

Investigating English Composition Writing Problems Encountered by Preparatory School Students and Finding Solutions to These Problems through Schema- Based Approach

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Abstract

Writing in English is one of the essential factors for successful EFL learning .Iraqi students at the preparatory schools encounter problems when using their background knowledge in handling subskills of writing(Burhan,2013:164).Therefore, this study aims to investigate the 4th year preparatory school students' problems in English composition writing, and find solutions to these problems through a suggested schematic language learning strategy training approach dealing with writing problems .The researcher made a survey at eight preparatory schools of AL-Risafa (1) General Directorate of Education :(316) from the scientific branch (159 males &157 females) and (284) from the literary branch (145 males &139 females), in Baghdad, during the second term of the academic year 2014-2015.In this regard, a suitable questionnaire is designed and exposed to a jury of specialists in ELT. The results indicate that the subjects of the study,i.e.preparatory school students are poor in English composition writing due to poor teaching methods, students'lack interest in vocabulary, grammar knowledge ,cultural knowledge, and schema .Then, the study advocates that writing problems can be reduced to a minimum if students are taught by using schema .With this orientation, this study suggests a schematic language learning strategy training that enables students to overcome their writing problems by developing their linguistic schema, formal schema and content schema .Conclusions, recommendations ,and suggestions are made.

Keywords: Writing- Composition-Writing Problems-Schema Theory.

The Problem of the Study and its Significance

According to Yasseen (1966), Al-Karkhi (1999) and Al-Jubouri (2001), Iraqi EFL students face difficulties in writing. They make a lot of errors in different aspects of writing. However, such students should master issues such as content, organization, purpose, vocabulary, punctuation and spelling. In addition, writing has been dealt with for many years as a product; therefore, teachers emphasize grammar rather than decisions about content, organization of ideas. Moreover, Burhan (2013:164) reveals that preparatory graders need more practice in writing English composition including punctuation, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary because their background knowledge in handling the writing subskills is not up to the standards.

Writing is a cognitive process in which students have to understand what to write. During this process, finding ways to restore previous knowledge is essential. This means that teachers need to activate students' schemata that enables them to improve their writing skill (Carrell, 1984:332). The significance of the problem lies in the fact that Iraqi students at preparatory schools encounter problems when they come to composition writing. Thus, the present study investigates the problems of English writing encountered by preparatory school students according to the variable of gender (male & female students) and specialty (scientific & literary branches) and then finds solutions for these problems by applying the schematic language learning strategy training approach.

Aims

The present study aims at:

1. Identifying the 4th year preparatory school students' problems in writing a composition in English according to the gender variable (males and females), and
2. Identifying the 4th year preparatory school students' problems in writing a composition in English according to the specialty variable (scientific and literary branches).

Hypotheses

In an attempt to find solutions to students' writing problems, the following hypotheses are adopted:

1. There are no statistically significant differences between the frequencies of students' problems in writing a composition according to the gender variable.
2. There are no statistically significant differences between the frequencies of students' problems in writing a composition according to the specialty

variable.

Limits

The present study is limited to:

1. The

4th year preparatory school students at AL-Risafa /1General Directorate of Education , during the academic year(2014-2015),

2.Runqing&Manchuns' (2004) questionnaire,

3.The schema –based training approach dealing with O'Malley, Chamot's (1990)& Oxford (1990) Classification of Language Learning Strategies, and

4.The gender and specialty variables , i.e. male / female and scientific / literary.

Procedures

The study involves the following procedures :

1.Selecting a sample of the 4th year preparatory students according to gender& specialty variables .
2.Constructing a questionnaire as a study instrument for investigating the problems the students face in writing a composition .

3.

Finding out the validity and reliability of the study instrument.

4.Applying the questionnaire on the sample.

5.Suggesting a schematic language learning strategy training approach dealing with English writing problems.

Pedagogical Aspects of Writing

Writing is an interactive process between the writer, text, and reader. White & Arndt (1991:4) state that producing a written text involves six procedures of generating ideas, focusing, structuring, drafting, reviewing ,and evaluating. Therefore, writing is a complex ,cognitive process that requires sustained intellectual effort over a considerable period of time. Seow (2003:105) defines four basic stages of writing process .They are planning (pre-writing) ,drafting (while writing stage), revising ,and editing .The researcher believes that this model is suitable for achieving the purpose of this study , thus applying schema theory as the best language learning strategy. Writing is a complex, cognitive, recursive process that involves the interaction of motor and language skills. It relies on good fine motor functioning, visual-motor planning, attention, sequencing, thinking, memory, and knowledge of grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary . Difficulties in one or more of these areas can inhibit written expression. Students who experience problems with writing often try to avoid the writing tasks (Bardos&Maybury,2006:1). With these pedagogical results, a number of specialists in the field of schema theory and English writing such as

(Wenyu and Lifei,2004: 51) believe that English writing is closely related to certain schemata ,and they all try to adopt different ways to accumulate ,enrich or activate relevant schemata in a writer's mind and to overcome English writing problems. Therefore ,this study advocates that writing problems can be reduced if

students are taught according to schema theory and language learning strategies training.

Composition Writing

Composition is a means of communication between the writer and the audience on paper. One of the distinctive types of communication by means of written words is called composition. It is a piece of writing made up of one or more paragraphs. It has a theme that can be broken into a number of topics. Each topic in a composition has its own paragraph (Ferris 1998:12). Heaton (1975:127) mentions that composition writing is a task which involves students manipulating words to produce grammatically correct sentences linked together to form a piece of coherent writing, which successfully communicates the writers' thoughts and ideas on a certain topic. Riley (2003:3) asserts that there are three steps in composition writing : introduction, body and conclusion. The main forms of writing are free and guided. Guided composition is a technique involving devices that help students to write under the guidance of the teacher or peer students. Kemp (1994:1-2) believes that free composition is a spontaneous free flowing type of writing that is unedited and ungraded. It is also highly achieved through brainstorming. Hyland (2003: 23) stipulates that a good piece of writing requires :

1.Content knowledge: This means knowledge of the ideas and concepts in the topic area the text will address.

2.System knowledge : This refers to the syntax ,lexis and appropriate formal conventions .

3.Genre knowledge : This implies knowledge of the communication purposes of the genre and its value in particular contexts.

4. Context knowledge : This means knowledge of the reader's expectations, cultural preferences and related texts.

Accordingly, two points can be made: Firstly, schema theory is useful for understanding how learners categorize information , interpret a text and make inferences . What learners write should fit into the schema of the native speakers. Secondly, what affects students' English composition writing ? To respond to such a question ,the researcher tries in this study to shed light on the factors affecting writing composition by reviewing some of the difficulties that require the skills of writing in the foreign language.

Schema Theory

Schema theory is a theoretical view of knowledge construction which states that the information people store in memory consists of networks of organized and interconnected ideas , relationships and procedures called schemata (Good & Brophy,1994:416) .Originally, the word schema (plural schemata) is a technical term in cognitive psychology originated by Kant(1871) who asserts that the mind

actively uses schemata to guide perception and categorize information. Then schema is a reflection or active organization of people's past experience. It involves higher-level, complicated and accumulated knowledge structures (Jing, 2012:915). Although the definitions of schema are various, most researchers on schema theory like (Cook 1989:69) and (Anderson & Pearson (1984:255) agree about these two definitions of modern schema theory:

(1) a mental picture of some area of experiences.

(2) a collection of organized and interrelated ideas, concepts and prior knowledge structures that are abstract representations of objects, events and relationships in the real world. Based on the above descriptions of schema, it can be inferred that schema has the following characteristics:

1. It is organized – when we learn, information is classified into hierarchical categories.

2. It is built on prior knowledge of the individual – the process of building schema is accumulative and individualized.

3. It contains the salient features of the object or event – schema directs our attention to the most distinguishable aspects.

4. It takes repeated encounters to build a schema – that is why more practice is necessary;

5. It is contextual – schema comes from various real contexts;

6. It is modified – schema can be modified to accommodate new information and contexts (Xiao, 2008:19).

According to (Carrel, Pharis & Liberto (1989:647), Xiao-hui et al. (2007: 18-21), and Huang (2009: 139), schema can be categorized into three types according to modern schema theory: 1. Content schema which refers to learner's background knowledge or world knowledge. It is our background knowledge of the topic and content of the text. In other words, it refers to the familiarity of the subject matter of the text.

2. Linguistic or language schema which includes the decoding features needed to recognize words and how these words fit together in a sentence. Put it differently, it refers to our linguistic schema which includes our language proficiency in vocabulary, grammar and idioms. Without linguistic schemata, one would not be able to activate relating content schemata and formal schemata in given information.

3. Formal schema: Often known as textual schema, it refers to the organizational forms and rhetorical structures of written texts. It can include knowledge of different text types and genres, and also the understanding that different types of texts use text organization, language structures, vocabulary, grammar, etc.

According to Anderson (1985) cited in Xiao (2008: ibid), schema has mainly four kinds of functions: 1. Providing background knowledge to interpret a specific event.

2. Providing background knowledge to infer beyond the information given.

3. Generating predications of events ,actions ,and information.
4. Helping the individual identify regularities so that more attention can be allocated to accommodate new information.

Furthermore ,the following points can be made :

- 1.Schema theory is based on the notion that past experiences lead to the creation of mental frameworks that help us make sense of new experiences.
- 2.Schema theory is a cognitive theory about information processing (encoding, storage ,and retrieval information).It has contributed to an understanding of memory distortions as well as social cognition.
- 3.Several characteristics of schema theory make it an especially appropriate tool for the writing teacher.
- 4.Schema theory emphasizes employing strategies to facilitate student's recall of related material ,such as using language learning strategies to draw connection to related content.

Thus, the application of schemata to the teaching of writing has received more attention from researchers who propose to improve the students' writing ability and efficiency by activating and constructing relevant writing schemata .

Nowadays, schema theory is highly used to overcome students' writing problems in English. Practically speaking, the ability of schema theory is to explain how different types of knowledge is learned to suggest instructional strategies appropriate regardless of the types of knowledge. With this orientation , the researcher in this study believes that one way to help students develop writing skill is to enable them to overcome the difficulties they encounter in writing a composition by teaching them how to use schema theory and develop the metacognitive knowledge and strategy crucial to success in writing.

Classification of Writing Problems

It seems that there is a consensus among educationalists that writing , whether in first language(henceforth L1) or second language (henceforthL2) , is the most difficult skill to master .Writing difficulties denote problems students encounter in the process of writing. Therefore, the classification of types of writing problems is various and different researchers have different directions for studying and sorting such problems according to their factors. According to Ellis (1994:342), writing problems come from the two main factors:1.Social factors ,and 2.Cognitive factors.

Myles (2002:1-20) indicates that learners may continue to exhibit errors in their writing for the following social reasons :

- 1.Negative attitudes toward the target language.
- 2.Continued lack of process in the L2.
- 3.Awide social and psychological distance between them and the target culture ,and
- 4.Lack of integrative and instrumental motivation for learning.

On the other hand, Hughey et al (2002) cited in Hameed (2012:3) have found that cognitive difficulties mean that when writing, students have to carry out simultaneously many cognitive processes: they generate ideas, translate them into sentences, take care of the correct form, mechanics and/or orthography, and think of the readers and social setting. Difficulties in one or more of these areas can inhibit written expression. Moreover, according to Maltain (2005:22), factors affecting writing can be classified into: **1.Social factors 2.Motivational factors 3.Motor factors 4.Working memory ,and 5.Long-term memory.**

(Richard (1971)&Abbort (1981) as cited in Msanjila2005:17-18) add another classification of writing problems :**1.Capitalization problem.2.Punctuation problem. 3.Inexplicitness/Fuzziness 4.Spelling problem. 5.Grammatical errors.** Other researchers in the field of English writing like Lee (2002:261) and, Mo(2012:118)have found that writing problems come from five main domains:**1.Lack of English proficiency(sentence level vs .organization level) 2.Lack of background knowledge.3.Lack of practice.4.Lack of motivation, and 5.Type of writing tasks .**

Furthermore, Sun (2014:1476) makes it clear that writing problems are related to the following reasons: **1.Lack of interest.2.Lack of vocabulary and grammar. 3. Lack of knowledge of English text structure ,4. Lack of awareness of coherence methods ,5.Lack of culture background knowledge, and 6.Lack of revision after writing.** Therefore, the questionnaire adopted in this study is dedicated to recognize preparatory school students' writing problems in terms of schema theory.

Instructional Application of Schema Theory to Teaching Writing

Writing is one of the most difficult skills that L2 learners are expected to acquire, requiring the mastering of a variety of linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural competencies. (Barkaoui,2007:35).However, for many years the teaching of writing was neglected as a result of concentration on the aural approach(Brookes &Grundy, 2000 as cited in Mo: Ibid).Therefore, experts and teachers have stressed many features of ESL writing and developed a variety of approaches to teaching of writing. For example, Raimes (1983:120) presents six approaches to the teaching of writing:**1.the Controlled- to-Free ,2.the Free - Writing, 3.the Paragraph -Pattern,4.Grammar-Syntax-Organization , 5.the Communicative ,and 6.the Process Approach.** Moreover, he recommends that ESL teachers should create their own professional practice in the teaching of L2 writing based on related theories.

In order to enhance language production, students can develop particular learning strategies that activate their mental processes. It is the task of EFL teachers of writing to focus more on schema- building strategies by providing learners with writing strategies on the process of writing (Jing,2012:916-920).O'Malley & Chomat (1990 :42) have differentiated these strategies into

three categories: **1.** Meta-cognitive, such as planning the organization of written discourse or monitoring (that is, being aware of what one is doing and responding appropriately to the demands of a task); **2.** cognitive, as in transferring or using known linguistic information to facilitate a new learning task or using imagery for recalling and using new vocabulary, and **3.** social/affective strategies, as in cooperating with peer revision classes. In addition, Oxford (1990:40-173) has classified learning strategies into two main kinds as direct and indirect, which in turn are subdivided into a total (19) sets. Therefore, the language learning strategies adopted by O'Mally and Chomat and Oxford, which are included in the present suggested questionnaire. See *Appendix(4)*

Related to the application of schema theory and strategies, Sun(2014:1477-1478) suggests three main steps for writing instruction: **1.** Activating students' previous existing schemata: The teacher organizes activities to activate students' schemata in the pre-writing stage. Topics are given to students to search on line for related information and materials, and to ask open questions in order to activate students' previous existing schemata. **2.** Constructing new schemata in the composing process: The teacher offers the related materials about the topic to students. Students are asked to discuss and verbalize their ideas in pairs or groups. Group discussion and brainstorming are two effective methods to activate their schematic knowledge. After the discussion, students decode information through schema knowledge and write essay in class. Self-correction and peer-correction are also conducted in class. **3.** Consolidating students' schemata by revising essays: The students email their essays to the teacher after self-correction and peer-correction as required, and the teacher revises and rates the texts according to the same rating standards.

From the above, the following main points can be made: **1.** In the process of writing, students' schema can be built and enriched continuously, since schemata change moment by moment when new information is received. **2.** In writing, linguistic schema, content schema and formal schema are combined to work. **3.** More attention is paid to the cognitive writing process: In writing instruction, schema theory is the one paying much attention to students' writing cognitive process. **4.** Culture and language are interrelated. To avoid culture shocking or information lacking, the students should have enough knowledge about the culture and customs of native speakers. **5.** Instruction should focus more on schema-building appropriate to functional problem-solving schema, in particular strategies for building appropriate functions, for the foundation of effective problem-solving ability.

Methodology

Population & Sample

The population of the present study includes the 4th year preparatory school students of AL-Risafa(1) General Directorate of Education, during the academic

year(2014-2015).The total number of the population is (12023);(6348) from the scientific branch (3195 males & 3153 females) and(5675) form the literary branch(2891 males & 2784 females).The total number of the sample is (600) students taken from the two branches see *Appendix(2)*,distributed according to their gender and specialty is shown in *Table (1)* .

Table(1) Sample of the Study

Specialization	Number of the Sample		Total
	Males	Females	
Scientific Section	159	157	316
Literary Section	145	139	284
Total	304	296	600

Instruments

In order to achieve the aims of the study and to test its hypotheses, a questionnaire of (six) questions is adopted from Runqing & Manchuns' (2004), including the problems the students encounter in English writing composition , their attitudes toward writing , and their views about the current teaching methods the teachers use during writing class ,to identify difficulties encountered by students through writing instruction of preparatory school. See *Appendix(3)*. The instrument is exposed to a jury of experts for the purpose of ascertaining its face validity. See *Appendix(1)* .

Data Collection Procedures

After verifying the validity of the instrument, it has been administrated to the sample of the study. This was on 8th, 9th , & 10th, March ,2015 .In order to find out the reliability coefficient of the instrument, it has been applied randomly to (80) students from the two sections .The reliability coefficient of the items of writing difficulties questionnaire is found out to be(from 0.133 to 0.432)which is considered acceptable (Ebel,1972 as cited in Al-Obaidi 1989:33). Obtained results will be presented according to the aims of the presents study and as shown below:

Table(2)Frequencies , Percentage of Sample's Responses to the Items of the Questionnaire of Difficulties in Writing & Chi-Square Value for the Differences in the Students' Gender Variable

Item	Male		Female		f	Computed X ² Value	Tab. X ² Value	Level of Significance 0.05
	F	%	F	%				
Choices								

	A	15	86	2.50	37	6.20	4	14.854	9.49	Significant
	B	145	58	14.30	95	15.80				
	C			24.20	125	20.80				
	D			9.70	39	6.50				
	Total	304		50.70	296	49.30				
	A	55		9.20	73	12.20	4	6.341	9.49	insignificant
	B	91		15.20	92	15.30				
	C	93		15.50	86	14.30				
	D	65		10.80	45	7.50				
	Total	304		50.70	296	49.30				
	A	18		3.00	36	6.00	4	9.014	9.49	insignificant
	B	73		12.20	77	12.80				
	C	150		25.00	136	22.70				
	D	63		10.50	47	7.80				
	Total	304		50.70	296	49.30				
	A	120		20.00	88	14.70	4	12.976	9.49	Significant
	B	97		16.20	90	15.00				
	C	53		8.80	86	14.30				
	D	34		5.70	32	5.30				
	Total	304		50.70	296	49.30				
	A	182		30.30	174	29.00	4	1.627	9.49	insignificant
	B	95		15.80	87	14.50				
	C	14		2.30	20	3.30				
	D	13		2.20	15	2.50				
	Total	304		50.70	296	49.30				
	A	94		15.70	105	17.50	4	2.326	9.49	insignificant
	B	155		25.80	138	23.00				
	C	35		5.80	38	6.30				
	D	20		3.30	15	2.50				
	Total	304		50.70	296	49.30				

1.Results Related to the First Aim

With respect to the gender of students variable ,*Table (2)* reveals the following :Results Related to Question One: There are statistically significant differences between male and female students since the computed χ^2 which is **(14.854)** is higher than the tabulated χ^2 which is **(9.49)** when the level of significance is **(0.05)** and the degree of freedom is **(4)**.**(33.90%)** of male students dislike writing or

even hate writing, (14.30%) of them are not highly motivated, whereas (27.30%) of female students dislike writing or even hate writing, (15.80%) of them are not highly motivated. This means that both male and female students dislike English writing and this result proves that male students suffer from lack of interest in writing more than female students.

Results Related to Question Two : There are no statistically significant differences between the two groups (females & males), regarding their views towards the textbook, since the computed χ^2 which is (6.341) is lower than the tabulated χ^2 which is (9.49) when the level of significance is (0.05) and the degree of freedom is (4). This reveals that (26.30%) of male students do not show a positive view towards the existing textbook, whereas (24.40%) of them show a positive view and (21.80%) of female students do not show a positive view towards it, whereas (27.50%) of them show a positive view.

Result Related to Question Three: There are no statistically significant differences between the two groups (males and females), regarding their views towards the teaching of English writing, since the computed χ^2 which is (9.014) is lower than the tabulated χ^2 which is (9.49) when the level of significance is (0.05) and the degree of freedom is (4). The results of the questionnaire reveals that (47.70%) of male students think that their schools do not attach great importance to the teaching of English writing, whereas (43.30%) of female students have the same responses.

Result Related to Question Four: There are statistically significant differences between male and female students, regarding the writing texts assigned by teachers, since the computed χ^2 which is (12.976) is higher than the tabulated χ^2 which is (9.49) when the level of significance is (0.05) and the degree of freedom is (4). (20.00%) of male students have never written any texts assigned by the teacher, (16.20%) of them just wrote one or two English texts, whereas (14.70%) of female students have never written any text, (15.00%) of them just wrote one or two texts. This means that the two groups lack practice in writing a composition and in favour of male.

Result Related to Question Five: There are no statistically significant differences between male and female students, regarding their views towards cultural cognitive problems, since the computed χ^2 which is (1.627) is lower than the tabulated χ^2 which is (9.49) when the level of significance is (0.05) and the degree of freedom is (4). (46.10%) of female students often or sometimes firstly organize the text in Arabic and then translate it into English, whereas (43.50%) of female students often or sometimes firstly organize the text in Arabic and then translate it into English. This means that the two groups suffer from lack of cultural differences.

Result Related to Question six : There are no statistically significant differences between male and female students since the computed χ^2 which is (2.326) is lower than the tabulated χ^2 which is (9.49) when the level of significance is

(0.05)and the degree of freedom is (4).(25.80%) of the male students consider vocabulary as the most difficult factor in writing ,whereas (23.00%) of the female students consider it as the most difficult. (15.70%) of males consider grammar as the most difficult factor, whereas (17.50%) of females consider it the most difficult.(5.80%) of the males think that cultural differences as the most difficult factor ,whereas (6.30 %) of the female students think that the cultural differences as the most difficult factor.(3.30%)of males believe that writing techniques is the most difficult factor, whereas(2.50%) of the female students believe that writing techniques is the most difficult factor. This result proves that the two groups suffer from lack of vocabulary , grammar, cultural differences ,and writing techniques .The following can be concluded from the above detailed results:

1.There are significant differences between the two groups in the first and the fourth items. Accordingly, the first hypothesis is rejected concerning the two items.

2.There are no significant differences between the two groups in the four items, namely;(2,3,5,and 6) .Accordingly ,the first hypothesis is accepted concern in these four items .The above results reveal that both male and female students suffer from difficulty in writing a composition.

Table(3)Frequencies , Percentage of Sample’s Responses to the Items of the Questionnaire of Difficulties in Writing &Chi-Square Value for the Differences in the Students’ Specialization Variable

<i>Difficulties</i>		<i>Scientific Section Male&Female</i>		<i>Literary Section Male&Female</i>		<i>Df</i>	<i>Comp. X²Value</i>	<i>Tab. X²Value</i>	<i>Level of Significance 0.05</i>
<i>N.</i>	<i>Choices</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>				
1	A	30	5.00	22	3.70	4	69.728	9.49	Significant
	B	136	22.70	45	7.50				
	C	125	20.80	145	24.20				
	D	25	4.20	72	12.00				
	Total	316	52.70	284	47.30				
2	A	95	15.80	33	5.50	4	131.108	9.49	Significant
	B	135	22.50	48	8.00				
	C	38	6.30	141	23.50				
	D	48	8.00	62	10.30				
	Total	316	52.70	284	47.30				

	A	31	5.20	23	3.80	4	5.674	9.49	nsignificant
	B	84	14.00	66	11.00				
	C	154	25.70	132	22.00				
	D	47	7.80	63	10.50				
	Total	316	52.70	284	47.30				
	A	88	14.70	120	20.00	4	17.826	9.49	Significant
	B	99	16.50	88	14.70				
	C	89	14.80	50	8.30				
	D	40	6.70	26	4.30				
	Total	316	52.70	284	47.30				
	A	139	23.20	217	36.20	4	65.439	9.49	Significant
	B	133	22.20	49	8.20				
	C	25	4.20	9	1.50				
	D	19	3.20	9	1.50				
	Total	316	52.70	284	47.30				
	A	96	16.00	103	17.20	4	6.392	9.49	nsignificant
	B	168	28.00	125	20.80				
	C	38	6.30	35	5.80				
	D	14	2.30	21	3.50				
	Total	316	52.70	284	47.30				

2.Results Related to the Second Aim : With respect to the specialty variable , *Table(3)* reveals the following :

Result Related to Question One: There are statistically significant differences between students in the scientific and literary branches since the computed χ^2 which is (**69.728**) is higher than the tabulated χ^2 which is (**9.49**) when the level of significance is (**0.05**) and the degree of freedom is (**4**). (**25%**) of students in the scientific branch dislike or even hate English writing , (**22.70%**) of them are not highly motivated , whereas (**36.20%**) of students in the literary branch dislike or even hate English writing , (**7.50%**) are not highly motivated. This means that students in the literary group suffer from lack of interest in English writing more than the students in the scientific branch.

Result Related to Question Two : There are statistically significant differences between the two sections since the computed χ^2 which is (**131.108**) is higher than the tabulated χ^2 which is (**9.49**) when the level of significance is (**0.05**) and the degree of freedom is (**4**) . (**14.30%**) of students in the first section do not show a positive view toward the new textbook, whereas (**38.30%**) of them show a positive view towards it. (**33.80%**) of students in second section do not show a positive view toward the new textbook , whereas (**13.50%**) show a positive

view .This means that the proportion of the frequencies of students in the literary branch who do not show a positive view towards the new textbook is more larger than the frequencies of the students in the first section.

Result Related Question Three: There are no statistically significant differences between the two sections since the computed χ^2 which is (5.674) is lower than the tabulated χ^2 which is (9.49) when the level of significance is (0.05) and the degree of freedom is (4). (47.50%) of students in the first section think their schools do not attach a great importance to the teaching of English writing ,whereas (43.50%) of students in the second section think the same .

Result Related Question Four: there are statistically significant differences between the two sections since the computed χ^2 which is (17.826) is higher than the tabulated χ^2 which is (9.49) when the level of significance is (0.05) and the degree of freedom is (4). (14.70%) of students in Scientific Branch have never written any texts assigned by the teacher in English ,(16.50%) of them just wrote one or two English texts ,whereas (20.00%) of students in the literary branch have never written any texts assigned by the teacher in English, (14.70%) of them just wrote one or two English texts. This means that students in the second section lack practice more than students in the first section.

Result Related to Question Five : There are statistically significant differences between the two sections since the computed χ^2 which is (65.439) is higher than the tabulated χ^2 which is (9.49) when the level of significance is (0.05) and the degree of freedom is (4). (45.40%) of students in the first section often or sometimes firstly organize the text in Arabic and then translate it into English ,whereas (44.40%) of students in the second section often or sometimes organize the text in Arabic and then translate into English .This means the two sections lack cultural knowledge and this difficulty for in favor of the first section.

Result Related Question Six: There are no statistically significant differences between the two sections since the computed χ^2 which is (6.392) is lower than the tabulated χ^2 which is (9.49) when the level of significance is (0.05) and the degree of freedom is (4). (28.00%) of students in the first sections consider vocabulary the most difficult factor in English writing, (16.00%) of them consider grammar the most difficult factor, (6.30%) of them believe that cultural differences the most difficult factor and (2.30%) of them think writing techniques is the most difficult factor, whereas (20.80%) of students in the literary section consider vocabulary the most difficult factor, (17.20%) of them consider grammar the most difficult factor, (5.80%) of them believe the cultural difference the most difficult factor and (3.50%) of them think writing technique the most difficult factor. This means that the two sections suffer from lack of vocabulary ,lack of grammar , lack of cultural differences and lack of writing techniques .It can be concluded from the above detailed results the following:

1. There are significant differences between the two groups in these four items: (1,2,4 and 5). Accordingly, the second hypothesis is rejected concerning the four items.

2. There are no statistically significant differences between the two sections in the items: (3, and 6). Accordingly, the second hypothesis is accepted concerning the two items. The above results reveal that both of the two branches suffer from difficulty in writing a composition.

Conclusions From the frequencies of students' responses to the items of the questionnaire shown in the results of the present study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Most Iraqi students at preparatory schools according to the gender & specialty variables encounter problems in writing a composition. These problems are due to the lack of:

a. interest in writing, in favor of males, and in favour of students in the Literary Branch.

b. practice in writing a composition, in favor of males, and in favour of students in the Literary Branch.

c. cultural knowledge, in favor of students in the Scientific Branch.

d. vocabulary knowledge and it is the most difficult factor that hinders writing in English.

e. grammar knowledge and it is the second factor.

f. writing techniques.

g. a positive view towards the new textbook, in favor of students in the literary branch.

2. Teaching of writing is not given adequate attention as the other EFL skills; therefore, the students are not well-prepared in both oral and written compositions.

3. Some teachers still use traditional teaching methods in the teaching of writing.

4. The concept of schema theory and language learning strategy are difficult and unknown for most preparatory school students because they are rarely used in writing. So most of them like applying the schema theory and language learning strategy training to English writing.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are put forwards:

1. Teachers should use activities that increase the students' employment of the variable of language learning strategies to promote their interest in writing a composition.

2. Teachers should incorporate authentic writing materials from a variety of topics as well as realistic writing tasks in the preparation of both written & oral compositions.

3. Teachers should have a training course on dealing with variety of writing

activities included in the new textbook.

4. Students should be trained in using schema theory and language learning strategies.

5. EFL syllabus designers should include variety of schema included with the subjects.

Suggestions for Further Studies

In

relation with the present study, research can be made in these areas:

1. The effect of schema theory on the teaching of ESP students' reading comprehension.

2. The

effect of using schemata on students' achievement in EFL writing.

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Appendix (1) The names of the jury members are arranged according to their academic ranks.

- 1.Prof.Abdul-Latif Al- Jumaily,Ph.D ,Duhuk University.
- 2.Prof.MuayyadM.Sa'eed,Ph.D ,Al-bani University College , Baghdad .
- 3.Prof.FatinKhairi. Al-Rifa'i ,Ph.D, College of Education/Ibn Rushd for Humanities ,University of Baghdad.
- 4.Prof.DhuhaAttallah ,Ph.D,College of Basic Education,Al-Mustansiriyah University
- 5.Asst.Prof.Istiqlal H. Al-Marsumi, Ph.D, College of Arts, Al-Mustansiriyah University.
- 6.Asst.Prof.Nadia Fadhil ,Ph.D, College of Islamic Sciences, University Baghdad.
7. Instructor Muayad Naji ,Ph.D, Ministry of Education.
- 8.Instructor Ali Arif, Ph.D, College of Languages, University of Baghdad .

Appendix (2) The names of the eight schools are:

- 1.Al- Zahra' Preparatory School for Girls.
- 2.Al- Markaziyah Preparatory School for Girls.
- 3.Al- Markaziyah Preparatory School for Boys.
- 4.Al-Ansar Preparatory School for Boys.
- 5.Aum-Al-Baneen Preparatory School for Girls.
- 6.Al- Farahiedy Preparatory School for Boys.
- 7.Al- Istiqlal Preparatory School for Girls.
- 8.Al- Furatain Preparatory School for Boys.

Appendix(3) A Questionnaire for Investigating the Difficulties Encountered by Iraqi Preparatory School Students in Writing instruction

<i>em</i>	<i>hoice</i>	<i>otices</i>
How much do you like writing in English?	. Enjoy . It is ok . . Dislike . Hate	
Is “ English for Iraq”, for the 4 th preparatory stage helpful to improve your writing competence?	. Very helpful . Helpful . A little helpful . Unhelpful	
Do you think that your school attaches great importance to the teaching of English writing ?	. Yes , it does. .yes ,but just sometimes . Not much.	

	.No, it doesn't .	
How many writing texts did you write according to the tasks assigned by the teacher in one term?	. None	
	. 1 -2 passages	
	. 3 – 5 passages	
	. More than 5 passages	
Do you usually translate Arabic into English while writing ?	. Often	
	. Sometimes	
	. Seldom	
	. Never	
What is the most difficult factor that hinders your English writing?	. Grammar	
	. Vocabulary	
	. Cultural differences between Arabic and English	
	. Writing technique	

The following options are followed in this study:

No. of Item	Correct option
Item One	A
Item Two	A + B
Item Three	A
Item Four	D
Item Five	D
Item Six	Free option

Appendix(4)A Proposed Schematic Language Learning Strategy Training Approach

All approaches to teaching English composition (the Controlled- to – Free , the Free-Writing ,the Paragraph–Pattern ,Grammar-Syntax-Organization ,the Communicative ,and the Process Approach) have their advantages ,and the teacher should not adopt any one of them and exclude other. The approaches can complement each other in the stages of the teaching of English writing .However , It is believed that schema is one of the best tools to reduce writing problems of preparatory school students .The most important implication of schema theory is the role of prior knowledge for effective information processing in writing. Students' existing schemas are related to the new content needed to be activated

.Schema theory explains how different types of knowledge are learned ,and using appropriate(Jing,2012:916-920).Many studies dealing with effective cognitive and compensation strategies such as memory used to improve students' performance .Moreover , these strategies can be considered as a measurement of students' writing abilities that can be analyzed and modified during the process of teaching writing .As a result, they come to overcome the difficulties encountered by EFL learners in the process of writing (Abdulkareem,2012:1553& Oxford,1990:38-50).With this orientation, the researcher suggests schema approach dealing with the problems of the preparatory school students' English writing for activating their linguistic ,formal , and content schemas by language learning strategy training .The following is a summary of the application of language learning strategies adopted in this study based on schema theory :

Voss &Wiley(1995:155)assert that cognitive psychologists differentiate three categories of long-term memory: **a.** Semantic memory, sometimes called declarative memory .This contains the facts and generalized information that we know; concepts, principles, or rules and how to use them ;and problem-solving skills and learning strategies. This memory is mentally organized in networks of connected ideas or relationships called schemata. **b.** Episodic Memory .This refers to our memory of personal experiences , a mental movie of things we have seen or heard(Slavin,1997). **c.** Procedural Memory .It is the ability to recall how to do something, especially a physical task. For the purpose of this study, language learning strategies deal with English writing problems according to the three above mentioned areas .

Thus, this study adopts the CALLA(Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach) model which deals with teaching (25) language learning strategies included in the aforementioned questionnaire incorporated into schemata according to the results of this study . (Chamot &O'Malley, 1994) worked on a project called Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA). This approach is an instructional model designed to increase the achievement of English language learners (ELL) .It is based on cognitive learning theory, and it integrates content area instruction with language development activities .CALLA principal objectives are to assist students in valuing their own prior knowledge and cultural experiences ,and relating this knowledge to academic learning in a new language and culture. This model has five instruction phases as a generalized lesson plan as explained below (Chamot and O'Malley ,1994: 43-44):

1.Preparation :Students prepare for strategies instruction by identifying their prior knowledge about and the use of specific strategies .e.g : Setting goals and objectives , identifying the purpose of a language tasks ,over- viewing and linking with already known materials .

2.Presentation :The teacher demonstrates the new learning strategy and explains how and when to use it. e.g: Explaining the importance of the strategy , asking students when they use the strategy .

3.Practice :Students practice using the strategy with regular class activities .e.g: Asking questions , cooperation with others, seeking practice opportunities.

4.Evaluation :Students self – evaluate their use of the learning strategy and how well the strategy is working for them .e.g: Self – evaluating their learning .

5.Expansion :Students extend the usefulness of the learning strategy by applying it to new situations or learning for them .e.g: Arranging and planning their learning .CALLA is valuable for these four reasons:

1.The linkage between language and content skills using the CALLA model is fruitful .

2.The structured nature of the CALLA lesson plan helps teachers to include the right elements, such as, learning strategy , language development , content skills ,and ways to assess all these elements .

3.The model suggests cooperation between language teachers and mainstream content area teachers . While this kind of cooperation is often logistically difficult , it is truly necessary if limited English– proficient learners are to get the best education possible.

4.The CALLA model awakens teachers and learners to the possibilities of using learning strategies for both language development and content area skill development. Accordingly, This model can be used in the language learning strategy training dealing with the suggested strategy questionnaire incorporated with English language methodology course and schemata exploited in English writing lessons at 4th preparatory school students.

O'Malley , Chamot's (1990)& Oxford (1990) Classification of LLS

These strategies help students in the stages of planning ,writing ,and editing, in order to enable them to infer meaning by making links between the written message and various types of prior knowledge to enhance (background knowledge) .In addition , these strategies can be used in the proposed program to overcome many English writing problems.

Strategies	Techniques	Description
Meta-Cognitive	1.Organizing	Before starting to write or while writing make decisions about the content organization of my composition and the linguistic expressions and how I should do about them.
	2.Directed& Selective Attention	I pay attention to the writing activities without being interfered ; paying attention to aspects such as thesis statement ,topic and supporting details in writing my composition.
	3.Seekig Practice Opportunities	I seek opportunities for practice new language writing such as , writing frequently for other people (e-mails, letters , chat ,and others).
	4.Self-Monitoring	I check my writing for spelling and rammatical errors and correcting them
	5. Self- Evaluation	compare my writing with the writing of more proficient language users to examine my progress of writing the new language.
	6.Repeating	rewrite or write the same composition several times in order to correct or amend it.
	7. Note – Taking/ making	I write down the main idea , important points out line or summary of information presented orally or in writing.
	8.Using Resources for Receiving and Sending Messages	use resources to find out the meaning of what is heard or read in the new language to produce message to improve writing.

Cognitive	9.Grouping	group and classify words , terminology or concepts according to their semantic or syntactic attributes.
	10. Transfer	I use background knowledge to understand a received message in the target language .
	11.Inferencing	I predict based on prior knowledge.
	12.Translation	I use the first language as based for understanding and/ or producing the second language .
	13.Recombination	use known vocabulary and structure to compose new spoken or written message
	14.Imagery	I relate new information to visual concepts in memory in familiar ,easily retrievable, visualizations, phrases or locations
	15 .Using Key Words	I remember a new words by using auditory and visual links and other memory strategies.
	16.Contextualization	guess / deduce the meaning and use of unfamiliar lexical items through contextual clues in my writing.
	17.Elaboration..	I relate new information to other concepts in memory in order to improve my writing.
	18.Summarizing	make a summary or abstract of a longer passage to structure input and simplified what I want to write.
Social/ affective	19Using Music	listen to music before stepping into the new language writing I listen to music before stepping into the new language writing activities.
	20.Making Positive Statements	I motivate myself to keep writing by saying“ I enjoy writing in the new language”.”You can do it”.
	21.Rewarding Yourself	reward myself when I am given a good grade in a composition , such as having a good meal , going out shopping.

	2. Asking for correction	seek assistance when I have linguistic problems that I cannot solve or I ask another person to revise my composition
	23. Cooperating with peers	give my writing to a friend or someone who is good at writing so that I have an opinion about my writing .
	4. Developing Cultural Understanding	I develop my cultural understanding toward the new language for achieving proficiency in my writing.
	5. Becoming Aware of Others' Thoughts and Feeling	I become aware of fluctuations in the thoughts and feelings of particular people who use the new language so that I can understand them more clearly during communication.

تحديد الصعوبات التي تواجه طلبة المرحلة الإعدادية أثناء كتابتهم الإنشاء باللغة الانكليزية وإيجاد الحلول لهذه الصعوبات من خلال تطبيق برنامج نظرية التخطيط العقلي

بحث تقدمت به

المدرس المساعد أنفال طه ياسين

المستخلص

تعد الكتابة في اللغة الانكليزية واحدة من العوامل المهمة في نجاح تعلم اللغة الانكليزية لغة أجنبية . يواجه الطلبة العراقيين في المرحلة الإعدادية صعوبات في استخدام الخزين الوافر من المفردات والقواعد اللغوية في كتابة الإنشاء (برهان ، 2013) و عليه أن الدراسة الحالية تهدف إلى التحقق من معرفة الصعوبات التي تواجه الطلبة العراقيين في المرحلة الإعدادية في كتابة نص إنشائي باللغة الانكليزية وتجريب طرق جديدة مقترحة في التدريس وهي تطبيق برنامج نظرية التخطيط العقلي واستراتيجيات التعلم في الكتابة تمكن الطلبة من إتقان مهارة الكتابة والتغلب على الصعوبات وبشكل خاص كتابة نص إنشائي. تضم الدراسة عينة (600) طالبا وطالبة من الفرع العلمي (159 طالب و 157 طالبة) والأدبي (145 طالب و 139 طالبة) تم اختيارها عشوائيا من المرحلة الرابعة في ثمان مدارس من المرحلة الإعدادية خلال السنة الدراسية (2014-2015) التابعة للمديرية العامة لتربية بغداد الرصافة الأولى. لتحقيق أهداف الدراسة واختبار فرضياتها تبنت الباحثة استبانته من ست فقرات تشمل أسئلة لمعرفة الصعوبات في الكتابة وقد تم عرض هذه الأداة والمقترح على مجموعة من الأساتذة المختصين لغرض إثبات الصدق الظاهري . لقد أظهرت النتائج ضعف العام لدى طلبة المرحلة الرابعة في كتابة الإنشاء والسبب في ذلك الضعف في استخدام طرائق التدريس و فقدان المتعة في الكتابة والضعف في المفردات والنحو والية الكتابة والناحية الثقافية . و عليه اقترحت الباحثة للتغلب على هذه الصعوبات عن طريق تطوير المخططات العقلية الثلاثة المحتوى واللغوية والمنهجية من خلال التدريب على استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة وفي ضوء النتائج وضعت عدد من التوصيات والاقتراحات لأجراء دراسات مستقبلية .

كلمات رئيسية: الكتابة - الإنشاء- مشاكل الكتابة- نظرية التخطيط العقلي .

أنفال طه ياسين : م. مساعد / ماجستير طرائق تدريس اللغة الانكليزية /كلية التربية / ابن رشد / جامعة بغداد / قسم العلوم التربوية والنفسية/ مدرسة مادة اللغة الانكليزية في المديرية العامة لتربية بغداد/ الرصافة الأولى . ولديها عدد من البحوث في مجال طرائق التدريس.

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