



Comparing The Achievement of Iraqi EFL Undergraduates in Writing Guided and Free Compositions

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Dedication

*....To everyone whose
Knowledge is his own Path...*

Abstract

One of the distinctive types of writing is a *Composition* which is defined as a piece of writing made up of one or more paragraphs talking about a definite theme or subject. Courses of teaching writing normally expose and train learners to mainly two kinds of compositions; *Guided and Free* compositions , each of which has its own mechanisms of writing.

Thus , the study tries to compare the achievement of Iraqi EFL undergraduates in writing both guided and free compositions .

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1.1 Statement of the problem:

Writing is one of the productive skills in learning a language. It follows that any language learner is supposed to be equipped with both linguistic abilities and the writing techniques so as to produce an acceptable composition. Linguistic abilities means the ability to use correct vocabulary in constructing grammatical phrases and sentences, the ability to compose different types of sentences (whether simple, complex or compound), and the ability to use cohesive devices to join sentences in a paragraph or a composition.

On the other hand, writing techniques include the ability to form a well-unified composition ,i-e, how introduce, give details, and finalize a composition .

For EFL learners, linguistic abilities are taught throughout successive or regular courses of English grammar whereas the writing techniques are taught throughout certain courses that are devoted for writing compositions or essays in English.(Rivers,1968;72)

With reference to the courses of writing compositions, EFL students are exposed to samples of mainly two kinds of compositions; *guided and free*, then students are asked to exercise both kinds. In a guided composition, students are provided with certain instructions that help them to write the required composition, such as the title, some helping ideas ,and some hints that tell how to introduce ,sequence, and finalize the required composition; whereas in free compositions, students are only provided with a topic sentence of the required composition and the students are asked to write a composition by their own ideas and which consists of several unified paragraphs where those ideas are sequenced.

There are major challenges that face EFL students in the process of writing guided compositions ,namely, the grammatical mistakes that they make in constructing sentences as they are asked to build up complete and meaningful sentences which are derived from the supportive ideas or hints given in such type of writing. Grammatical mistakes appear in using conjunctions to combine sentences in a unified paragraph.

Challenges can be more problematic to EFL students in writing free compositions as it demands linguistic abilities as well as

the mechanics of writing such as generating ideas and organizing the ideas into a coherent whole.

Thus, the study tries to compare the achievement of Iraqi EFL undergraduates in writing both guided and free compositions.

1.2 The aim of The Study:

The study aims at comparing the achievement of Iraqi EFL undergraduates in writing both guided and free compositions.

1.3 Hypothesis: It is hypothesized that the achievement of Iraqi EFL undergraduates in writing a guided composition is better than their achievement in writing a free composition.

1.4 The limitation of the study: The study is limited to Iraqi EFL fourth class students in English Dep., college of Arts, of Kufah Univ. during the academic year (2008-2009).

1.5 The Definition of Basic terms:

1.5.1 Achievement: Recognition granted to a learner when all required learning outcomes have been successfully demonstrated.

www.evc-consult.nl/english/glossary

1.5.2 Composition: A piece of writing made up of one or more paragraphs talking about a definite theme or subject. (*Ferris, 1998:23*).

1.5.3 A Guided Composition: A kind of directed writing in which a student is provided with instructions and supportive ideas that help to compose a suggested theme or subject. www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/guided_composition

1.5.4 A Free Composition: a kind of writing which permits a student to develop his own ideas and to create his own style of writing as he chooses. www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/free_composition.

Chapter Two

2.1 Theoretical Background

Writing is a trade in which every educated man, woman, and child should be skilled. Writing is a trade, which any one can master if he goes about it in the right way. It is true that writing skill is often the only trade of some people like the poets, novelists, newspaper reporters and editors. These might be called specialists in writing, and writing is their main occupation and way of making a living. But writing skill is a universal trade and it is necessary for every person to know it to a certain extent.(Ivanic,1998:6)

All writings consist of sentences that may be defined as series of words so arranged that they express a thought. Sentences are the basis of written language. Words do not make sentences unless they are arranged in accordance with the rules of grammar. On the first steps in the teaching writing we may use sentences whose words have been scrambled. They will serve as illustrations of how the teachers explain grammar, vocabulary, and writing mechanics while teaching organizational writing. The internal structure of the sentences is the immediate problem for the student. The teacher can teach many other conventions of punctuation, depending on the structure of the sentence under consideration. Once students understand sentence order, the teacher can move to sentence arrangement in a paragraph. The organization of any text depends greatly on the literary genre it represents ,for instance, if a text is a narrative, or a commentary, or analysis, each genre requires and organizational format. In an analysis, the writing must be logically organized whereas narratives require a chronological ordering; and a commentary presents an opinion with supportive facts.(Reids,1993:36)

One of the distinctive types of communicating by means of written words is called a composition. It is a piece of writing made up of one or more paragraphs. It has a theme that can be broken into a number of topics. Each topic in a composition has its own paragraph.

Essentials of a good composition are as follows:

- 1- It limits its content to one theme.

- 2- It presents and develops the theme in an orderly manner.
- 3- It shows continuity from one paragraph to the next in the same way that sentences do within a paragraph.(Ferris,1998:12)

Many compositions can be arranged basically as follows:

- 1- Introduction which tells the reader what the composition is about.
- 2- Body which gives the details or explanations of the composition.
- 3- Conclusion which draws the composition endings.

These three divisions do not tell exactly where each topic ideas goes. In order to write a well- planned composition, it is necessary to decide where each topic should be .One way to do this is to organize the detailed plan of the composition through the use of an outline which sets out the order in which thoughts should be written and tells how to save the unity of the composition theme. (Ibid)

Any composition is made up of a paragraph or paragraphs as stated earlier .A paragraph is a group of sentences that talk about only one idea. It has the following features:

- 1- It develops just one topic.
- 2- Every sentence in it says something about the topic.
- 3- There is no set of length of a paragraph.

Many paragraphs are built around a topic sentence. A topic sentence states the main thought of the paragraph. The other sentences explain, or discuss or illustrate the idea stated in the topic sentence. The topic sentence is usually the first sentence in a paragraph, however it appears in the middle or at the end of the paragraph. A paragraph does not need a topic sentence if all the sentences of the paragraph express one central idea. (Grabe,1996:67)

Essentials of a paragraph are the following:

- 1- **Unity:** It means that all the elements that make up the writing work harmoniously toward the single topic. If ideas are not arranged in proper order , if less important elements are not subordinated to more important elements, if relations among ideas are not made clear, if irrelevant materials are included, unity is not be achieved.

- 2- **Consistency:** It means adopting a point of view and a way of presentation and sticking to both throughout the paragraph.
- 3- **Coherence :** It is basically a matter of having the parts of a writing in the right order with the relations among the the parts made clear to the reader. Ways of th doing this are: numbering divisions of ideas as “first” ,”second”, to keep the reader aware of their progression:using conjunctions such as:
however,consequently,moreover,on the other hand,as a result ...
:repeating key words or phrases and maintaining continuity by skilful employment of pronouns.(Witte,1981:42-3)

One of the distinctive types of compositions is the *Guided* composition. It is a kind of directed writing in which a student is provided with instructions and supportive ideas that help to compose a suggested theme or subject. It follows that a student can not make a series of errors if he follows directions.(Silva,2001:65)

However; this kind of composition writing has the following weak points:

- 1- The guided composition techniques lack a means of determining graduation of control or decontrol which permit a smooth transition from highly manipulated writing practice to free composition.
- 2- The guided composition seems to force students to write for teachers' or textbook writers' purposes, but not their own.

Unlike a guided composition, there is a *Free* composition which is defined as a kind of writing which permits a student to develop his own ideas and to create his own style of writing as he chooses.

Usually the topic sentence or the subject of the composition is supplied by the teacher, and the student proceeds as he sees fit. Writing a free composition is a complex activity that includes the mechanics of writing, including spelling, and the basics of language knowledge. In addition, it includes the following:

- **generating ideas to put into print**
- **planning what to say and how to say it**
- **organizing the ideas into a coherent whole**
- **recognizing the needs of readers and how to meet those needs**
- **translating these plans into a written text, including a style of writing and word choice appropriate to the writing task and projected readers**
- **remembering all of the components that need to be included in producing the composition**
- **self-monitoring the process and reviewing the content, organization, and mechanics and then editing as needed**
- **possessing the cognitive capacity to deal with all of these aspects of complexity**
- **possessing the confidence, motivation, and perseverance to engage in the hard work needed to create a well written product.(Tannacito,1995:92)**

A free composition has these benefits:

- **It makes students more comfortable with the act of writing.**
- **It helps students bypass the "inner critic" who tells them what can't they write.**
- **It can help students discover things to write about.**
- **It can indirectly improve their formal writing.(Ibid)**

2.2 Previous Studies These studies are not adequate empirical studies on the same topic, but they refer generally to the topic of the study. They are arranged chronologically as follows:

2.2.1 Myles,Johanne(2002):

This paper explores error in writing in relation to particular aspects of second language acquisition and theories of the writing process in L1 and L2. The study argued that the process approach to instruction, with its emphasis on the writing process, meaning making, invention and multiple drafts, is only appropriate for second language learners if they are both able to get sufficient feedback with regard to their errors in writing, and are proficient enough in the language to implement revision strategies. The study sees also that although instructors may think of errors as part of a language learning process related to linguistic, situational, and psycholinguistic contexts and writing as a skill developed over time, most L2 learners' writing is judged according to criteria that are static and product-based. That teachers draw conclusions about intellectual ability on the basis of structural and grammatical problems has also been well documented Variability in writing, which is typical of a learner's interlanguage, is a concern when addressing proficiency issues. The definition of proficiency has consequences for L2 students; it affects their ability to complete writing tasks across the disciplines, cope with the demands of academic English, and receive recognition as well-informed, critical thinkers. Thus, the study concluded that in order to learn more about L2 writers' use of language in the process of writing, there is a need to apply to L2 writing the research methods utilized in exploring the composing process in L1 writing, such as think-aloud protocols. There is also a need to understand how students compose in both their native languages and in English to understand more about their learning strategies (especially in monitoring errors), the role of translation, and transfer of skills.

2.2.2 AL-Hamzi,Sultan(2006):

The study was founded on the premise that the writing process is uniquely suited to promote the skills of critical thinking and reflection as it is the area of self-expression where ideas can be reviewed, reflected

and refined. This paper reports on a study of nineteen Saudi EFL university students reflections on composition writing in English .The study revealed positive results with regard to promoting students student’s critical reflection in the service of EFL writing. Other positive indications included making a writing class a personal process, that is, a continual critical reflection on the problems posed by EFL context. Plausible explanations of the emerging results are provided and implications for EFL composition teaching are accordingly drawn.

Chapter three Procedures

3.1 The population: It consists of Iraqi EFL fourth class undergraduates during the academic year (2008-2009). The determination of the class is justified as the fourth class students are more advanced than other previous classes and they are supposed to have the accumulative knowledge of the previous academic years.

3.2 The sample: (80) male and female fourth class students of English Dep., college of Arts, of Kufah Univ.

3.3 The research instrument: A written test form was chosen as the tool of the study.

3.3.1 constructing the test: The test form consists of two questions. The first question is designed to examine the students' achievement in writing a guided composition. In this question, the title of the required composition is determined and the students are instructed to follow a certain plan to form the required composition as they are asked to write only three paragraphs, the first one as introductory, the details are in the second, and the third paragraph represents the endings. The students are provided also with some coherent ideas that are classified in a way which helps to distribute them in each paragraph of the required composition.

The second question is designed to examine the students' achievement in writing a free composition. So, it consists of only a statement which represents the topic sentence of the required composition and the students are asked to give the title and to write unified paragraphs for the required composition using their own ideas.

3.4 Statistical means: the percentage formula and Chi-A square test were adopted to obtain results for the study.

Chapter Four

The Analysis of Results

After implementing the test, the correction was made for the answer sheets of the sample of the study. The correction strategy varied according to each question. For question one, the correction was mainly concerned with the linguistic abilities of students that are used to write the required composition. Therefore; the correction was made to check the spelling mistakes of the used vocabulary, the grammatical errors of the constructed phrases and sentences, and the mistakes that were committed in using conjunctions that were used to combine sentences in each paragraph of the required composition. The correction was also concerned with the student's adoption to the question's given instructions for writing the required composition.

For question two, the correction was mainly concerned with the writing techniques that were used in the required composition. Therefore; the correction was made to check the following areas:

- a- The relativity of the title that was given by the students to the required composition.
- b- The way how the required composition is divided into paragraphs.
- c- Coherence and unity of the required composition.

4.1 Results analysis of Question One: High scores of succeeded answers were recorded for the sample. The following table shows the results with percentages :

Table (1): results of the testees in the guided composition

Succeeded	Percentage	Failed	Percentage
61	75%	19	25%

Chi-Square test was made to record (6.4) for the testees of the guided composition as a computed value and when compared with the table value which is (3.8) with (1) as the free degree, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

The above results indicate the following:

1-Iraqi EFL undergraduates have experienced such kind of guided writings throughout their academic study,i-e,other kinds of free writings are not emphasized in the courses of writings which are taught to Iraqi EFL undergraduates throughout their academic study.

2- Although 75% of the testees succeeded to answer the guided composition,many answers indicated some linguistic mistakes such as the misuse of conjunctions and the incapacity to change the provided ideas into complete and meaningful sentences. In other words, Iraqi EFL undergraduates are not taught courses of English grammar in a way that it makes those courses helpful for the writing courses throughout their academic study.

4.2 Results analysis of Question Two: Low succeeded answers were recorded from the total number of the testees . The following table shows the results with percentages :

Table (2) results of the testees in the free composition

Succeeded	Percentage	Failed	Percentage
28	35%	52	65%

Chi-A squire test was made to record (12.3) for the testees of the guided coposition as a computed value and when compared with the table value which is (3.8) with (1) as the free degree ,the nill hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

The above results indicate the following:

1-Iraqi EFL udergraduates are not able enough to produce unified and coherent writings by their own as the answers indicated the use of disconnected ideas and the failure to write coherent paragraphs for the required composition .In other words,they are not trained to such kind of free writings in their writing courses throughout their academic study.

2- Iraqi EFL udergraduates have little opportunities to express their own ideas freely throughout their academic study as their role is limited to repeat what was previously said by those who taught them.

Finally, the the results of the test proved the hypothesis of the study as the achievement of Iraqi EFL undergraduates in writing a guided composition is better than their achievement in writing a free composition.

Chapter Five

Conclusions & Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions: The study reached the following conclusions:

- 1- Iraqi EFL undergraduates are taught the writing techniques that do not emphasize free writings and the rules that should be followed in this type of writing. As a result, they are not trained to express their own ideas through writing and if they do, they fail to organize their writings in a coherent and a unified way.**
- 2- The techniques of teaching grammar courses are not very much helpful to build the linguistic abilities of Iraqi EFL undergraduates that are needed for writing.**

5.2 Recommendations: The study recommends the following:

- 1-Iraqi EFL undergraduates ought to train equally both free and guided writings.**
- 2-Writing courses ought to be the field work of grammar courses and techniques of teaching grammar courses ought to be directed to train Iraqi EFL undergraduates to apply what is taught in grammar in writing.**

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