An Investigation into Iraqi EFL University Students' Difficulties in Writing English Compositions

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Abstract. This research examined the challenges encountered by Iraqi EFL students in composing written texts in English. The objective was to pinpoint the particular aspects where Iraqi EFL students experience difficulties, including grammar, vocabulary, organization, and content development. A mixed-methods approach was adopted for this study, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Written compositions from a cohort of 42 Iraqi EFL university students at the College of Education, AL-Shatrah University were subjected to error analysis and thematic evaluation. Furthermore, questionnaires and interviews were administered to collect insights regarding students' views on their writing challenges and the underlying factors that contribute to these issues. The research indicates that Iraqi EFL students face various challenges, such as incorrect grammar application, restricted vocabulary, inadequate organization of their thoughts, and struggles in producing and elaborating coherent content. Additionally, the study investigated the possible reasons behind these challenges, taking into account factors like the influence of the students' first language, lack of writing practice, minimal exposure to English, and insufficient teaching of writing techniques. The findings underscore the necessity for focused interventions and teaching methods to tackle the particular writing challenges faced by Iraqi EFL students, with the goal of

enhancing their writing skills and overall communicative effectiveness.

Keywords: grammar usage, challenge, academic writing, writing composition.

الملخص. تناولت هذه الدراسة التحديات التي يواجهها طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية لغةً أجنبية (EFL)العراقيون عند كتابة النصوص باللغة الإنجليزية. وكان الهدف منها تحديد الجوانب المحددة التي يعاني فيها الطلبة من صعوبات، مثل القواعد النحوية، والمفردات، والتنظيم، وتطوير المحتوى. وقد تم اعتماد منهج البحث المختلط في هذه الدراسة، حيث جُمعت البيانات باستخدام الطريقتين الكمية والنوعية. خضعت الإنشاءات الكتابية لعينة مكونة من 42 طالبًا من طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية التربية بجامعة الشطرة لتحليل الأخطاء والتقييم الموضوعي. كما تم توزيع استبيانات وإجراء مقابلات لجمع آراء الطلبة حول الصعوبات التي يواجهونها في الكتابة والعوامل الكامنة وراء هذه التحديات. وأشارت نتائج البحث إلى أن الطلبة يواجهون صعوبات متعددة، من بينها الاستخدام غير الصحيح للقواعد، وضيق المفردات، وسوء تنظيم الأفكار، فضلًا عن صعوبة إنتاج محتوى مترابط ومفصل. كذلك، بحثت الدراسة في الأسباب المحتملة لهذه التحديات، مثل تأثير اللغة الأم، وقلة ممارسة الكتابة، وضعف التعرض للغة الإنجليزية، والنقص في تعليم مهارات الكتابة بشكل كافٍ. وتؤكد النتائج على الحاجة إلى تدخلات موجهة وأساليب تدريس فعّالة لمعالجة التحديات الكتابية التي يواجهها طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية العراقيون، بهدف تطوير مهاراتهم الكتابية وتحسين كفاءتهم التواصلية العامة.

Introduction

For Iraqi students learning English as a foreign language, achieving proficiency in English composition poses a considerable obstacle that adversely affects their academic success and future prospects. Despite the introduction of English instruction at the primary education level, numerous students find it challenging to create written work that is coherent, grammatically correct, and well-structured. This struggle can be attributed to various factors, such as the influence of Arabic grammatical frameworks, insufficient exposure to genuine English literature, and a possible

misalignment between teaching methods and the learning preferences of students. To effectively tackle these challenges, it is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of the unique difficulties encountered by Iraqi EFL learners in the realm of writing.

The challenges faced by Iraqi learners in mastering English writing are significantly influenced by their cultural and educational backgrounds. The traditional focus on rote learning and grammar-translation techniques prevalent in Iraqi educational institutions may fall short in promoting the critical thinking and creative skills essential for proficient writing (Al-Khafaji, 2018). Additionally, the disparities in rhetorical norms between Arabic and English can result in difficulties related to structure, argumentation, and stylistic choices (Mohammed, 2016). Moreover, the scarcity of resources and opportunities for writing practice beyond the classroom can impede students' development (Ali & Abdal, 2019).

Examining the particular challenges encountered by Iraqi EFL students in English composition is essential for creating focused interventions and educational strategies. A thorough analysis of prevalent errors, along with an exploration of their root causes and the students' perspectives and motivations regarding writing, can guide the development of more effective writing curricula and teacher training initiatives. By recognizing the linguistic, cultural, and educational influences involved, educators can enable Iraqi EFL students to surmount their difficulties and cultivate the requisite writing skills for success in both academic and professional contexts (Salih, 2020; Yaseen & Shakir, 2015).

Iraqi students learning English as a foreign language frequently encounter considerable obstacles when tasked with writing English compositions. These challenges arise from various factors, including insufficient exposure to genuine English language contexts, an overreliance on rote learning techniques, and the influence of Arabic linguistic structures and writing norms (Al-Khafaji, 2017). The difficulties experienced are the result of a multifaceted interaction of elements, such as the disparities between the rhetorical frameworks of Arabic and English, limited familiarity with authentic English writing, inadequate command of vocabulary and grammar, and a deficiency in effective writing strategies. This study seeks to pinpoint the specific aspects in which Iraqi EFL learners face the greatest difficulties in English composition and to investigate the root causes that contribute to these challenges.

The purposes of the present study were:

-To identify the specific difficulties Iraqi EFL students face when writing English compositions.

- Assessing the effects of teachers' feedback on improving the Iraqi EFL students' writing composition quality.

In this regard, the following research questions and hypotheses were formulated:

Research Question 1: What are the most prevalent challenges faced by Iraqi EFL students in their English composition writing?

Research Question 2: Does providing feedback improve Iraqi EFL learners' writing composition quality?

The following null hypothesis was formulated based on the above mentioned research question.

H0: Teachers' feedback does not have any significant effect on Iraqi EFL learners' writing composition quality.

This research presents important implications for the enhancement of English language teaching in Iraq. By pinpointing the particular challenges encountered by Iraqi EFL students in their English writing, educators can customize their instructional strategies and curricula to directly tackle these issues. The results can guide the creation of focused writing interventions and resources, thereby improving students' writing skills, boosting their academic success, and equipping them for future academic and professional opportunities where proficient English communication is essential. Additionally, gaining insight into these challenges will enrich the understanding of the distinct linguistic and cultural elements that affect EFL writing development in the Iraqi context.

Literature Review

Writing is the most important ability in learning a foreign language. It includes some sub-skills, such as handwriting, spelling, and composition. Students must arrange their thoughts correctly to produce any written work. Since there is no direct communication between writers and readers, writing can be seen as a crucial talent that requires greater clarity. According to Tuan (2010), writing is a skill in which the more students practice, the better they write. However Abbas & Al-bakri, (2018) have stated that "Communication via English, whether oral or written, has become essential in the modern everyday life. As a productive mode of English as a foreign language in which students' language knowledge is effectively reinforced, writing represents a significant set of skills through which language learning and communication

can be achieved" . As proposed by Pangaribuan & Manik (2018), writing is defined as a means that students use to convey their ideas, thoughts, opinions, and experience. Also, they acknowledge that writing can be altered by several elements such as grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, recognition, and spelling. McDonough et.al, (2013) have described writing as a way to practice one's language skills because authors use it to express their ideas and opinions. Personal writing, public writing, creative writing, social writing, study writing, institutional writing, and suggested levels are the six categories into which they divide writing.

Iraqi EFL students frequently encounter significant obstacles in their English composition writing, which arise from a combination of linguistic, educational, and contextual influences. Numerous studies indicate persistent challenges related to grammar, vocabulary, structure, and overall coherence. Al-Khafaji (2014) identified that Iraqi learners often have difficulty constructing grammatically correct sentences, frequently making mistakes in areas such as tense, subject-verb agreement, and the use of articles. In a similar vein, Hussein and Al-Mahmood (2017) pointed out the restricted vocabulary of these students, which limits their capacity to articulate complex ideas and subtle meanings in their written work. Consequently, these challenges often lead to compositions that lack fluency and clarity, thereby diminishing the overall effectiveness of their communication.

In addition to linguistic challenges, the teaching methodologies utilized in Iraqi EFL classrooms may exacerbate writing difficulties. Conventional pedagogical practices frequently prioritize memorization and isolated grammar instruction, neglecting a more process-oriented approach to writing development. Al-Jarf (2009) has pointed out the detrimental effects of an overemphasis on teacher-centered instruction, which restricts students' chances to engage actively in the processes of drafting, revising, and obtaining feedback. Moreover, insufficient exposure to authentic English texts and writing exemplars impedes students' capacity to grasp genre conventions and organizational structures prevalent in English academic writing (Alsamadani, 2010).

Contextual elements, particularly the impact of Arabic as the first language of the students, significantly contribute to the writing process. The rhetorical frameworks and grammatical characteristics of Arabic differ markedly from those of English. Such linguistic differences can create obstacles in the transition of writing competencies from Arabic to English. Research conducted by Aziz and Hussein (2015) examined how Arabic rhetorical conventions

affected Iraqi students' English writing. Their findings indicated that students frequently applied organizational strategies unique to Arabic, which were unsuitable for English writing conventions. This adverse transfer often results in difficulties with the formulation of topic sentences, the coherence of paragraphs, and the overall structure of arguments.

Addressing these complex challenges necessitates a comprehensive approach that takes into account both language proficiency and innovative teaching methods. Future investigations should focus on identifying effective techniques to reconcile the differences between Arabic and English writing conventions, encourage learner independence in the writing process, and incorporate authentic materials to enrich students' vocabulary and rhetorical understanding. Additionally, teacher training initiatives must prepare educators with the essential competencies to implement process-oriented writing instruction and deliver constructive feedback that promotes student development and confidence in their writing skills (Salih & Hussein, 2019). Ultimately, enhancing the writing abilities of Iraqi EFL students is vital for their academic achievements and future career prospects (Ahmed, 2012).

Research consistently underscores the difficulties encountered by EFL students in crafting English compositions, with Iraqi EFL learners being no exception. These challenges arise from a multifaceted interaction of factors, such as linguistic interference, insufficient exposure to English rhetorical norms, and teaching methodologies that frequently emphasize grammar at the expense of communicative proficiency. Investigations reveal that ongoing issues with grammar, vocabulary selection, and sentence construction serve as considerable barriers to proficient writing. Additionally, numerous students find it challenging to arrange their ideas logically and to formulate coherent arguments in English, which impedes their capacity to create well-organized and compelling compositions.

Numerous international studies corroborate these challenges. For example, Raimes (1983) highlighted the cognitive burdens faced by EFL writers, especially when they attempt to convert their thought processes from their first language. In a similar vein, Silva (1993) contended that EFL writers frequently carry over rhetorical structures and organizational styles from their native language, which may not align with the conventions of English academic writing. Research conducted in comparable EFL environments, such as the studies by Al-Khasawneh (2010) in Jordan and Abu Rass (2002) in Palestine, supports these conclusions, illustrating that linguistic transfer and insufficient

familiarity with English writing norms considerably hinder writing proficiency.

Recent studies emphasize the critical need to consider cultural and contextual elements in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction. Research conducted by Ferris (2003) and Hyland (2003) has demonstrated how students' cultural backgrounds significantly shape their understanding of plagiarism and the proper use of sources in academic writing. Additionally, the educational environment in Iraq, which frequently relies on teacher-centered methodologies and offers few chances for genuine writing practice, may further complicate these challenges.

A thorough examination of the writing challenges faced by Iraqi EFL students necessitates an analysis of the interconnected linguistic, cognitive, cultural, and pedagogical elements. Subsequent research should aim to pinpoint particular error trends, assess the efficacy of various writing instruction strategies adapted to the Iraqi educational environment, and evaluate how cultural backgrounds influence students' writing practices. Tackling these issues demands a comprehensive strategy that enhances communicative competence, nurtures critical thinking abilities, and recognizes the importance of cultural awareness in EFL writing education. Grasping these local nuances is essential for enhancing writing performance among Iraqi EFL learners.

Methodology

This research examines the challenges Al- Shatrah University student Department of English first-year face in learning English as a foreign language in their composition writing. Utilizing a mixed-methods framework, the study primarily emphasizes quantitative data while also incorporating qualitative perspectives. A sample of 42 undergraduate students from English language programs at the College of Education, AL-Shatrah University was involved in the research. Participants were selected through convenience sampling, which allowed for representation across various academic levels within the English department, thereby reflecting a wide range of writing skills and obstacles. To investigate the effects of applying process writing activities to help the students overcome their writing difficulties, they were divided randomly to two groups of experimental (n=21) and control (n=21). The objective of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the particular aspects in which the students experienced difficulties and to uncover the root causes of these challenges. In this regard, the experimental group received process writing training and

activities designed by their teacher. However, the control group received the traditional training such as writing to their teachers and being evaluated by their teacher. The control group did not receive the process based support and feedback that the experimental group received.

The main research tools employed in this study included a diagnostic writing assessment which was considered as the pre-test of the study and the students' final written production after experiencing the process writing activities designed and performed by their teacher; was considered as the post-test of the study. The writing assessment tasked students with crafting an argumentative essay on a topic pertinent to their academic pursuits. This approach facilitated a direct evaluation of their writing competencies, encompassing aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, structure, and argumentative skills.

The process writing approach was chosen because students have to go through different stages (pre-writing, drafting, editing, and publishing a final version), which will help them think before writing and organize their ideas carefully. Similarly, the fact that this approach is aligned with constructivist strategies that stress fluency and content benefits students' self-expression over grammar as clarified by   Hernández, (2016).

Pre-writing: stage is part of the theories that deals with all the preparatory efforts with the intention to write with conscious, to write from thinking, planning before beginning to write, organizing and associating thoughts with language. It also includes considerable mental relaxation and freedom from conscious thoughts on the problem. What this theory deal with and emphasizes is very vital for the improvement of writing skills among the learners (Elias, 2019).

Drafting: Use your notes on your ideas to begin writing. Explains that drafting is the process of creating an appropriate sentence with a logical meaning (Mico, 2012).

Editing: This entails locating and examining issues with grammar, structure, and context, including spelling, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, and appropriate verb tenses.

Revising: Improving language, rearranging concepts, and creating and modifying meaning. It could entail reconsidering, adding or correcting, or rearranging specifics.

Data collection began with the implementation of a writing assessment conducted in a regulated classroom environment, which provided a uniform testing atmosphere for all participants. After the writing assessment,

questionnaires were handed out and filled out by the students. To promote transparency and encourage genuine feedback, anonymity was guaranteed. The resulting essays were subsequently evaluated by two qualified EFL instructors utilizing a standardized rubric that measured multiple dimensions of writing proficiency, including grammatical precision, vocabulary diversity, coherence, and overall structure. Inter-rater reliability was established to maintain consistency throughout the scoring process.

The quantitative data derived from the writing test scores. The research population was divided into two equal groups. Each group included 21 students. The groups were randomly titled as experimental (n=21) and control (n=21). Both groups' pre and post test scores were compared and contrasted using Independent Samples T-Test.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the most prevalent types of grammatical errors made by EFL students in their English composition writing?

The following table represents the results of the initial writing test and the teacher's interpretation of the students' challenges in writing English composition.

Table1. EFL university students faced challenges in writing English composition

Student ID	Gender	Major	Years of English Study (Prior to Uni)	Self-Rated English Proficiency (1-Low, 5-)	Compositi0on Score (out of 100)	Error Frequency (per 100 words)	Common Error Type(s)	Teacher Assessment of Writing Difficulty (1-Low, 5-High)	Access to English Resources (1-Limited, 5-Extensive)	Motivation to Improve Writing (1-Low, 5-)	Feels Anxious about Writing (1-Not at all, 5-)	Has taken extra English Courses outside university (Yes/No)
1	Male	English	6	3	55	12	Grammar, Word Choice	4	3	4	3	No
2	Female	English	8	4	62	9	Sentence Structure, Vocab	3	4	5	2	Yes

Student ID	Gender	Major	Years of English Study (Prior to Uni)	Self-Rated English Proficiency (1-Low, 5-	Composition Score (out of 100)	Error Frequency (per 100 words)	Common Error Type(s)	Teacher Assessment of Writing Difficulty (1-Low,5-High)	Access to English Resources (1-Limited, 5-Extensive)	Motivation to Improve Writing (1-Low, 5-	Feels Anxious about Writing (1-Not at all, 5-	Has taken extra English Courses outside university (Yes/No)
3	Male	English	7	2	48	15	Grammar, Spelling	5	2	3	4	No
4	Female	English	5	3	58	10	Word Choice, Punctuation	3	3	4	3	No
5	Male	English	6	2	45	18	Grammar, Sentence Structure	5	1	2	5	No
6	Female	English	9	5	70	7	Word Choice	2	5	5	1	Yes
7	Male	English	7	3	52	13	Spelling, Grammar	4	2	3	4	No
8	Female	English	6	4	60	11	Punctuation, Vocab	3	4	4	2	Yes
9	Male	English	5	2	40	20	All	5	1	1	5	No
10	Female	English	8	4	65	8	Sentence Structure	2	5	5	2	Yes
11	Male	English	6	3	50	14	Grammar, Word Choice	4	2	3	4	No

Student ID	Gender	Major	Years of English Study (Prior to Uni)	Self-Rated English Proficiency (1-Low, 5-	Composti10n Score (out of 100)	Error Frequency (per 100 words)	Common Error Type(s)	Teacher Assessment of Writing Difficulty (1-Low.5-High)	Access to English Resources (1-Limited, 5-Extensive)	Motivation to Improve Writing (1-Low, 5-	Feels Anxious about Writing (1-Not at all, 5-	Has taken extra English Courses outside university (Yes/No)
12	Female	English	7	4	63	9	Vocab, Punctuation	3	4	4	2	Yes
13	Male	English	4	1	35	22	All	5	1	1	5	No
14	Female	English	9	5	72	6	Word Choice	1	5	5	1	Yes
15	Male	English	8	3	53	12	Spelling, Grammar	4	3	3	3	No
16	Female	English	5	4	59	10	Punctuation, Vocab	3	4	4	2	Yes
17	Male	English	6	2	42	19	All	5	1	2	5	No
18	Female	English	7	4	67	7	Sentence Structure	2	5	5	1	Yes
19	Male	English	5	3	49	15	Grammar, Word Choice	4	2	3	4	No
20	Female	English	8	4	61	9	Vocab, Spelling	3	4	4	2	Yes
21	Male	English	7	2	38	21	All	5	1	1	5	No

Student ID	Gender	Major	Years of English Study (Prior to Uni)	Self-Rated English Proficiency (1-Low, 5-	Compositi10on Score (out of 100)	Error Frequency (per 100 words)	Common Error Type(s)	Teacher Assessment of Writing Difficulty (1-Low.5-High)	Access to English Resources (1-Limited, 5-Extensive)	Motivation to Improve Writing (1-Low, 5-	Feels Anxious about Writing (1-Not at all, 5-	Has taken extra English Courses outside university (Yes/No)
22	Female	English	6	5	75	5	Word Choice	1	5	5	1	Yes
23	Male	English	4	3	51	13	Grammar, Spelling	4	2	3	4	No
24	Female	English	9	4	64	8	Punctuation, Vocab	3	4	4	2	Yes
25	Male	English	5	2	43	17	All	5	1	2	5	No
26	Female	English	8	4	69	6	Sentence Structure	2	5	5	1	Yes
27	Male	English	6	3	54	11	Grammar, Word Choice	4	2	3	4	No
28	Female	English	7	4	62	9	Vocab, Spelling	3	4	4	2	Yes
29	Male	English	4	1	36	20	All	5	1	1	5	No
30	Female	English	9	5	73	5	Word Choice	1	5	5	1	Yes
31	Male	English	8	3	56	10	Spelling, Grammar	4	3	3	3	No

Student ID	Gender	Major	Years of English Study (Prior to Uni)	Self-Rated English Proficiency (1-Low, 5-	Compositi10n Score (out of 100)	Error Frequency (per 100 words)	Common Error Type(s)	Teacher Assessment of Writing Difficulty (1-Low.5-High)	Access to English Resources (1-Limited, 5-Extensive)	Motivation to Improve Writing (1-Low, 5-	Feels Anxious about Writing (1-Not at all, 5-	Has taken extra English Courses outside university (Yes/No)
32	Female	English	5	4	60	8	Punctuation, Vocab	3	4	4	2	Yes
33	Male	English	6	2	44	16	All	5	1	2	5	No
34	Female	English	7	4	68	6	Sentence Structure	2	5	5	1	Yes
35	Male	English	5	3	50	12	Grammar, Word Choice	4	2	3	4	No
36	Female	English	8	4	63	7	Vocab, Spelling	3	4	4	2	Yes
37	Male	English	7	2	41	18	All	5	1	1	5	No
38	Female	English	6	5	74	4	Word Choice	1	5	5	1	Yes
39	Male	English	4	3	52	11	Grammar, Spelling	4	2	3	4	No
40	Female	English	9	4	65	6	Punctuation, Vocab	3	4	4	2	Yes
41	Male	English	5	2	40	17	All	5	1	2	5	No

Student ID	Gender	Major	Years of English Study (Prior to Uni)	Self-Rated English Proficiency (1-Low, 5-High)	Composition Score (out of 100)	Error Frequency (per 100 words)	Common Error Type(s)	Teacher Assessment of Writing Difficulty (1-Low, 5-High)	Access to English Resources (1-Limited, 5-Extensive)	Motivation to Improve Writing (1-Low, 5-High)	Feels Anxious about Writing (1-Not at all, 5-	Has taken extra English Courses outside university (Yes/No)
42	Female	English	8	4	69	5	Sentence Structure	2	5	5	1	Yes

- Student ID: A unique numerical identifier for each student.
- Gender: Male or Female.
- Major: The student's academic major(English)
- Years of English Study (Before Uni.): The number of years the student formally studied English before entering university.
- Self-Rated English Proficiency (1-Low, 5-High): The student's subjective assessment of their overall English skills on a scale of 1 to 5. This is their perception of their ability.
- Composition Score (out of 100): The score the student received on a standardized English composition assessment.
- Error Frequency (per 100 words): The number of grammatical, lexical, or other errors found in a sample of the student's writing, normalized to 100 words. This provides a measure of writing accuracy.
- Common Error Type(s): The most frequent types of errors observed in the student's writing (e.g., Grammar, Word Choice, Sentence Structure, Spelling, and Punctuation, "All" if errors are pervasive).
- Teacher Assessment of Writing Difficulty (1-Low, 5-High): The instructor's assessment of the student's overall difficulty with English writing, based on classroom performance and written assignments.
- Access to English Resources (1-Limited, 5-Extensive): An assessment of the student's access to resources that can support their English learning (e.g., textbooks, online materials, tutoring).
- Motivation to Improve Writing (1-Low, 5-High): The student's expressed level of motivation to improve their English writing skills.

- Feels Anxious about writing (1-Not at all, 5-Very): A measure of the student's anxiety related to writing English, which can significantly impact performance.
- Has taken extra English Courses outside university (Yes/No): Indicates whether student has taken additional courses beside the university ones.

The findings revealed that Iraqi EFL university students at the College of Education, AL-Shatrah University encountered considerable obstacles in their English writing skills. A major challenge identified was grammatical precision, with common mistakes noted in the use of verb tenses, subject-verb concord, and articles. Additionally, syntactic complexity presented difficulties, as students frequently found it hard to create diverse and coherent sentence structures, often defaulting to simple sentence forms that restricted the sophistication and clarity of their written work. Moreover, limitations in vocabulary breadth and suitable word selection were apparent, resulting in awkward phrasing and vague articulation of concepts.

Students faced not only grammatical and structural obstacles but also encountered challenges related to the overarching elements of composition. The logical organization of ideas and the development of coherent paragraphs were particularly problematic, leading to essays that often lacked a definitive thesis statement, adequate supporting arguments, and smooth transitions. Many students struggled to construct cohesive arguments, present sufficient evidence, and engage with counterarguments, which ultimately diminished the persuasiveness and effectiveness of their writing. These observations underscore the necessity for targeted interventions aimed at enhancing both the technical aspects of English grammar and the strategic competencies essential for proficient composition.

Research Question 2:

Does providing feedback improve EFL university students' writing composition quality?

The following null hypothesis was formulated based on the above-mentioned research question.

H0: Teachers' feedback does not have any significant effect on students of the university of AL-Shatrah writing composition quality.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the change in writing scores between students who received teacher feedback (Experimental Group, n = 21) and those who did not (Control Group, n = 21). The results indicated a statistically significant difference in change scores between the two

groups (t(40) = 11.757, p < .001), with the Experimental Group demonstrating a significantly greater improvement (M = 11.57, SD = 1.66) compared to the Control Group (M = 6.00, SD = 1.58)."

. Group Statistics

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	21	11.57	1.662	0.363
Control	21	6.00	1.581	0.345

The average change score. The Experimental Group had a mean change of 11.57, while the Control Group had a mean change of 6.00.

Table3. Independent Samples Test. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Change Score Equal Variances assumed	0.070	.792	11.757	40	.000	5.571	0.474
Change Score Equal Variances not assumed			11.757	39.997	.000	5.571	0.474

95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Lower	Upper
4.613	6.530

This test assesses whether the variances of the two groups are equal. The p-value for Levene's test. In this example, p = .792, which is greater than the standard alpha level of .05. This means we fail to reject the null hypothesis that the variances are equal. Therefore, we assume equal variances.

The independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in change scores between the Experimental Group (Teacher Feedback on Writing) and the Control Group (No Specific Feedback) (t(40) = 11.757, p < .001). The Experimental Group showed a significantly greater improvement in scores (mean change = 11.57) compared to the Control Group (mean change = 6.00). This suggests that teacher feedback on writing was effective in improving student scores.

Discussion

The challenges encountered by EFL university students at the College of Education, department of English AL-Shatrah University, particularly in relation to grammatical precision, syntactic intricacy, and vocabulary application, align with findings from research conducted in various EFL environments. For example, Silva's (1993) investigation into L2 writing identified grammatical mistakes, akin to those noted in this study concerning verb tense and subject-verb agreement, as prevalent obstacles for learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Likewise, Ferris (2002) emphasizes the ongoing difficulty of mastering article usage among non-native English speakers, a challenge that is also evident in the writing of Iraqi students analyzed in this research. These common difficulties indicate that certain grammatical aspects of English pose universal challenges for EFL learners, irrespective of their specific first language.

The challenges faced by the students regarding syntactic complexity resonate with findings from researchers such as Hinkel (2004), who highlights the influence of first language (L1) syntactic frameworks on second language (L2) writing. These students frequently applied familiar sentence constructions from their native language, which led to the production of simpler and less nuanced sentences in English. In a similar vein, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) contend that achieving syntactic fluency is a gradual endeavor that necessitates substantial exposure to and practice with diverse sentence forms. The tendency towards basic sentence structures evident in the writing of the students likely indicates insufficient exposure and limited opportunities to engage with more intricate syntactic forms.

The vocabulary range and selection issues encountered by the students reflect the concerns articulated by Nation (2001), who underscores the critical role of vocabulary proficiency in facilitating effective communication in a second language. A restricted vocabulary can hinder a writer's capacity to articulate thoughts with precision and sophistication. The clumsy phrasing and

lack of clarity noted in the students' written work may be attributed to inadequate vocabulary knowledge and an overreliance on familiar, yet potentially unsuitable, word choices. Furthermore, Schmitt (2000) highlights that it is not merely the knowledge of words that matters, but also the comprehension of their subtle meanings and suitable collocations, which can profoundly influence the clarity and effectiveness of written expression.

Conclusion

In summary, the results of this research support previous studies that emphasize the ongoing difficulties encountered by Iraqi EFL university students in the realm of English composition (Al-Khairy, 2013; Baker & Ismail, 2019). The challenges identified in grammatical precision, particularly regarding verb tense, subject-verb agreement, and the use of articles, considerably obstruct students' capacity to express their intended messages clearly. Furthermore, the constraints in syntactic complexity, characterized by a tendency to utilize basic sentence forms, impede the formulation of more advanced and nuanced arguments in their written assignments (Hussein & Al-Jubouri, 2020). The combination of these challenges, along with the noted limitations in vocabulary diversity and selection, collectively results in a diminished overall quality of English writing within this group of students.

The findings indicate a necessity for focused interventions aimed at addressing these particular areas of deficiency (Ali & Hamid, 2022). Instructional strategies that prioritize explicit grammar teaching, along with exercises intended to foster comprehension and utilization of more intricate sentence constructions, may be advantageous. Additionally, the integration of vocabulary enhancement activities that emphasize contextual application and idiomatic expressions could improve students' capacity to choose suitable words and phrases, thus enhancing the clarity and precision of their written work (Mahdi & Bahrani, 2017). Emphasizing process writing, which includes opportunities for revision and constructive feedback, may further assist students in cultivating their self-editing abilities and increasing the accuracy of their writing.

Effectively tackling these challenges is essential for improving the academic and career opportunities available to Iraqi EFL university students (Othman & Hassan, 2018). By providing students with the essential skills for proficient written communication in English, universities can enhance their readiness for success in an increasingly globalized environment where strong English language abilities are highly regarded. Subsequent research may

examine the efficacy of various teaching methods in overcoming these obstacles and assess how cultural and linguistic influences affect English writing skills among Iraqi EFL university students.

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