Teaching and Assessing Writing Strategies for Secondary School Students and Investigating Teachers' and Students' Attitudes towards Writing Practice

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ABSTRACT This study aimed at investigating teaching and learning strategies followed by teachers of English and secondary school students in Tafila Directorate of Education concerning writing practice inside the classroom. It also aimed at identifying English language teachers' and students' attitudes towards teaching and learning writing and finding out the problems which face the secondary students when they start writing composition. From my own observation as a supervisor of English language for almost ten years in the Ministry of Education, I noticed that students in general, and secondary school students in particular find it difficult to write in English. They say they do not find reasonable ideas in English, and even if they find ideas, they fail to elaborate them into correct English. So, the impact is that they hate to write in English and, maybe, they start to form a kind of negative attitudes towards writing in English. The subject of the study consisted of all EFL teachers who teach secondary school students (first and secondary stages) in Tafila Directorate of Education with a total number of 45 teachers, and all secondary school students with a total number of 350 students. The sample of the study consisted of 10 teachers (5 males and 5 females) and 30 students (15 males and 15 females) chosen randomly to fit the purpose of the study. The instruments of the study were two questionnaires developed by the knowledge of the researcher to collect the data regarding strategies and techniques used by the teachers and students when presenting writing: one for the teachers and the other for the students. Teachers were asked to evaluate the students written tasks. The collected data was analyzed and discussed and findings were figured out as shown in the tables enclosed with this study. Recommendations were also drawn out at the end of the study.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Writing is one of the four main skills that teachers often neglected. Most of the them feel that Jordanian students are wreakers in writing than in other skills, and that more practice is crucially needed than is found by simply following the required course book (Al-qomoul 2007). They have to begin to think about some of the reasons why students find it difficult to write in English. However, a picture or a plan can be a useful stimulus for writing tasks. It provides a common experience for the whole class, and is a basis from which a variety of language activities of different levels can be generated (Al-qomoul 2007).

Almost all English language teachers whom I supervised expressed their deep concern with the low level of achievement of their students at the writing skill. When asking them a question like: What is the percentage of your students who can write legibly? Some teachers put it at 5%, others at 10%. Those who teach the scientific streams put it at 25% at the very best. Even very clever students when asked about their ab-

ility to write in English complained that they didn't do very well. Mukattash (1982) stated that the overwhelming majority of Jordanian students cannot construct a simple sentence without making basic errors. Karala (1986) complained that the written performance of Jordanian students showed a high percentage of errors.

Writing is an integrative skill and an important, constructive, and a complex process. It is an essential skill in foreign language learning in order to give the learners the opportunity to develop the proficiency they need to write personal letters, essays, research papers and journals. In addition, writing skills enhance cognitive and linguistic awareness (Abu-Jalil 2001).

Writers often use the writing process in different ways. The writing process is influenced by the purpose of writing, the intended audience and the selected format (e.g. letter, report, journal entry). The five activities that comprise the writing process are prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. These steps are more complex. Rather than being linear, the writing process is extremely recursive as writers go back and forth among the different steps of the process. In other words, any activity can turn up at any moment in the writing process and that any

activity can precede or follow any another (Ferris 2005).

In view of the importance of writing and the significance of correction and grading as a mean of reinforcement, this study has been conducted. The main purposes of this study is the following: (a) to investigate the strategies and techniques adopted by English language teachers in Tafila Directorate of Education in teaching writing; (b) to identify English language teachers' and their students' attitudes towards teaching and learning writing; and (c) to find out what problems face our students in learning to write. This, I think will help us think of more suitable strategies and more effective techniques that will satisfy more fully the needs and raise more appropriately the interests of our students. Moreover, this will help English language teachers and students gain even much deeper insights into the teaching and learning processes.

Ministry of Education puts great emphasis on teaching English at schools in Jordan. It is stated very clearly in teacher's books in the secondary cycle that English is a necessary tool for the country's economic, educational technological development. According to the Official Ministry of Education Syllabus of English language, the student's needs should be satisfied judiciously. Among these needs are the ability to communicate orally, to read analytically and to write coherently in English. Thus we can see that writing has been granted much respect and emphasis. This is because its relevance and value in both the academic and vocational fields (MOE 2002).

This due emphasis on the writing skill came as a result of a recent approach to language teaching which views language as a form of human communication. This approach has been supported by a good number of educationists and methodologists. Byrne (1982: 7) claims that writing serves a number of pedagogical purposes:

1. The introduction and practice of some form of writing enable us to provide for different learning styles and needs. Some learners, especially those who do not learn easily through oral practice, feel secure if they are allowed to read and write in the language.
2. Written work serves to provide the learners with some tangible evidence that they are making progress in the language.
3. Exposure to the foreign language through more than one medium is likely to be more effective than relying on a single medium alone.
4. Writing is often needed for formal and informal testing.

McDonough (2003: 41) also assured:

"Only if we adopt as our purpose and our students' purpose that they will learn more if they write well we find ourselves with purpose that can truly encompass all our curriculum plans and all our students' needs."

The Problem

The main aim of most English courses is to teach the students how to speak, and it is often assumed that when they can speak, they will then naturally be able to write. But writing is not simply speech written down on a paper. If this were so, then all people would automatically be able to write their own language. In fact many adult native speakers find writing difficult.

Purpose of the Study

In the past, research into the process of writing has dealt mainly with the product, that is, learners writing samples were chosen to determine the writers language competence and proficiency development. However, a shift in the study orientation has emerged with some researches now taking a closer look at the way learners adopt techniques and procedures to produce written works (Leki 1995). Observing how learners carry out the act of writing provides EFL instructors as well as researchers with insights about the difficulties FL learners encounter.

This study explores the learning strategies and writing processes that EFL teachers and learners use when carrying out a writing task in Tafila Directorate of Education. It is an attempt to increase our understanding of the writing process of EFL learners through the technique of creativity.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the present study lies in its attempt to shed the light on the teaching and learning strategies EFL teachers and learners utilize when producing an extended piece of writing. Its implications may help instructors and their students benefit from the findings of the study. The researcher, also, hopes to open an

avenue in this research area due to its importance to EFL specialists in Jordan and may be in other parts of the world.

Limitation of the Study

The following factors may limit the generalization of the results of the present study:
- the study is restricted to the EFL teachers who teach secondary school students at the public sector in Tafila Directorate of Education.
- the questionnaires employed in this study were developed by the researcher himself.
- the impact of the gender is excluded in the present study.

Literature Review

In this part of the study, I will revise some of the previous views, ideas and studies which, I think, tackled the process of writing in general and shed some of the light on teaching and learning writing strategies.

Al-Mashour (2003) explained that foreign language learners, most of the time, find writing as a difficult and exhausting process. Such learners may have a limited scope of vocabulary, may suffer from the inability to write coherent and cohesive texts, and may be unable to spell words and use grammatical structure correctly. Such problems lead the students to claim that they have the ideas but they do not have the ability or the skill to express them in the target language.

Myles (2002: 5-9) indicated that students' writing in a second language is faced with social and cognitive challenges related to second language acquisition. Learners may continue to exhibit errors in their writing for the following social reasons: negative attitudes toward the target language, continued lack of progress in the L2, a wide social and psychological distance between them and the target culture, and a lack of integrative and instrumental motivation for learning.

Most research in SL (Second language) writing focuses on the teaching of writing rather than on the SL learners' experiences in the process of writing. Zamel (1983), for example, presumes that good writing strategies obtained from good writers should be taught to less proficient or inexperienced writers to help them understand and focus less on the requirements of the assignment. However, the use of various strategies in writing

is affected by many variables such as gender, attitudes, motivation, cognitive style, self-confidence and the teacher's behavior.

Some examples of studies which were conducted by researchers in order to investigate the role of teaching and learning strategies in writing are as follows: Chamot and Kupper (1990) investigated English learners of Spanish about each of four domains and concluded that successful teachers and interested learners chose different strategies depending on a domain. For example, in writing, successful learners used more metacognitive strategies (e.g. planning) and cognitive strategies (e.g. substitution and elaboration). I think, it is understandable because writing needs more metacognitive strategies (e.g. reviewing, planning), whereas, reading, for example, needs more cognitive strategies (e.g. retrieving).

As for writing strategy studies, researchers have used different methods to access strategy use of L2 (Language) writers. Qualitative methods, such as think-aloud protocols or observation, were often used. Khaldieh (2000) observed American students learning journals in his Arabic classes for two years. He classified their strategies into two categories: prewriting and writing implementation. However, he considered the lack of linguistic proficiency to be the cause of improvement in writing.

Cummings (1990) studied writing strategies in a different perspective. In his study, French learners of English performed think-aloud protocols with three different writing tasks. His focus was on how L1 writing expertise and L2 writing skills were related. Cummings proposed that being a good writer in L1 is an indicator of being good writer in L2. So, he recommended that in a writing class teacher should provide different practice depending on L1 expertise.

Leki (1995) studied L2 writing in a different way as he interviewed five international students about writing strategies and time management strategies. Most of the strategies that he mentioned were not on-line strategies, but it worth noting that the learners relied largely on past writing experiences-training and L1 culture when it came to information that they needed for writing.

Kharma (1985) indicated that English as a Foreign Language students attempting to write a proper English discourse failed to organize a passage, use the devices (punctuation, capitali-

zation, indentation, paragraphing) normally, develop coherence, unity, and topicalization, use methods of development and develop a whole theme in several paragraphs of expository prose.

Silva (1993) argued that L2 composing processes are more constrained, more difficult, and less effective. L2 writers planned less and had difficulty in organizing material. Their transcribing was less fluent and less productive. They reviewed and reflected on their texts less, and they revised more – but with difficulty and less intuition. Second language texts were less fluent (few words), less accurate (more errors), and less effective. At the discourse level, their sentences included more coordination, less passivization, distinct patterns in the use of cohesive devices, fewer lexical ties, and less lexical control and sophistication.

A dominating belief among researchers in the composing process, which has widely, spread is based upon the fact that though the study of the composing process teachers can gain insights into how to teach it. As Hairston (1982: 84) puts it:

We cannot teach students to write by looking only at what they have written.

We must also understand how that product came into being, and why it assumed

The form that it did. We have to understand what goes on during the act of writing

…. If we want to affect its outcome. We have to do the hard thing, examine the intangible Process, rather than the easy thing, and evaluate the tangible product.

Sommers (1990) in her investigation of the revising strategies indicated that proficient writers' revising is an important part of composing for it leads to further writing, whereas, less-proficient writers' revising manifests itself in very local changes.

Hedge (1988) argued that writing is more of a recursive activity in which the writer moves backwards and forewords between drafting and revising, with stages of preplanning in between. Rewriting gives students the chance to think further about the content. They are able to focus on the introductory paragraph and develop ideas from the previous draft in a subsequent paragraph in the new version. They refer to all the components of the process of writing as composing: students start off with an overall plan in their heads, they think about what they want to write and who they are writing for then, they draft out sections of the writing and they work on them;

and they constantly review, revise and edit their work.

Lapp (cited in Richards 1990) indicated that skilled writers spend time planning the task while unskilled writers spend little time planning the task and, in consequence, are confused when they begin. At the drafting stage, skilled writers write quickly and fluently, spend time reviewing what they write, and do most of their reviewing at the sentence or paragraph level. Unskilled writers spend little time reviewing what they have written, reviewing only short segments of the text, and are concerned principally with vocabulary and sentence formation. Finally, at the revision stage, skilled writers revise at all levels of lexis, sentence and discourse, review and revise through out the composing process, and use revisions to clarify meaning; on the other hand, unskilled writers do not make major revisions in the direction or the focus of the text, make most revisions on during the first draft and focus mainly on the mechanics of grammar, spelling , punctuation and vocabulary.

Hedge (1999) assumed that writing is essentially a creative process which involves students in a learning process, motivates, builds their confidence, gives them an opportunity to explore the language, to communicate and to look for the best ways of self-expression. The teacher's role in this process in undoubtedly very important: The teacher's role is to provide an environment in which students will learn about writing, see models of good writing, get plenty of practice in writing, and receive help during the writing process. The teacher, being a facilitator, helper, motivator, consultant, prompter, advisor and only then assessor, should help learners by organizing writing as a series of stages. First of all, students need to feel the necessity of writing. « Why should I write? What's the point of writing? » - these are common complaints of pupils. And it is up to the teacher to bring real- world atmosphere in the classroom. Nowadays, it is not difficult to do, due to travel experiences, student exchange programs, internet opportunities and so on.

Ur (2002) assured that the writing process is the starting point for developing students' writing abilities, teachers must recognize that students need a range of writing experiences to develop as writers: *"You learn to write through writing. … One of our main tasks then, as teachers, is to get our students to write a lot, thinking,*

as they do so and learning from their own writing experience." (Ur 2002, p.169). In addition, in order to become good at writing, learners need concentration, instruction, practice, and patience. The teacher's task is to assist her learners to gain control over the written word. How to do this? Douglas Brown provides guidelines for developing learners' writing techniques. The teacher, when giving the learners a writing task, should always consider various techniques for maintaining efficient writing practice. These include: balance process and product, take account of the learners' cultural/literary background, connect reading and writing, provide as much authentic writing as possible, frame lesson plans in terms of including prewriting, drafting, and revising stages, offer techniques that are as interactive as possible and sensitively apply methods of responding to, and correcting the learners´ writing. Furthermore, the teacher should bear in mind what good writers do and encourage the learners to do the same: focus on a goal or main idea when writing, perceptively gauge their audience, spend some time planning to write, easily let their first ideas flow onto the paper, follow a general organizational plan as they write, solicit and utilize feedback on their writing, revise their work willingly and efficiently and patiently make as many revisions as needed (2001: pp. 346-355).

Powell (2004) indicated that educators have explored various factors which may contribute to success or lack of success in writing for example, on campus with a large number of minority students, it is often concluded that widespread inefficiency in writing results because these students come from homes and environments where language versatility has not been practiced In addition, it is assumed that students in these universities and others have attended elementary and secondary schools where teachers have not provided enough opportunities for individuals to learn the art of composing. This study was designed to explore still another factor – attitude which until recent times, was seldom mentioned as an issue in writing success but which is probably of far greater significance than many persons have surmised.

Gloria (2008) stated that she has a preconception attitude towards writing, she feels that writing is incredibly vital to the society. Now that we have all of this technology, writing is being over looked, and she thinks that she sometimes takes her writing skills for granted. If truth be told, there was a time where our ancestors were neither allowed to read nor able to write. So, she feels that she has to write because it is part of her rights and no one can take that from her. However, the reason why she is abhorrent against writing is that, she does not like it when teachers give bad topics to students to write about. She thinks, if you are going to take that job title on or give an assignment it needs to be something that they would want to write about, all she is asking as a student is that for a minute they take the time out to get into a mind set of a student and think about when they were at school and had to write about some of the wall topics. It would be better if they would just not throw a topic on the board, they have to be creative with their assignments and their job duties.

Pacquette (2008) conducted a study which aimed to survey the students' attitudes about writing after a cross-age tutoring experience. The study was designed to identify whether or not the implementation of a cross-age tutoring program would have a significant impact on students' attitudes toward the subject of writing. At the end of the cross-age experience, interviews were conducted to attempt to identify aspects of the cross-age tutoring program which students like and/or dislike. Students' attitudes toward writing were researched because of how students perceive themselves as writers influences their writing performance.

Nordquist (2009) argued that whatever your attitude may be, one thing is certain: how you feel about writing both affects and reflects how well you can write. Certainly you can change your attitude—and you will, as you gain more experience as a writer. In the meantime, here are a few points to think about: You get the point. As you begin working to become a better writer, you will find that your attitude toward writing improves along with the quality of your work. So enjoy! And start writing. Spend some time thinking about why *you* would like to improve your writing skills: how you might benefit, personally and professionally, by becoming a more confident and competent writer. Then, on a sheet of paper or at your computer, explain *to yourself* why and how you plan to achieve the goal of becoming a better writer.

Yoon (2004) conducted a study which describes the corpus use in two ESL academic writing courses. Specifically, the study examined

students' corpus use behavior and their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of corpora as a second language writing tool. The study's qualitative and quantitative data indicate that, overall, the students perceived the corpus approach as beneficial to the development of L2 writing skill and increased confidence toward L2 writing.

Thus, from this review of related literature, we can see that the field of teaching-learning strategies is a wide field that has many explorations which need to be made. In addition, many ambiguities and problems in the field of teaching-learning strategies need to be given intensive exploration for a better understanding of FL learners' strategies.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The population of this study consists of all teachers who teach English at the secondary school students (first and secondary stages) in Tafila Directorate of Education with a total number of 45 teachers, and all secondary school students with a total number of 350 students. The sample of the study consisted of 10 teachers (5 males and 5 females) and 30 students (15 males and 15 females) chosen randomly to fit the purpose of the study. However, only 16 students were asked to participate, they wrote 16 different topics in various subjects. The teachers were asked to correct and assess the students' works, that is, each composition was corrected ten times by ten different teachers to see if the teachers followed the same correction criteria or not. Eighty percent of those teachers had at least five years experience of teaching English.

Two questionnaires were developed to collect data concerning strategies and techniques followed by teachers when teaching writing and students when learning how to write – one for the teachers and the other for the students. Another questionnaire was also developed which contained items which revealed teachers' and students' attitudes towards teaching and learning writing. Teachers were also asked to identify the problems that face the students when they practice writing and to what extent.

It is worth mentioning, that the study neglects gender and that may be considered as a remarkable factor which affects much on the results and findings of the study. The educational private sector is also excluded in this study. However, the researcher hopes that the selected sample to be a reasonable example which reflects the real situation in the educational public sector in Jordan and may be in most of the Arab world as well.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teaching and Learning Strategies

The questionnaires contain a considerable number of items covering most of the possible strategies and techniques that educationists in concern suggest for teachers to adopt in teaching writing. The main objective behind collecting teachers' and learners' responses to these items is to discover what are the strategies that teachers are really utilized inside the classroom and to what extent. Do they follow those suggested in the teacher's book? Or have they developed their own methodologies?

Table 1 shows that, according to teachers' responses, 90% of teachers derive topics for writing assignments from the previously taught material. However, only 37% of students advocate the above claim. While 77% of teachers claim that their students take part in selecting the topics to write on, only 28% of students agree with them. With regard to the use of pair work, 52% of teachers confirm that they are usually applying this technique. Almost one-fourth (24%) of students assure that, as far as group work is concerned, 42% of teachers support it in their writing classes. A very high percentage of students (85%) refute this argument. While all teachers emphasize that they define the objectives behind writing and discuss them with the students, only 40% of students certify this claim. Regarding students involvement, 96% of teachers state that they brainstorm the students to elicit relevant ideas that will make writing easier for them.

A very high percentage of teachers (98%) confirm that they provide ideas, information and vocabulary items needed by the students to practice writing. However, only 45% of students share with them this idea. While 90% of teachers believe that writing is meant mainly for teaching and not for testing, almost one-third (32%) of students agree with them. Finally, 90% of teachers claim that they create supportive atmo-

Table 1: Teachers' and students' responses towards teaching and learning strategies (1 always, 2 usually, 3 sometimes, 4 rarely, 5 never)

S.No.	Items	Students					Teachers				
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
1	T. derives topics from previously taught material	20	17	28	13	22	46	44	10	-	-
2	Ss. Take part in choosing subjects to write on	11	17	20	28	44	22	55	23	-	-
3	T. uses pair work to teach writing	9	15	20	17	39	18	34	36	12	-
4	T. uses group work to teach writing	-	1	4	10	85	22	20	40	18	-
5	T. identifies the objectives of the writing tasks	40	20	11	20	9	76	24	-	-	-
6	T. emphasizes accuracy of the language	45	20	17	11	7	80	18	-	2	-
7	T. draws attention to the use of linking words	29	18	13	7	22	86	10	4	-	-
8	T. highlights cohesion and coherence	25	28	19	24	4	68	38	4	-	-
9	T. focuses on shape and paragraphing	40	30	21	4	4	28	54	18	-	-
10	T. draws attention to punctuation	43	14	14	10	19	40	38	22	-	-
11	T. probes students to elicit relevant ideas	25	22	16	18	18	60	36	4	-	-
12	T. provides students with ideas and vocabulary needed for writing	28	17	28	17	10	60	38	2	-	-
13	T. allocates enough time for students to write	33	25	20	18	4	60	34	6	-	-
14	The writing task is meant for teaching and not for testing	16	16	19	26	23	50	40	10	-	-
15	T. gives directions to students at every step	8	19	27	19	27	38	50	10	2	-
16	T. creates supportive atmosphere to encourage students to write	14	13	29	24	20	46	46	6	2	-
17	T. emphasizes fluency rather than accuracy	4	8	11	18	59	4	26	38	10	22
18	T. introduces teaching aids to help students to write	-	3	22	21	44	8	40	30	20	2
19	T. presents a model of writing for students to imitate	4	6	13	23	54	22	40	32	6	-
20	T. encourages students to work together to discover the topic sentence and the supporting sentences in a paragraph	7	13	11	20	49	24	28	40	8	-

sphere in their classes to make writing lessons more interesting. Only 27% of students do assure that. As for teaching aids, almost two-thirds of students (65%) assure that they are rarely used. Only 8% of teachers frequently, use them. Finally, regarding presenting models for students to imitate while writing, only ten percent of students confirm this. However, 69% of teachers assure that. As you can see clearly in table 1, there is a considerable contradiction between teachers' responses and those of the students. Teachers draw a very pleasing picture of teaching writing at our schools. Unfortunately, students draw a gloomy one.

Correction Strategies

Correction and grading are very important for both teachers and learners. They show students whether they are making progress and in what aspects. They also encourage them to take things seriously and at the same time provide students with definite goals to attain. For teachers, on the other hand, they show them whether their teaching procedures are appropriate or not. They help them to discover the students' weaknesses and strengths in order to tackle them seriously.

The questionnaires distributed to both teachers and students covered many possible aspects of correction and grading. This is meant to discover what correction techniques have been in practice and to what extent they have been used. Table 2 shows that peer correction has rarely been used. Only 12% of teachers utilize this technique. Regarding grammar mistakes, 29% of students claim that their teachers neither identify nor correct them. Only 1% of teachers support this claim. While 40% of teachers state that they usually comment on the negative aspects of the students' written works, only 16% of the teachers write comments on the positive ones. As for feedback, 65% of students claim that their teachers have never provided them with. Strangely enough, none of the teachers support this claim. Only 7% of students assure that teachers display good topics on the wall magazine. Also, very few of students, 6% claim that teachers encourage students to present their good written works in front of the class. However, 80% of the teachers claim to the contrary. Table 2 also, shows that 88% of the teachers correct every single paper written by their students. Finally, more than two-thirds of teachers, 72% complain that correction poses a

Table 2: Shows percentages of teachers' and students' responses regarding correction strategies (1 always, 2 usually, 3 sometimes, 4 rarely, 5 never)

S.No.	Items	Students					Teachers				
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
1	T. corrects all syntactic errors	1	13	23	18	45	14	42	28	10	6
2	T. indicates errors but does not correct them	16	19	27	23	18	-	18	18	30	30
3	T. does not underline errors and does not correct them, either	18	11	16	31	24	1	-	1	28	70
4	T. comments on the negative aspects of the written work only	10	6	16	37	31	12	28	40	16	4
5	T. comments on the positive aspects of the written work only	2	8	25	25	38	8	8	42	28	14
6	T. corrects the content of the subject only	5	15	15	27	38	4	12	30	38	14
7	T. involves students in peer correction	-	1	1	10	85	8	24	34	22	12
8	T. provides students with feedback on their weaknesses and strengths	3	8	8	15	65	32	36	24	8	-
9	T. chooses good written works of the students for a wall magazine	4	3	12	23	58	8	22	28	28	12
10	T. encourages students who did well to read their works aloud in the class	6	11	16	24	47	48	32	18	-	2
11	T. asks students to write in their note books to monitor their progress	22	10	6	17	45	62	18	14	4	2
12	T. corrects all subjects written by students	43	13	18	13	13	56	32	12	-	-
13	Correction is a heavy burden upon teachers because of large classes	-	-	-	-	-	38	34	24	2	2

Table 3: Expose grades assign to sixteen topics by ten teachers

Teachers	Topics															
S.No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1	60	40	50	50	80	50	90	80	80	50	40	70	70	40	60	60
2	50	60	40	62	70	40	75	70	70	60	55	60	65	30	50	55
3	60	55	40	60	60	50	70	80	60	75	20	70	70	50	70	60
4	50	60	50	40	50	65	80	85	60	60	50	55	40	50	65	70
5	55	60	45	45	75	76	85	80	76	65	35	50	51	52	67	60
6	60	60	55	75	85	75	80	85	75	75	55	65	50	60	70	65
7	70	60	60	50	80	40	80	80	80	70	40	60	50	70	40	40
8	65	55	55	45	75	40	75	60	60	70	30	60	65	40	60	55
9	55	60	45	70	80	65	85	75	75	75	55	70	70	50	70	70
10	70	65	60	65	65	70	70	85	80	65	45	50	50	70	65	60

real challenge for them because of the large classes.

Whether teachers of secondary stage adopt common criteria to apply when grading students' written works? The researcher appointed sixteen students chosen from the sample of the study to write sixteen different topics. The written works of the students were photocopied ten times. Ten teachers were also appointed to correct the students' assignments and grade them. This means that each topic was corrected ten times by ten different teachers. Table 3 presents the grades assigned for each topic.

A look at Table 3 shows the big differences between teachers with regard to the marking scheme of the students' written works. A sense of subjectivity can easily be felt, for example, teacher number four graded topic number four 40 marks while teacher number six graded the same topic 75, teacher number three marked topic number eleven 20 whereas, teacher number two marked the same topic with 50. Topic number six was graded 40 by one of the teachers and 76 by another. The highly noticed differences in marks may bring success by one teacher and failure by another. A lucky student graded by one teacher may get an admission to a university, while an unlucky one may go astray.

Attitudes

Teachers' Attitudes towards Writing

This study also catered for a very crucial concept of teaching and learning process, that is, attitudes. Table 4 displays teachers' responses regarding writing significance as one major skill of English language. It illustrates teachers' attitudes towards writing. A look at the table explains clearly that teachers hold very highly positive attitudes towards the skill of writing in English language. Most teachers 90% believe that writing in English is a tough career but students should work hard to master it if they want to use the language communicatively. More than half of the students 52% expressed their preferences of learning writing to learning other language skills. Moreover, a very high percentage of teachers are totally convinced that writing is crucially needed for the students' daily life. However, 46% of teachers complain that writing lessons are dull and tiring.

Students' Attitudes towards Writing

Table 5 presents students' views regarding writing classes. It shows that students, too, hold

Table 4: Presents teachers' responses to items related to attitudes towards writing (1 agree strongly, 2 agree, 3 not sure, 4 don't agree, 5 don't agree strongly)

No.	Items	1	2	3	4	5
1	T. prefers teaching writing to other skills	6	46	18	28	2
2	Writing is an important skill for students	48	42	8	2	0
3	Ss do not need writing in everyday life	4	6	6	46	38
4	T. prefers teaching other skills to teaching writing	18	8	8	38	4
5	Writing lessons are dull and tiring	12	10	10	32	12
6	We should not specify a lesson for teaching writing	10	2	2	36	16
7	Priority should be given to teaching writing	4	12	12	56	8

Table 5: Presents students' responses to items related to their attitudes towards writing (1 agree strongly, 2 agree, 3 not sure, 4 don't agree, 5 don't agree strongly)

S.No.	Items	1	2	3	4	5
1	Writing is very difficult lesson	33	19	25	16	7
2	Writing is the least important skill	4	13	22	28	33
3	Writing improves our academic achievement	46	30	9	9	6
4	Writing strengths our critical thinking	50	32	7	5	6
5	Writing is necessary to get a good job	46	37	6	6	5
6	Writing helps in mastering other skills	44	39	5	7	5
7	Writing lessons are dull and tiring	15	13	14	26	32
8	Writing lessons are not enough	27	33	12	13	15
9	I like to write regularly	19	31	15	17	18
10	Mastery of writing brings wide respect	45	26	19	7	8

Table 6: Presents teachers' responses to items related to students' writing difficulties (1 always, 2 usually, 3 sometimes, 4 rarely, 5 never)

S.No.	Items	1	2	3	4	5
1	Ss. complain from syntax problems	56	36	8	0	0
2	Ss. can not express their ideas easily	52	44	8	0	0
3	Ss. can not link sentences together	46	40	12	2	0
4	Ss. can not provide enough relevant ideas	30	38	22	10	0
5	Ss. can not identify the topic sentence	34	34	24	6	2
6	Ss. are unable to write cohesively	32	44	22	2	0
7	Ss. have problems with punctuation	30	38	28	4	0

very highly positive attitudes towards writing. More than three- fourths of them (82%) believe that writing improves critical thinking. With regard to academic achievement, 76% of students stated that writing helps much in gaining high marks in the exams. 83% of students believe that the mastery of writing is considered to be a necessity for getting a suitable job. Moreover, writing, as 83% of students think, helps much in doing better in other schooling subjects. Still 72% of students claim that mastery of writing will gain them wide respect and good reputation among their colleagues. However, more than half of the students 52% complain that writing is one of the most difficult language skills.

Writing is Troublesome to Students

Teachers were also investigated about the problems that face the students when they start writing. Table 6 presents the teachers' responses on items related to writing difficulties. It shows, inconspicuously, that the students suffer a lot from many troubles related to language elements such as: semantics, syntax, cohesion, coherence and even to the ordinary mechanics of writing. The majority of teachers (92%) complain that the students suffer mainly from problems with syntax. Almost all teachers state that the students

encounter problems regarding their disability to express themselves properly. Moreover, 86% of the students suffer from inability to link sentences together. On the whole, table 6 proves that only few of the secondary school students can write English legibly and satisfactorily.

However, when comparing the results of this study with the results of the previous related literature, we find that it is consistent with many practical studies which were conducted before (Zamel 1983; Khrma 1985; Hedge 1990; Khaldieh 2000; Ur 2002; Al-Mashour 2003; Powell 2004; Gloria 2008; Pacquette 2008; Nordquist 2009).

CONCLUSION

The study's quantitative data indicates that teachers and students hold very highly positive attitudes towards writing in English, although the practice and product of writing at schools is rather cumbersome. This has been projected very strikingly through the percentages of teachers' and students' responses presented in the previous tables. Students' responses concerning strategies and techniques adopted by the teachers make it clear that teachers still follow traditional and outdated methods of teaching English writing. Teaching aids have been rarely employed, pair

work and group work have almost been neglected. Teachers pay more attention to accuracy on the expense of fluency. Language functions have also been ignored. A high percentage of teachers are reported to correct every simple mistake filling students' papers in red ink which may cause frustration and negative attitudes towards writing. It is crystal clear that most teachers do not consult the teacher's book which offers very detailed procedures of how to present and correct writing.

With regard to writing assessing, it seems that most teachers do not have a common analytic criteria to follow. A very high percentage (70%) of teachers grade students' written works according to previous impression they hold about them. This, I think, is the cause of the wide differences in grading the students' written works between teachers. Only few teachers promote students to write well through displaying their good works on a bulletin board. Moreover, rarely have teachers required their students to keep special file of the students' written works to monitor their progress. Feedback on the students' weaknesses and strengths has almost been forgotten. These drawbacks concerning strategies and techniques practiced at the governmental schools are accounted to some extent for the students' low achievement in the writing skill.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The statistics in the previous depicted tables carry significant implications for English language teachers, teacher trainers, and supervisors. It has clearly been proved that there are significant differences between teachers with respect to procedures of teaching and techniques of correction. Therefore, I think, the following recommendations may improve the processes of teaching and learning writing:

1. It is a matter of crucial importance for the Ministry of Education to organize training courses for teachers on more suitable, more varied and more interesting procedures for teaching writing.
2. Workshops on how to prepare teaching aids and how to put them to good use, are by no means, less important.
3. Group work and pair work should be duely emphasized.
4. Teachers should always be encouraged to consult teacher's books every now and then.

5. They should cater for the mixed-ability classes by enabling and encouraging students of abilities to work cooperatively and contribute depending on their capabilities.
6. A context should be established to balance the need for fluency and accuracy which are essential in the success of the end of the written product.
7. The language knowledge and skills should be integrated to allow students to be confident enough in their own abilities to use English in real situations in the outside world.

Finally, there seems to be a grave need for conducting workshops on various techniques of correction that would take it less challenging for teachers, especially with large classes. Teachers should adopt more objective and more analytic criteria for evaluating the students' written works.

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