluded with several reasons that incorporated to hinder students developing their performance in writing: the traditional method of teaching, the poor technology in classes, the lack of motivation, and the poor opportunities to involve students



in writing. The study also revealed that Learners in the literary branch were found less competent at writing than those in the scientific branch.

In their article, Moses and Mohammed (2019) reported that having a classroom with students from different educational levels may require teachers to employ a variety of methods to teach them. Thus, they would find it difficult to organize their courses and devise activities suitable for their students. Another difficulty that teachers might confront was the lack of professional experience. In other words, having instructors with insufficient professional experience would cause anxiety when teaching elementary school learners. The researchers concluded that teachers' multiple duties could also be challenging. The instructors' expertise might vary based on their degree of previous experience, and training would take time for beginner teachers to adjust successfully to their students.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

Following the research objectives, this study employed a qualitative research design with a case study approach. This qualitative design helped the researchers to elucidate the value of the difficulties that Iraqi teachers encounter while teaching writing in their classrooms, and help them comprehend the participants' attitudes and perceptions toward teaching and learning the skills in question. The qualitative design is appropriate for this study since it gathered the data from interviews with a small number of participants. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative researchers are often interested in understanding individuals, namely how they make sense of their world and their experience in it. Creswell (2016) argues that within the domain of the qualitative case study approach, researchers may explore a single or even multiple bounded system (a case or cases) over time. They can, then, utilize detailed and profound data collection that involves multiple



sources of information, such as observations, interviews, diaries, documents, etc.

3.2 Participants

The study included 20 Iraqi teachers, comprising 18 males and 2 females, all native Arabic speakers, aged between 29 and 59 ($m=44$, $SD=76.13$) years. As to their English language teaching experience, 6 participants had from 3 to 5 years; 8 of them had from 10 to 13 years; and 8 had from 23 to 24 years ($m=4$, $SD=3.5$). Thirteen teachers were graduated from the College of Education-University of Basra (B.A in English Language Teaching, whereas the rest were graduated from College of Arts-University of Basra (B.A in English Language and Literature). The interviews were conducted after obtaining the official approval from the schools' administration and the approval from the interviewees. It is worth noting that the research participants were assured that their information would be kept confidential and the results would be reported anonymously.

3.3 Instrumentations

For data collection, semi-structured interviews were used and originated by the researchers.

The questions of interviews started smoothly with the teachers' names, place(s) of work, years of experience, the purpose of the interview, etc. to prepare and help them react to the themes of the interviews (see appendix 1). As to the questions included, they were centered on the social, cultural, and economic challenges that the participants encountered when teaching writing in the classrooms. The first and second researchers held the interviews in 14 secondary schools (10 governmental and 4 private) in Basra, South of Iraq.

3.4 Research Question:

The study sought to answer the following question:

R.Q: What are the challenges that secondary school teachers encounter while teaching writing skills?

3.4 Procedures

Two procedural processes were performed to collect the data of this study. The first one was to



have the official approvals from the schools' principals as well as the teachers and to appoint the time to meet the latter during their breaks. The second one was the appointed time to hold the interviews with the participants inside their schools, a matter which would be considered a serious challenge when reconciling the participants' schedules with the researchers' working hours. The interviews were conducted in multiple sessions due to the various geographical locations of the schools. Additionally, each interview was allocated to meet one teacher individually to help him/her feel free in responding to the questions addressed to them. A mobile application (Voice Memos) was used to record and store the data obtained from the interviewers in question. Then, all the records were transferred to the researchers' laptops for analysis. Then, the data were collected after schools resumed in Iraq in October 2021. It is also important to mention that the emerged themes, attributed to

the challenges encountered by the Iraqi teachers, were provoked in the Arabic language. These themes were extracted literally in the 'Results and Discussions' section. But for the purpose of clarity and to guarantee that the non-Arab speakers could grasp the meaning of the extracted materials, the researchers translated the extracts into English. Afterward, the translated items were revised and modified by a board of professors, specialized in Translation, from the University of Basra, College of Arts, Department of Translation. In this way, the researchers made sure that these extracts met the requirement of professionalism and reliability.

Practically speaking, several factors decreased the researchers' opportunity to have all of their interview questions answered; among which was the time allotted for the interview, the interest and aptitude of some interviewees to convey all of their opinions on the challenges in question, and the confusion of some interviewees when being acknowledged that

their statements would be recorded officially.

4. Data Analysis

As a qualitative research design, this paper involves non-statistical data analysis. To put it differently, the work highlighted the emerging themes and sub-themes (codes),

demonstrated by the challenges that Iraqi teachers encounter while teaching writing skills.

These themes and subthemes were elicited from the interviews held with the participants. Table 1 below illustrates them with the number of participants and percentages.

Table (1): Challenges Encountered by Iraqi Teachers

Challenges	Themes	No. Participants	%
Students' number	Educational/ Institutional System	13	65
Classroom time management			
Classroom equipment			
Pedagogical and curriculum design			
Libraries and writing centers			
Students' seating			
Readymade materials			
Social context	Sociocultural	11	55
Social behavior			
Anxiety	Psychology	8	40
Peer's feedback			
Teachers' feedback			
Accuracy			
Teachers' low payment	Economics	7	35
Students' financial responsibility			



Table (1) shows that the educational/ institutional system in Iraqi occupied the highest score among the rest, recording 65%. It is worthy to mention that this theme includes other themes, such as the number of students in the same class, classroom time management, classroom equipment, pedagogical and curriculum design (non-cultural incorporation between the textbooks and the British culture), students' seating (bylines), and the students' reliance on readymade questions and answers found in booklets which are available in hard and electronic version. The second highest score was occupied by the sociocultural factors which registered 55%. As a challenge, it included other related issues, such as social context (interactions), and social behavior (violence and aggression reflected in students' production).

The psychological challenge was rated as the third influential factor (40%) that hindered Iraqi teachers while teaching writing in the classroom. This factor was encompassed by anxiety from

spelling mistakes, students and teachers' negative feedback, and the shortages of vocabulary as well as the grammatical accuracy. Finally, economical challenges attributed to teachers' low payment, and students' financial responsibilities were found to occupy the fourth factor, recording 35%, that impeded teaching writing.

5. Results and Discussions

Based on the results obtained from the interviews held with the participants, it was found that there were four major challenges, including other related ones, that teachers encountered while teaching writing skills. To practically support what the participants stated, the following extracts were found to serve this purpose:

Challenge 1: Educational/ institutional system

Extract 1: Students' number and shortage of class time

«أكيد هواي صعوبات منها عدد الطلاب وضيق الوقت فمتكدر تسأل كل طالب وتخليه يشارك وياك والصف مليان بأكثر من 60 65 طالب... كذلك الوقت كلش ضيق

بحيث ما تكدر تفهم كل الطلاب
على مادة الكتابة ومتكدر تشرحهم
لان الوقت يضايقك».

Of course many difficulties such as the number of students and limited time, so you can't ask each student and get in involved while there are 60 – 65 students in the classroom. Add to that the time is very limited to the extent you can't get each student to understand the writing subject and you can't explain to them because of the short time

It can commonly be found that classes in state secondary schools are over-numbered by students in that the very class may hold more than 65 students (see appendix 2). Consequently, the teacher is not able to include all students in the writing activities. In addition, classroom time is another issue that should be considered i.e. class time does not exceed 40-45 minutes which will not allow teachers to cover the writing activities as being time-consuming in nature. Consequently, many students struggle with the organizational and proper use of writing techniques. They are also

inefficient and inactive in detecting the appropriate word(s) to fluently convey and verbalize their ideas.

Extract 2: Classroom equipment, libraries, and writing centers)

» بالمدارس الحكومية ماكو ادوات
تساعدك مثل الاب توب والسبورات
الذكية وحتى الصف متهايك ناهيك
عن افتقار المدارس الحكومية
للمكتبات ومراكز تطوير الكتابة كما
هو في باقي الدول».

In the state schools, there are no aids - like laptops and smart boards – and the classrooms are run-down in addition to the lack of libraries and writing development centers .as in the other countries

Classroom equipment such as projectors, smartboards, and sound systems are not found in the classes. Such equipment help boost student engagement, assist teachers in developing more effective teaching materials, and allow autonomous learning. Libraries and writing centers, on the other hand, are excellent channels that help learners enrich their competencies. However, these resources are not found in almost all government secondary schools.



Writing centers, generally, aim to help students develop their writing abilities while lacking them would block the teachers to afford enough constructive feedback on how students' writing performance could be improved.

Extract 3: Students' seating

«مثلا إذا اريد أسوي كروبات ما عندي سعة صفوفنا صغيره عدد الطلاب كبير بالإضافة حتى طريقة الجلوس عدنا طريقه كلاسيكيه تلت محاور يمين ويسار ووسط لانكدر نسويهم على شكل حرف u لانكدر نتحكم بالقاعة لانكدر نشتغل بحرية وبأريحيه».

For example, if I want to make groups, I have no enough space because the classrooms are small and the number of students is large. Add to that, the way the students sit is classical, i.e. there are three lines: one on the right, one on the left, and the third in middle; hence, we can't make them sit in a U-shaped way, we can't control the class and can't do our job comfortably and easily.

The schools of the twenty-first century are characterized by an active learning environment that

is characterized by a new positive classroom culture emphasizing modern teaching strategies. The most important of which is cooperative and group work, where effective groups are described by high productivity among students in order to accomplish a goal in the classroom and extracurricular activities. However, seating arrangements in classes bylines do not allow teachers to relocate learners or put them in groups or pairs. In this context, students will not be able to be engaged with the language learning activities in general and writing activities in particular. Moreover, those learners will not be afforded opportunities for group peer correction, learning independence, and hinder them develop their interlanguage.

Extract 4: Curriculum design

«والله اكو تحديات سببها المنهج مثلا اكو مواضيع عن ثقافات اجنييه والطالب ما عنده اي معلومات عنها فيحس بتخوف وعدم قدره على التعبير... بصراحة انا اوجه صعوبات جدا كثيره بسبب طبيعة الكتب والقوالب الجافه والقوالب المملة الي موجودة بالكتب والاسئلة الي تخلي

الطالب ينفر ويبتعد عنها وعن اللغة بصورة عامه ... وكذلك حلول الأسئلة موجودة في الأسواق على شكل ملازم ومراجعات مختصرة»

In fact, there are challenges because of the syllabus as there are subjects related to foreign cultures and the student has no idea about these cultures; hence, the student feels afraid and unable to write. Frankly speaking, I encounter a lot of difficulties due to the nature of the books and the rigid and boring patterns included in the books and questions which make the student dislike and unwilling to learn a language in general. Moreover, the questions' answers are available in the markets as booklets and abridged book reviews.

The curriculum design of the Iraqi English textbook activities requires students to write about topics that are unrelated to their culture, nor what they are familiar with in their everyday lives. As a result, teachers find it beyond reach to acculturate the writing activities with the learners' cultural awareness. In addition, the curriculum design in general and writing skills, in

particular, is another factor that decreases students' creativity and engagement in writing skills. To further detail, writing activities in the textbooks require students to act on a topic far from their environment and culture and far from what they know in their daily life. Therefore, students face difficulty in writing because they do not have enough ideas about the topic in question as can be seen in an exercise, among many, in the activity book of the sixth grade/ preparatory school 'Studying in Britain' (see appendix 3). Furthermore, most of the writing activities are designed as guided compositions which make the students neither productive nor are they creative in their writing production. In the same vein, model answers of these exercises are afforded to the class readymade by the teacher in the form of a handout or booklet. (see appendix 4).

Extract 5: Storytelling and repeated topics

«الكتابة مهمه جدا للطالب تخليه يعبر عن رايه بس احنا اغلب



مواضيع الكتابة قوالب جاهزة بالمنهج...من المشاكل الي نواجهها هي موضوع عناوين الانشاء المكررة في الكتب المنهجية، يعني ماكو شيء جديد يحفز الطالب على الابداع والعمل بمهارة».

Writing is very important for the student as it makes them express their opinion; however, most of the writing topics are ready-made patterns in the syllabus. One of the problems we face is the repeated composition titles in the textbooks. There is nothing new that pushes the student to be creative and write skillfully.

Iraqi writing syllables are constantly repeated material where teachers do not have the opportunity to introduce the student to various writing techniques. In Iraq, students finish their secondary school without the least knowledge in constructing a thesis statement, topic sentence, logical link of sentences, paraphrasing, summary, notes taking, choosing an appropriate title, transitional phrases, etc. nor are they trained in the etiquette of writing emails or reports. This

means that teachers literary teach what is in the textbook exclusively. Accordingly, students may not have the opportunity to think critically or creatively and enhance their working memory, similar to the educational systems in most advanced countries.

Challenge 2: Sociocultural factors

Extract 6: Social interaction

« ادرس مهارة الكتابة بالصف بس مو مثل باقي المهارات لان طبيعتها تتطلب جهد واغلب الطلبة يتعاجزون من بذل جهد بالكتابة... ومن نطلب منهم مواضيع خارجيه نواجه اعتراض حتى من الاهالي يكلك وقت وينه وانت تزيد علينا بالمنهج يعني حتى البيئة الاجتماعية مجاي تساعدنا على اضافة شيء من يمنا... بالحقيقة أكثر الاحيان ننطوي واجب الكتابة كواجب بيتي بسبب ضيق الوقت ... المدارس واداراتها أيضا مهملة لقضية تعريف الطالب بمهامه تجاه المجتمع والتفاعل مع افراد المجتمع مثل باقي الدول المتحضرة ومهمتها اليوم اقتصرت على تدريس المناهج وخلص».

I teach writing skills in the classroom, but this skill is not like the other skills because its nature takes more effort and most

of the students are not willing to make effort in writing. When we ask them to write about topics, not within the textbooks, we face rejection not only from the students but from their families as well; they claim there is not enough time and you want to add to our tasks, i.e. even the community does not help us to work creatively by adding extra tasks. In fact, most of the time we give writing as homework due to the short time. Even the schools' managements are negligent in getting the student to know their duties in society and interact with society like in other civilized countries. Nowadays, the job of schools is just to complete the textbooks

The activities of writing skills in the textbooks are demanding and time-consuming. Therefore, most teachers assign these tasks as homework. This requires the learners' parents to help their children in doing the homework in question. Unfortunately, most of those parents are lacking the ability to do writing activities that need knowledge of syntax,

a wide range of vocabulary, and writing mechanisms (punctuation, paragraphing, topic sentence, etc.). Therefore, most parents keep themselves detached from assessing and helping their children.

Furthermore, there are no opportunities for Iraqi students to integrate and learn about the societal culture or learn about the norms of the society. In other words, students lack to organize the discourse in writing and to identify the appropriate vocabulary and structures that may be reflected in their writing performance. Schools do not carry out community activities to introduce students to life outside the school. Such activities play a significant role in developing the student's mentality and expanding their vocabulary and linguistic structures, which in turn contribute to improving performance, as is the case in most countries of the developed world. Extract 7: lacking vocabulary

« تعرف انه كثير من مناطق البصرة هي مناطق نائية وبعيدة عن المركز واهل الطلاب يشغلون في بيئة مغلقة مثل الزراعة والاعمال



اليديوية وبعيدين عن التكنولوجيا والانترنت... الطالب ما عنده المهارات الاساسية الي تخليه يكتب بشكل جيد فالطالب ما يطلع وما يقرأ لذلك عنده نقص بالمفردات ما تخلي يعبر عن نفسه بشكل واضح وبعض الاحيان عنده بعض المفردات بس ما عنده قدره على تكوين جملة بقواعد صحيحه...»

You know most of Basra districts are rural and far from the center and the students' parents do simple jobs such as agriculture and handicrafts i.e. they are far from technology and the internet. So, the students do not have the core skills that make them write properly because they do not go out a lot and do not read. This makes them have a shortage in vocabulary and unable to express themselves clearly, and sometimes they have some vocabulary but they are unable to write a grammatically correct sentence.

Students in remote and rural areas, in which Basra governorate includes a very large number of schools outside the city center, have very limited vocabulary due to the closed nature of the society there

and their distance from big cities. Most of the families there work in careers, such as agriculture, handicrafts, etc., and most of them belong to one tribe. As a result, their vocabulary is encompassed and revolved around a repeated number of topics related to the situational context they live by. Additionally, new emerging ideas and expressions that might be learned from the internet are also constrained since these trends are not welcomed in rural areas due to their conceptions and traditions. These issues challenge and hinder the teachers' efforts and attempts to develop their students writing skills.

Extract 8: Violence and aggression
«اغلب الاحيان انطيمهم انا مواضيع جاهزة لان من كلفتهم بكتابة مواضيع من اختيارهم اغلبهم يكتب عن امور حزينة وسلبية وقسم منها عدائي اعتقد بسبب الظروف والحروب الي مريها المجتمع».

Most of the time, I give them ready-made topics because when I assign them to write on topics they choose, most of them write about sad and negative topics – some

of which are aggressive – because of the wars the society had gone through, I think.

Teachers virtually always emphasize strengthening their students' ability to write autonomously. Nonetheless, as revealed from participants' interviews, it was shown that learners are predisposed to utilize violent and aggressive phrases in their output. These are echoes of continuing conflicts and social and political crises, which have an impact on the students' language. By this attribute, teachers are challenged to widen the perspectives of their students, particularly when the latter is set to choose topics of their interest for the sake of writing advancement.

Challenge 3: Psychological challenges

Extract 9: Spelling mistakes

« الطالب لما يرتكب خطأ معين على السبورة او بالورقة ممكن يكون محل سخرية من الطلاب... اكيد تواجهني مشاكل وتواجه كل الأساتذة مثل انه الطالب من يكوم يكتب يخاف ويستحي من زملائه غير ذلك يخطا

بالأزمنة والقواعد ويخطئون بالإملاء «كلش هواي».

When the student commits a certain mistake on the whiteboard or the paper, they might be laughed at by the other students. Of course, I and the other teachers face problems like when the student starts to write, they feel afraid and shy which makes them commit mistakes in tenses, grammar, and a lot of misspellings

Students feel confused and anxious about their spelling mistakes and their inaccurate grammar since these mistakes are documented in their exam sheets. The fear of negative evaluation by their peers is a very crucial factor as students with low-level writing proficiency are very frequently worried about their faces being threatened in class.

In addition, students' lack enough vocabulary and grammar accuracy would lead to demotivating and disengaging them to participate in writing classroom activities and assignments. Students often think that vocabulary and grammar are big obstacles to their writing advancement. That is, students



often become nervous for they may know the idea but they, due to their limited vocabulary and grammar, could non transfer these ideas into written forms.

Extract10: Teachers negative feedback

« بالآونة الأخيرة وخصوصا بعد كوفيد الطالب في الامتحان الشفوي الطالب يحجى لكن في الامتحان التحريرى بالكتابة يخاف يخطا حتى لايقى الخطأ مستمسك عليه طول مدة دراسته قضية أخرى أيضا هي موضوع تأنيب الأستاذ للطالب من يخطا في كتابته في القواعد في الاملاء وما شابه. للأسف الاستاذ يرتكب خطأ كبير بهذا التأنيب والمفروض يعالج هاي الأمور بطريقة أكاديمية وليس بالتعنيف»

Lately, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, the students do well in the oral exam, but in the written exam they feel afraid of committing a mistake because they are afraid of being ashamed throughout their study years, add to that, the teacher also blames the student when they commit a grammatical mistake in their writing, and other reasons. In fact, the teacher commits a huge mistake

when they blame their students; they are supposed to correct these mistakes academically rather than .by blaming them

Teachers, on the other hand, play unconsciously a part in increasing the number of writing challenges, specifically things related to their correction and evaluation techniques. These techniques may be of much importance on the part of students in maximizing anxiety even the teacher him/herself is having intimacy with students. Receiving negative feedback will amplify individuals' negative feelings and unproductive work practices while lowering individuals' self-efficacy for development. Therefore, teachers should be careful when correcting students' errors and make sure that they do not do it in a way that embarrasses students in the classroom. It is important to consider, on the part of teachers, that student's fear of making mistakes causes him/her to panic, and one of the most prominent complications of psychological anxiety is the student's inability

to secure adequate academic achievement as a result of his/her mind being distracted, his/her weak focus, and his/her lack of comprehension.

Challenge 4: The economical factor

Extract 11: Teachers' low payment

«انت تعرف البلد اليوم خصوصا بعد مرحلة داعش سنة 2014 وبعد كوفيد 19 سنة 2019 أدت الى ارتفاع الدولار والى مباشرة انتقلت الى المواطن البسيط والى أصحاب الدخل المحدود مثل معلم الابتدائية او معلم الثانوية. متطلبات الحياة كثيرة وصعب تليبيتها والاصعب تلبية متطلبات البيت بهذا الدخل المحدود».

You know nowadays especially after ISIS invasion in 2014 and after the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019, the prices increased which negatively impacted the simple people and those of low income such as the primary and secondary schools' teachers. Life requirements are multiple and can't be fulfilled, and the most difficult things are the house requirements with this low income.

Teachers' low payment, compared

to some other Iraqi governmental employees, results in demotivating them to be more creative; meaning that they just carry out their duties to finish the syllabus without any innovation. Besides, this financial factor holds the teachers to spend extra efforts to design and structure up supplementary activities that enrich students' writing outputs. Add to that, teachers may drop out of teaching and search for another good resource for their livings resulting from the inadequate primary sources of economic waste, leading to an unappealing educational atmosphere, owing in part to the financial resources.

Extract 12: Students' at work

«اغلبية الطلاب بما انهم ثانوية فأكد عدهم توجه للعمل حتى يعين اهله ونفسه وهذا السبب المادي يأخذ من وقته وجهده فيصير عنده اهمال وعدم تركيز في بعض المواضيع... كثير من الطلاب فاقدين للمهارات ومن ضمنها مهارة الكتابة من تجي تكله وليدي اكتب بهذا الموضوع الانشائي يصير عنده حاجز كبير بسبب الإرهاق في العمل خارج المدرسة افرازات كثيرة للظروف الي مر بيها البلد والأزمات السياسية».



Most of the students – since they are secondary school students – work to assist their families and themselves. The work takes part of their time and effort; hence, they become careless and do not focus on some subjects. A lot of students have no skills including writing skills. When you ask them to write about a certain composition topic, they have a big barrier because they are exhausted at the work. All of these consequences are caused by the crises which the country .had gone through

Because of the bad economic conditions in the country, most families force their children to work part-time at an early age so as to meet their needs. Another case is when the students themselves are orphaned because of the wars and the political conflicts that took place in Iraq; many students become responsible for their families and have to work part-time to make their livings. All these lead to having exhausted and passive students who do not care about fulfilling their writing assignments which need time

and effort to accomplish, and also hinder teachers from assigning homework to their students to do at home because the students are already engaged at work and have no time to do it.

6. Conclusions

This paper described a case study in which the main purpose was to analyze the most substantial challenges that Iraqi secondary school teachers experienced when teaching writing skills. This investigation was qualitative in nature as it was based on the information provided by 20 male and female teachers by 20 semi-structured interviews performed with them. The findings of the study revealed that the educational/ institutional system, sociocultural, psychological, and economic elements were, successively, the most effective ones that challenged the teachers to teach these abilities, which answered the research question “What are the challenges that secondary school teachers encounter while teaching writing skills?” These issues resulted in having students with poor

performance when compelled to put pen on paper, demotivated teachers, and very often the very skills were discovered beyond being attained in classrooms. The findings of the present study may be contributed to the literature so that researchers may take advantage of this study's results to explore additional aspects that may limit teaching writing in secondary or higher-level schools. They may analyze, in other words, various diverse regions in the country in an effort to arrive at more comprehensive variables that would therefore assist address these challenges. Importantly, researchers are urged to perform additional studies to explore students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language with particular emphasis on writing skills. Researchers are also urged to analyze teachers' standpoints who teach at private schools to find out whether they too have comparable or different issues in their classrooms.

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Appendices

Appendix-1:

* حضرتك تدرس كتابة بالصف؟
 * شنو اهمية مادة الكتابة بالنسبة لك؟
 * شنو الاستراتيجيات الي تسويها بتدريس الكتابة؟
 * من تبدي درسك تهيأ الطلاب للدرس؟
 * حضرتك تفضل ان تقترح المواضيع للكتابة بنفسك لو تنطي الطلاب حرية يختارون مواضيع حسب اهتماماتهم؟
 * إذا انت اقترحت موضوع معين وهذا الموضوع ما عجب طلابك، شلون راح تقنعهم بالمقترح مالتك وشلون تشجعهم وتقنعهم حتى يحبون هذا الموضوع ويكتبون عنه؟
 * شنو هيه التحديات الي تواجهها من تدرس مهارات الكتابة؟
 * شلون تتعامل ويه هاي التحديات الي تواجهك بتدريس الكتابة لطلابك؟
 * دايما تكدر تحل المشاكل الي تواجهك بتدريس الكتابة؟
 * عندك معدات بالصف تساعدك على تدريس الكتابة مثل الشاشة وغيرها؟
 * البيئة الاجتماعية الي عايشين بيها انت والطلاب تأثر على التعليم وتساعدك بتطوير مهارات الكتابة؟
 * إذا اكو عندك بالصف طلاب من

الأقلية من حيث المظهر والشكل السمران مثلا او الاشهب او ما شاكل، شلون تتعامل وياهم من تدرس كتابة؟

*شلون تتعامل مع الطلاب الي مبردون يدرسون ويمحلون واجباتهم وشلون تكدر تخليهم يدرسون ويحلون واجباتهم؟

*تنطي طلابك ملاحظات لو لا؟ وشلون تصحح اخطائهم مباشرة تكلمهم لو بعدين ورا ميخلصون الكتابة؟

*الأخطاء الاملائية والنحوية والكلمات الي مو بكانها، تشدد عليها هواي لو تمشيها مثل ما هيه؟

*بالتصحيح تخلي طلابك واحد يصحح للثاني لو بس انت الي تصحح الهم؟

*تعرض اجابات الطلاب على شاشة وتشوفهم الاخطاء بالكتابة وتخلي الصف كله يشترك بالتصحيح وشنو الاستراتيجيات الي تطبقها بهال خصوص؟

*بالنسبة لأسلوبك بتقديم المادة الي راح يكتبها الطالب، شنو تسوي وياهم عادة تنطي توجيهاتك كبل لو توجههم بشكل غير مباشر حتى يعتمدون على أنفسهم؟

*ممنون منك أستاذ لهاي المعلومات الحلوة والمفيدة الي قدمتها الي بالمقابلة

Appendix -2: Google image: <https://almadapaper.net/view.php?cat=210160>



Appendix -3:

WRITING

Before you do Exercise H: read the text on page 32 of the Student's Book. Revise Lesson 8 in the Activity Book, pages 66-68.

H Write 100 to 120 words on the advantages of studying English in Britain. These notes may help you:

- you can hear people speaking English all day, in many different situations
- lots of opportunities to practise speaking, especially if staying with a British family
- watch TV and films in English and listen to radio
- read English newspapers, advertisements, notices
- observe British way of life
- possibly stay with British family

Appendix -4:

اللغة الانكليزية

السادس، الاعداد

اعداد

الانشاءات

القطع الادبية

التوصيلات

أفراد

فوائد دراسة اللغة الانكليزية في بريطانيا

Advantages of studying English in Britain

Q) Write 100 to 120 words on "The advantages of studying English in Britain"

أنا شخص أحب أن أدرست في أفضل مكان لدراسة الإنجليزية لأنه أفضل وأني وموطن اللغة الإنجليزية.

Personally, I think Britain is the best place to study English, because it is the **best place** and home of English language.

أولاً، يمكنك التأكد من أعلى معايير التدريس وأن جوداً، بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يمكنك سماع المتحدثين الذين يتحدثون الإنجليزية طوال اليوم، في العديد من الأماكن المختلفة.

Second, you can be sure of the highest standards of teaching and care. **In addition**, you can hear people speaking English all day, in many different situations.

يمكنك التمتع على الكثير من الفرص لتعلم اللغة خاصة إذا كنت تتدبر مع **British family** وتعلمه للغة في هذه الأماكن ضمن تلك الإنجليزية يمكنك من التحدث بغير صعوبة.

You can get a lots of chances to **practise speaking**, especially if you are staying with **British family**. **As a result**, these things improve your English language and enable you to **speak correctly**.

عندما تشاهد التلفاز والأفلام باللغة الإنجليزية وتستمع إلى **radio**، فهذا طرق جيدة لتعلم مهارات في الاستماع.

When you watch TV and films in English and listen to **radio**, these are good ways to improve your skills in **listening**.

وأخيراً، على تلك فإن أفراد الصناديق والصحف والإعلانات باللغة الإنجليزية هي طريقة ممتازة لتعلم القواعد.

Moreover, reading English newspapers, magazines and adverts are good ways to improve your reading.

أخيراً، بريطانيا مكان رائع **to explore**. يمكنك ملاحظة النمط البريطاني في الحياة التي تستطيع فهم الشعب البريطاني.

Finally, Britain is a fantastic place to **explore**. You can observe British way of life so that you can understand English people, you can discover many beautiful things about the culture of British society.

