

Assessing Writing Skills of the EFL Learners in the Universities of Nineveh Province

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Abstract

Writing assessment has been considered as a difficult topic for learning professionals, mainly when it approaches to assess the writing of English Foreign Language learners. The present study aims at answering the following questions: After (3) three years of learning English Foreign Language writing skill at the university, have 4th- year students in English departments at colleges of Education mastered the basic writing skills? It is hypothesized that: Fourth year students in the departments of English at the colleges of Education have mastered the basics of writing skills... To verify the posed hypotheses, two methods were used: a test and a questionnaire. 50 (male and female) fourth year Iraqi students in the Departments of English from College of Education for Humanities/ Mosul University and Al Hamdaniya University. Based on the findings obtained, it was found that after three (3) years of studying the writing skills at university, learners have not yet mastered the of the basic writing skills. Many of learners lack knowledge in the basic of writing skill owing to the defect in way of teaching writing, the materials and techniques used in the classroom, as well as the use of outdated textbooks, class sizes that are too big, and the amount of time devoted to learning writing skill each week, additionally to the weak level of the students themselves

Keywords: Assessment, Writing, Students, Skills.

تقييم مهارات الكتابة لمتعلمي اللغة الانكليزية بوصفها لغة اجنبية في جامعات محافظة نينوى

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المستخلص

لطالما اعدّ تقييم الكتابة موضوعاً صعباً للمهنيين التربويين، لا سيما عندما يتعلق الأمر بتقييم كتابة طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى الإجابة على الأسئلة الآتية: بعد ثلاث سنوات من تعلم كتابة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية على المستوى الجامعي، هل أتقن طلاب السنة الرابعة في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية في كليات التربية مهارات الكتابة الأساسية؟ من المفترض أن: طلاب السنة الرابعة في هذه الأقسام قد أتقنوا أساسيات مهارات الكتابة. للتحقق من الفرضيات المطروحة، تم استخدام طريقتي الاختبار والاستبيان. خضع (٥٠) طالباً من السنة الرابعة يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كليات التربية في جامعة الموصل وجامعة الحمدانية. تشير النتائج إلى أن الطلاب لم يتقنوا بعد مهارة الكتابة الأساسية بعد ثلاث سنوات من دراسة الكتابة في الجامعة. يفتقر العديد من الطلاب إلى المعرفة في مهارات الكتابة الأساسية بسبب الخلل في مهارات التدريس في الكتابة والمواد التعليمية وطرق التدريس وسياسة القبول في القسم، فضلاً عن ضعف مستوى الطلاب أنفسهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تقييم، الكتابة، الطلبة، المهارات.

Introduction

The present study aims at investigating one of the most important of language skills that is *writing*. Several linguists give definitions of writing e.g., Browker (2007) states that writing is a social practice in which people interact with each other's. It is a way of expressing emotions, ideas, and exchanging information or a way of using words to express oneself. It also means a powerful mode of communication that enables individuals to place their thoughts and feelings on paper, understanding into persuasive arguments, and to produce well-formed text. Lindsay and Paul (2006 cited in Shokrpour, N., and Fallazadeh, 2007: 12) hold that People write for a variety of reasons: to practice their language, to refine their language, to aid memorization, etc. As a result, as part of the language learning process, students engage in various writing tasks in order to improve their writing abilities.

Writing is a cognitive process that entails creating ideas, organizing, goal-setting, observing, evaluating what will be written as well as what has been written, and using language to convey precise meanings. It means that writing entails a series of steps that the writer must complete in order to effectively convey the message (Nunan, 1989: 36). Kellogg (2008: 9) states that writing allow students to explore new ways and strategies to write and express themselves; furthermore, they also learn how to get suitable structures while writing. Furthermore, writing is about conveying meaning by the use of words that have been

1-2 – Aspects of English Foreign Language Writing skills

There are three aspects EFL: Mechanism of writing, coherence, cohesion, and parallelism.

1-2-1-Writing Mechanism

Writing mechanism is the first way in teaching writing for Foreign Language classroom Kellaheer (2001) states that for efficient written communication, these abilities are important because they make the work of the reader easier and more comprehensible. Capitalization and Punctuation marks are two major aspects of the writing mechanism.

Capitalization marks that a sentence is starting and distinguishes specific terms within a sentence. The use of capital letters draws attention to key words. (Paras, 2015). Commonly, names of people, personal pronouns, the first word of a particular occasion, historical times, names of months, years, days, festivals, country, nation, geological names, are capitalized (Kellaheer, 2001). Also, proper noun, names of association and organization, religious events, battle, competition, quoted sentences and the title of magazine, essays, newspapers, Poem, Novel Films, books, etc. are capitalized (McCaskill, 1990). Such as:

She stated, "Treat him as you would your own son".

Punctuation marks Punctuation plays a critical role in making that the word conveys the intended meaning. The incorrect placement of such marks can completely alter the meaning of a sentence, and in some cases even transform it into total nonsense (Mitchell, Baugh and Kelly, 2016: 6). Misuse of Punctuation marks include mistakes in the use of the colon, apostrophe, ellipsis, comma, parentheses, hyphen, quotation marks, dash, slashes, abbreviations, semicolons, dots and exclamation marks. Each of these marks has its own set of functions. For example, the semicolon is used to imply or demonstrate that two separate clauses' thoughts are closely related, as well as to show that a number of short sentences have the same meaning and are given priority for example - *We travelled to London, England; Berlin, Germany; and Sofia,*

Bulgaria (Straus: 2008). Hyphen is used to shape compound numbers, words and to join suffixes and prefixes for example: *E.g. He re-covered the sofa* (Hall: 2003). And etc.

1-2-2- Coherence and Cohesion

Coherence and cohesion can be regarded as the best features of the writing skills and are considered as critical constituents to construct and produce a well-formed, unified and understandable text (Elbow, 1999:12). **Coherence** in a written text is a difficult concept to understand, since it involves gathering of reader and text-based aspects. It is one of the text's important features that makes it a syntactic and semantic unit, allowing the reader to comprehend the context. All of the sentences are well-organized so that no one can be confused with another, making it easy for the reader to comprehend the thoughts that the writer wishes to convey (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 7). When a paragraph's sentences are intertwined, the reader can quickly shift from one sentence to the next without feeling as though there are differences in thought. As a result, it adds logic to the order in which the ideas are presented (Elbow, 1999: 18).

Cohesion is the arrangement between one element and another within the texts. When the elements of a text are linked and considered meaningful to the reader, it is said to be cohesive. Baker (1990) clarifies cohesion as “a set off connection between lexical, grammatical and other relations which join various parts of text to each other”. oey (1994: 23) point out that cohesion is “the way certain words or grammatical features of sentences connect that sentence to its predecessor in text”. In this perspective cohesion would be reached by the use of various relations to produce strong, smooth, and clear connection among many pieces of writing. Halliday and Hasan (1976: 5) explain that “the concept of cohesion is a semantic one. It refers to

relations of meaning that exist within the text, and that defines it as a text. Cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another”.

The devices that tie words, phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs together to form a unique whole are called cohesive devices or linking words. Connor (1984: 18) adds that “the use of cohesive devices signal relation among sentences and parts of text”. Below are the main types of cohesive devices (linking words).

Cohesive devices

The connecting phrases and words that bind the sentences and paragraphs together are referred to as cohesive devices, or (linking words). These phrases and words connect what is being said to what has already been said or what will be said in the near future. (Geme and Lea, 2008: 37). Halliday and Hasan (1976: 74) identify the linking words in great detail. The two categories of cohesive devices are: grammatical and lexical.

There are four types of **grammatical cohesive devices**: substitution, conjunction, reference, and ellipsis.

a) Substitution is the method of replacing one item by another in the text to prevent repetition. There are three classes of substitution: Verbal, nominal, and clausal. Substituting a noun with another noun is an example of nominal substitution.

E.g.-This house is old. I will buy a new one. (One substitutes house).

b) Conjunction words are connecting devices between sentences or clauses in a text. For instance:

- *I like cooking and eating, but I don't like washing dishes afterward. Sophie is clearly exhausted, yet she insists on dancing till dawn.*

c) **Ellipsis** is described as the absence of a previously specified unnecessary part in a text and its replacement with nothing. Such as substitution. Verbal, nominal, and clausal are the three types of ellipsis:

E.g.-her sisters and I like cooking. actually, both like cooking. (The nominal her sisters are omitted in the second sentence).

lexical cohesion, is the collection of vocabulary. It concerned with the relationship between lexical elements like words and phrases in a text. There are two types of lexical cohesion, reiteration and collocation. Halliday and Hasan (1976:84) explain reiteration as two items that share the same referent and may either be repeated or have similar meanings in a text. The types of reiteration are antonym, synonym,, repetition. For examples:

-Gorgeous and beautiful.

Collocation is a combination of vocabulary items that occur in the same sentence. Such as linking of noun and adjective.

- Commit an error/ a crime / a mistake.

Transitional Markers

Oshima and Hogue (2007: 41) state that transitional markers are used by the writer to link thoughts from one sentence to the next, from paragraph to another, and from one topic to the next. The Transitional connectives appear near the beginning of a sentence or clause. The transitional signals are: transitions that illustrate time: e.g., after; spatial order: e.g., beyond; contrast between ideas: e.g., otherwise; chronological order: e.g., soon; addition: e.g., next; emphasis: e.g., in fact; similarities: e.g., also; and conclusion or result: e.g., to summarize.

1-2-3- Parallelism

Two or more similar sentence elements of the same grammatical type are known as parallelism.: adjectives paired with adjectives, verbs with verbs, nouns paired with nouns, and so on. Parallel, in this sense, means equal or balanced (Robinson, 1999: 5). In both grammar and function, items in a list should be parallel. Anson and Schwegler (2000 cited in Mehawesh, 2013: 4) show that “when two or more elements of a sentence have the same grammatical structures: adjectives to adjectives, nouns to nouns, prepositional phrases to prepositional phrases, and clauses to clauses”, but clauses cannot be related to phrases or adjectives paired to nouns, this is referred to as parallel grammar. for examples:

parallel: *Jack is angry, hungry, and lonely.* (Adjectives are related to adjectives)

Not Parallel: *Jack is angry, lonely, and in a rush.* (Angry and lonely are adjectives, but in a rush is a prepositional phrase).

Parallel in function means sentences of the same thought or function importance have to be balanced (Robinson, 2009:10) Such as: Parallel: *They can get phones in blue, green, red, and brown.* (All are colors)

Not Parallel: *They can get cell phones in blue, red, brown, and shiny.* (Blue, brown, and red, are colors, while shiny express a different feature of it).

1-2-4- Paragraphing

Writing a paragraph is a very difficult task which involves not only mechanical skills, but also the ability to express oneself in writing and intellectual qualities. The paragraph is traditionally defined by Vivian and Jackson (1961: 158) as a distinct unit of idea generally consisted of a numeral of smaller elements "sentences". The writer uses sentences to create paragraphs, uses paragraphs to create compositions like: letters,

stories, essays, etc. Paragraph is generally defined as a set of closely related sentences that address and develop a single main idea (Zemach and Rumisek, 2003: 78; Juzwiak, 2009: 21; Owl, 2009 cited in Aziz, 2011: 37). A paragraph's length is likely to vary: some are short, while others are very long (Fox, 1981: 41). Paragraph writing is typically consisting of a topic sentence followed by a sequence of sentences which support that point. And then a concluding sentence (Oshima and Hogue, 2007: 39).

The most common sentence of the paragraph is known as **the topic sentence**. It presents the paragraph's main idea and gives the reader a general idea of what the paragraph would be about (Zemach and Rumisek, 2003: 79). The last sentence in a paragraph is called **the supporting sentences**, a paragraph's body is made up of supporting sentences and their supporting elements. These are sentences that include additional information about the topic sentence. They come after the topic sentence. Supporting sentences expand on the topic by elaborating thoughts, providing an explanation, features, evidence, and examples (Chaplen, 1970: 11). And the last sentence in a paragraph is called Closing sentence (**conclusion**). It's a sentence that summarize the texts and tells the reader of the author's main argument and supporting points. It should present the same information in a different way, maybe by rearranging the words or summarizing the main ideas (Oshima and Hogue, 2007: 42).

1-3-Assessment of the Writing Skills

Assessment is the systematic process of gathering, explaining, or quantifying, arranging, and analyzing data about a learner's performance using various methods or tools such as (tests, quizzes, portfolios, etc.) (Le Grange & Reddy, 1998). Writing assessment has strong educational aims as it may have directly impact on supporting teaching progress (Richards, 1996:

26). It's a student-teacher interaction that shows teachers how much their learners are learning and what they're teaching... Madsen (1983) illustrates that there are a variety of techniques which are used to test different aspects of writing like: punctuation marks, vocabulary, grammatical structure, and spelling. Testing writing skills, according to Kilmovea and Rokitanskeho (2011: 15), should involve students' understanding of rules of the standard written English. Rules refer to sentence structure, writing fluency, rules of grammar, style, strategy, organization, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

Several writers, including Lado (1961), Weir (1990), and Olshtain (1991), stated that when deciding on the formats for assessing writing skills, many factors must be considered. The following are examples of these formats:

- a. Editing:** In which students are provided by a text that contains a variety of mistakes in spelling and punctuation, and grammar and are asked to correct them all.
- b. Gap Filling:** in which the students are given a text with blanks that have to be filled in with the appropriate or incomplete words. Understanding the fundamental linguistic unit, such as vocabulary, structure, or linking words, is the value of this technique.
- c. Responding to give details:** tastes are asked to respond to information provided in table form, or respond to information from various written sources by writing their responses.
- d. The Completion of form:** The way to assess writing ability is to make the participants complete a questionnaire with proper spelling and lexical skill.
- e. Copying:** The use of spacing, punctuation, and spelling is required for this assignment. Those students are instructed to copy the previously written sentences.

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- f. Information Transfer Task:** Tastes are required to note down what they can observe from the table data, pictures, graphs, and drawings.
 - i. Making Correction:** Students are given a piece of writing with spelling, punctuation, and syntactic errors that they must correct.
 - g. Combined Reading into writing:** This test can be used to see whether students can write effectively about what they've read. Students are given a short reading text to comprehend before being asked to compose a description of the text.

Although there hasn't been much research about "Assessing Writing Skills of the EFL Learners at Universities of Nineveh Province", the researcher has come across some similar studies that could serve as a foundation for the current paper. To begin with, **Kantor's (2012) study** tried to identify the vital characteristics of writing skill and monitor the development of writing ability over time. Participants were 158 pupils from fifth elementary schools. A compositional writing sample was collected each year of the study. The findings revealed that students' organization of concepts, vocabulary, grammar, organizing, editing, revising, usage of content and skills improved after each year of teaching writing.

Zhang et.al. (2014) study was conducted to assess a writing lesson for ESL students by using technology. The lesson was designed around an integrated model that included the model of writing as a process to see whether or not learners have made achievement as a result of this lesson. The number of the participants was 41. Students attending the writing class on a three-days a week. The course lasted 15 weeks and included the use of the Internet and computers to help with writing. As a result of taking the lesson, the learners' writing skills improved,

and the results of the questionnaire review revealed that the majority of the students improved and had positive feelings and opinion about the lesson.

2- The Research Problem

English Departments in Iraqi Colleges of Education have not paid enough attention to assessing English Foreign Language writing skills. Many students still faced a real challenge in almost all forms of writing after (3) years of studying the writing skills. Likewise, teachers argue that students continue to make mistakes and are unable to apply what they have learned in their writing lesson. Therefore, the current study aims to determine the real problem and tries to provide answers to the following research questions:

- 1- After (3) three years of learning English Foreign Language writing skill at the university, have 4th- year students in English departments at colleges of Education mastered the basic writing skills?
- 2- Which writing skills did the participants find the most difficult?

3- The Hypotheses

- 1- Fourth year students in the departments of English at the colleges of Education have mastered the basics of writing skills.
- 2- Students can do better in mechanism of writing skill more than in other macro writing skill such as (making a summary, cohesive devices, etc.).

4-Methodology

4-1- The Participants

A total of 50 (male and female) fourth year Iraqi students in the Departments of English were chosen in the present study. For

the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021. (25) students from College of Education for Humanities / Mosul University. (25) students from College of Education for Humanities / Al Hamdaniya University.

4-2-The Research procedures

Two methods were used to assess the writing abilities of 4th - year students: a test and a questionnaire. The achievement test and the questionnaire are discussed in depth in the following sections:

4-2-1– Achievement Test

"Test" is the most popular research methods for gathering data. It was carried out in order to confirm the hypotheses that had been proposed previously. It consisted of (8) eight items covering a variety of features and principles of the writing ability.

The aim of **question No. (1)** was to see how well students could use punctuation marks correctly in their writing. It consisted of one paragraph, and learners were asked to punctuate and capitalize it.

The **question No. (2)** aimed to test students' ability to write a good introductory paragraph that has all the essential elements of an introductory paragraph including: the topic, general statements, and thesis statement. Students were provided by a topic, and were required to write an introductory sentence.

Question No. (3) was designed to measure student's ability to write supporting sentences by using proper examples, reasons, quotations, and information. Students were provided by a topic, and they were asked to write supporting detailed sentences.

The aim of **question No. (4)** was to measure students' ability to write a well concluding sentence that summarize and paraphrase the reasons, ideas, and information given in the

paragraph. Learners were given one paragraph and were required to complete this paragraph with a well concluding sentence.

The **question No. (5)** was measured students' ability to identify and describe a person supported by specific justification and logical information for the main ideas.

Question No. (6) was designed to see how well students could use linking words to compose a well-formed coherence and cohesive text.

The aim of **question No. (7)** was to test students' ability to identify the components of writing a good paragraph consisting of topic sentence, supporting detailed sentences and then concluding sentence.

Question No. (8) was designed to test the students' ability to summarize the main ideas without mentioning all details. The students were provided by a text and they were required to summarize the most important ideas in a few sentences as possible.

4-2-2- Scoring Scheme

The total score of the test in this research paper is (100) points. The test has (8) questions. Each test question was given a different mark.

In the 1st question, the following is how the marks were distributed: one mark was distributed for each capitalization or punctuation mark.

In the 2nd question, the marks were distributed as follows: five marks for writing a good introductory paragraph and five marks for examples and reasons.

In the 3rd question, the marks were distributed as follows: six marks for examples and five marks for reasons.

In the 4th question, the marks were distributed as follows: five marks for ideas, two marks for grammar, three marks for punctuation, and three marks for using connectors.

In the 5th question, the marks were distributed as follows: four marks for describing and giving physical appearance, four marks for describing and giving qualities, and four marks for punctuation marks.

In the 6th question, the marks were divided as follows: two marks for each blank.

In the 7th question, the marks were distributed as follows: five marks for the topic sentence, three for the supporting sentences, and two marks for the concluding sentence.

And lastly, **In the 8th question**, the marks were distributed as follows: three marks for writing 70 -60 words, three marks for selection of sentences/words, three marks for punctuation marks, two marks for grammar, and three marks for cohesion and coherence.

5-Results and Discussions

5-1- Result of the Achievement test

An f-test and t-test procedures relying on SPSS were computed to interpret and analyze the results. Percentages were also applied. Furthermore, the data were examined in tables to illustrate the percentages and numbers of the data which the test has given. These findings were examined in the lights of two questions.

- 1- After (3) three years of learning English Foreign Language writing skill at the university, have 4th- year students in English departments at colleges of Education mastered the basic writing skills?
- 2- Which writing skills did the participants find the most difficult?

The total mean scores for both groups of students have been analyzed for answering the 1st question. Table No. (1) showed the results:

Table (1)
The total mean score attained by the students in both colleges

Total	Number of participants	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
	50	44.6300	10.76336

The above table showed that total mean score read (44.6300). This means that the students' overall performance is weak and are having difficulty with the majority of writing skill.

A comparison was then made between these two colleges. Table no. (2) showed the mean scores and standard deviation that have been attained:

Table (2)
Mean score and Standard deviation of Students' groups in both colleges

Descriptive Statistics			
	Number	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Education Mosul	25	41.8728	9.87952
Education Hamdaniya	25	44.7150	12.03079

From the above table no. (2) indicates the highest mean score (44.7150) was got by the college of Education for

Humanities/ University of Al-Hamdaniya. Whereas, the lowest mean score (41.8728) was got by college of Education for Humanities / University of Mosul.

Table no. (3) below showed that the mean score of each college and in each question was analyzed for the purpose of answering question No. (2) that implies which writing skills did the participants find the most difficult?

Table (3)
The ranks of simplicity and difficulty of each writing skill for the Mosul University, College of Education for humanities

Q	Education Mosul = 25		
	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	%
1	5.3064	3.88736	56.17%
2	4.4925	2.42339	44.93%
3	4.6074	2.39685	45.07%
4	3.2343	2.53364	32.33%
5	4.0201	2.40374	40.00%
6	2.1751	1.41733	21.74%
7	5.1002	2.28345	51.01%
8	4.2252	2.39123	43.22%

From above table, the best results obtained were got in question No. (1) which reads (56%) in answering this question which measured the ability of students to utilize punctuation marks in writing. And question No. (7) which reads (51%) recognized the elements of writing a well-formed paragraph. By

contrast, the most difficult question was in question No. (6) which reads (21%) measured the ability of students to utilize cohesive devices. The outcome showed that the majority of students were unable to utilize cohesive devices correctly. And question No. (4) which reads (32%) measured the ability of students to write a good concluding sentence. The outcome showed that most of the students were incapable to write a good concluding sentence that summarize or paraphrase the information given in the paragraph.

Table No. (4)
The ranks of simplicity and difficulty of each writing skills
for Al-Hamdaniya University, College of Education for
Humanities

Q	Education Hamdaniya = 25		
	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	%
1	5.3164	2.39637	51.16%
2	4.3447	3.33412	43.36%
3	4.6836	2.16240	46.84%
4	4.5782	2.70789	43.78%
5	2.8575	2.43469	28.57%
6	2.3639	1.59731	22.74%
7	6.7923	3.77253	64.91%
8	4.7947	2.21972	45.96%

From above table, question No. (7) has got the best results (64%), in answering this question recognized the elements of

writing a well-formed paragraph. And question No. (1) has got (51%) measured the ability of students to utilize punctuation marks appropriately in writing. Yet, the least results were got in questions No. (6) has got (22%) which measured the ability of students to utilize cohesive devices. The results showed that the majority of the students were unable to utilize cohesive devices appropriately. In question No. (5) has got (28%) which measured the ability of students to use of description in writing. The result showed that most of the students were unable to utilize description properly in writing.

5-1-1- Achievement test (Discussion and Results)

The researcher can present an integrated assessment of the writing skill for English Foreign Language learners at the university with regard to the hypotheses given formerly, from the findings that have been showed above. Hypothesis No. (1) reads: Fourth year students in the departments of English at the colleges of Education have mastered the basics of writing skills. The findings show that the overall mean score was (44%), indicating that students did not achieve the required level of achievement of (50%) out of 100. Learners have not yet mastered fundamentals of writing skill. Therefore, the first hypothesis of the study is not confirmed by the results as it was already mentioned. This finding may be owing to the defect in way of teaching writing, the materials used in the classroom, the techniques used in the classroom, as well as the use of outdated textbooks, class sizes that are too big for the teacher to have enough practice, and the amount of time devoted to learning writing skill each week... So, I am going to give and discuss more details about the results of hypothesis No. (1) with the outcome of questionnaire.

Regarding hypothesis No. (2) which reads that student can do better in mechanism of writing skill more than in other macro

writing skill such as (making a summary, cohesive devices, etc.). Our hypothesis was found to be fully verified since most students were able to master writing mechanism such as: capitalization, utilizing commas, apostrophe, exclamation marks, ...etc. as shown in question No (1). Yet again, the findings demonstrate that students can organize the elements of writing a correct paragraph. Topic sentences, supporting sentences, and then concluding sentence.

All college students, on the other hand, faced difficulty in how to organize their writing skills. The use of linking words proved to be the most difficult. Students have no ability to either use or identify these linking words as shown in (question No. " 6") Most students did not seem to depend on meaning at all, and they were unaware of the semantic relationships expressed by coherent devices.

5-2 – The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was used as the second tool to complete the aim of the current study. It was administered to determine the reason for the 4th year students' low achievement in writing skills. Is it possible that the problem is caused by:

- a: In the manners of teaching English Foreign Language writing?
- b: In the student's background Knowledge?
- c: In both alternatives.

A questionnaire was distributed to the two teachers of English writing at colleges. The same question was asked to six 4th year students from each college.

5-2- 1- The Questionnaire (Discussion and Results)

The findings show that there is a disparity between the writing teachers and students in ascribing the causes of student's

low performance in writing skill. Teachers attributed the low performance of the English foreign language students in the writing skill to the low ability of the students themselves who were registered in English Departments, which is then ascribed to the application policy in the English departments. (30%) Students, on the other hand, blamed their low performance to the manner used in teaching skills. The application policy at the colleges was blamed by (30%) of the students of their low performance. And (40%) of them ascribed the low achievement to the both alternatives that have been mentioned above.

The real issue, however, appears to be in both. Students' lack of preparation material at home means they depend solely on the teachers in the classroom. Furthermore, the techniques used for teaching writing seem to be obsolete. Students' low performance can also be attributed to certain teachers' inadequate training and lack of experience in the skills of teaching writing.

6- Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Studies

6-1- Conclusion

Based on the findings obtained, it was found that after three (3) years of studying the writing skills systematically at university, learners have not yet mastered the of the basic writing skills.

Many of learners lack knowledge in the basic of writing skill owing to the defect in way of teaching writing, the materials used in the classroom, the techniques used in the classroom, as well as the use of outdated textbooks, class sizes that are too big for the teacher to have enough practice, and the amount of time devoted to learning writing skill each week, additionally to the weak level of the students themselves. Some writing teachers do not follow the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research's guidance, which could be regarded as one of the flaws in teaching writing... In addition to the application policy

at colleges which permits many students with their low level of performance to enroll in the departments of English. Using cohesive connectives correctly and how to make an effective and well-formed text of writing be it a paragraph writing or a summary is the most difficult. Also, it has been found that the simplest writing skill for the students were mechanism of writing be it Punctuation marks, such as question marks, full stops, commas, apostrophes etc. As well as analyzing and recognizing the constituents of a successful paragraph.

6-2-Suggestions for Further Studies

More studies are also needed to be carried out to assess 4th year university student's mastery of other skills such as: Listening comprehension, Reading, and Speaking. Also, a developmental study that traces the development of language skills from enrollment to graduation is needed to highlight how various skills can be developed over time.

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