

# Writing Deficiency among EFL University Students: Causes and Solutions

## The Case of English LMD Students at Djilali Liabes University

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### Abstract

Writing is a basic skill in language and believed to be the hardest one to teach and learn (Walters, 1987) as the writer must transcribe his/her thoughts while maintaining control over a number of aspects varying from word choice and spelling to overall text structure and layout. In addition to its multifaceted nature, writing requires a huge amount of effort and practice on the part of the learner in order to reach a standard acceptable level. The aim of the present paper is to analyse the process of teaching/learning of writing and address learners' writing deficiencies at the level of English language department at Djilali Liabes University. Additionally, through a number of research tools, reasons lying behind this problem have been identified and areas that students find most challenging in writing have been pinpointed. More importantly, the present study also puts forward a number of suggestions and solutions, most important of which is the adoption of an instructional framework for writing based on purposeful eclecticism.

**Keywords:** Writing deficiency, written expression, module, approach, practice

### 1. Introduction

Hundreds of students enrol annually in English language department at Djilali Liabes University, for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English language didactics. As part of their studies, those students are required to write essays throughout the six semesters they are supposed to spend at the university, and sit for written examinations at the end of every semester. However, their inability to write adequately affects their grades negatively and sparks off the everlasting debate over students' writing deficiency. The reasons behind this deficiency have been traditionally attributed to poor English language instruction at medium and secondary schools' levels as low entry requirements permit the admission of all students, even those who lack the rudimentary basics of English language. Regarding the mediocrity and deterioration that Algerian educational system is witnessing, raising the entry requirements and imposing higher admittance standards will result in nothing but depriving students, who are victims of the poor educational system in the first place, from pursuing their studies in a field of their choice. Furthermore, even after joining the university, students find themselves in an environment, which does not cater for their needs appropriately, and lack some of the basic requirements needed to support and enable them to develop their language skills properly, especially writing that has a direct impact on students' academic pursuit.

### 2. Writing Instruction

Writing instruction has been widely subjected to constant change of views, as the principles underpinning the teaching of this skill have been highly controversial. Driven by the disputation over which skill(s) contributes the most to effective writing, teaching of writing fell within two conflicting categories. The first one entails the supporters of "Product-oriented approach", who see writing as a means of presenting information rather than informing, and whose primary concerns are the final results and accuracy of grammatical and syntactical structures. As imitation and transforming model texts are the main activities in which learners are engaged (Jones, 2006), this approach failed to recognize that writing has a purpose and an audience, and that ideas are generated and modelled during the process of writing. Whereas the second stream is represented by the advocates of "Process-oriented approach", who view writing as a creative process of self-discovery and to whom "the development of good writing practices" is far more important than "the imitation of models" (Tribble, 1996, p. 156). Based on the recursive framework of Prewriting-Drafting-Revising-Editing-Publishing model, students in process approach are invited to draw on their personal experiences and have their personal imprint put on the piece of writing.

Rather than supporting one side to the exclusion of the other, a third stream emerged endorsing eclecticism and interchangeable use of strategies and techniques from the aforementioned mainstream approaches and the ensuing ones. This is in line with the argument put forward by Raimes (1983), who indicated that "all approaches to writing overlap, and the teacher should not be so devoted to one approach that she excludes all others." (ibid., p. 11). In fact by exclusively committing him/herself to a one single approach or a method, the teacher risks limiting his/her options,

making his/her practice less flexible and adaptive, and depriving his/her students of the opportunity to develop their skills more fully. Therefore, teachers are challenged to form a holistic understanding of all learning theories and related pedagogies (Gao, 2011), and engage in a process of “diagnosis, treatment, and assessment” (Brown, 2002, p. 13) in order to devise their own blend according to their learners’ proficiency, needs and objectives.

Characteristics associated with successful writing instruction have been the subject of a growing body of literature, resulting in setting a number of guidelines that might help usher teachers to come up with their own eclectic approach. The main criterion associated with successful writing class is the incorporation of practices applied by real writers, as this will take writing out of its dull theoretical academic shell and present it in a more meaningful and realistic way. Furthermore, as writing is the full time job of many professional writers, who is better than them to inform the instruction of this skill. Though the term “practices” sounds too broad and generic, it can be highlighted in terms of the following points

1. Students should be engaged in a meaningful experience where they tackle authentic topics, write for a clear purpose and address a real audience (Whitaker, n.d.).
2. A routine must be established to familiarise students with class atmosphere, make them feel more comfortable, help them become acquainted with the different stages of writing process, and enable them to manage their time more efficiently. (The access Center, n.d.)
3. A common language should be put in place to help discuss the different aspects of students writing and facilitate provision of feedback. Being equipped with the needed language to address and discuss different aspects of writing enables students to profit from the feedback and encourages them to engage in group discussions with their teachers as well as their peers. (ibid.)
4. A careful balance between process and product approaches must be maintained. While guiding students through different stages of writing process, teachers must provide learners with a model that keeps them on the track and help them meet rhetorical conventions required by the genre they are writing in. (Brown, 2000)
5. Reading and writing must be connected, as the former informs the latter and represents an indispensable input source for students. Students learn to write by reading materials written by others, observing and analysing models, and imitating techniques and strategies. (Brown, 2000; Whitaker, n.d.)
6. Students must be allowed ample opportunity to write and practice what they have learned, as “students learn to write best when they write frequently, for extended periods of time” (Peha, 2003, p. 3).
7. Students should be provided the opportunity to work collaboratively in terms of pairs and groups; this entails ideas generation, peer reviewing, writing sharing and publishing opportunities.
8. Rhetorical and formal conventions of writing must be presented clearly and explicitly (Brown, 2000).
9. Students must be given some freedom over the choice of the topic; this promotes their sense of ownership and motivates them to engage more actively in assignments. (Whitaker, n.d.; Brown, 2000)
10. Constructive response must be provided to students in regards of their writing. The feedback must be provided throughout the writing process as this helps teachers cover issues beyond layout errors and steer students’ compositions in the right direction (Whitaker, n.d.).

As no definition has been provided in regards of what constitute the best writing approach, last decades’ “try and err” have taught us a great deal of what can be termed as guidelines for effective writing instruction. Written expression teachers must be aware of the current writing approaches, keep in constant touch with the world of academic research, assume the role of researchers themselves, and draw on their own experiences to devise an approach that suits their learners’ style and meet their objectives.

### 3. Aim of the Study

As far as writing at Djilali Liabes English department is concerned, students are unable to develop their composition skills properly. While the problem keeps being a matter of fact clearly apparent to the naked eye, the real reason(s) lying behind it remains a dilemma where both teachers and students exchange accusations for whose fault it is. Taking into consideration that dealing with the roots of the problem and resolving writing deficiency issues at medium and secondary schools’ levels can only happen through the intervention of the highest authorities, it is necessary to investigate this persisting problem at the level of university and find the appropriate solutions that help students overcome this deficiency and improve their writing skills. Therefore, the present study aims at investigating the reasons impeding English department at Djilali Liabes University from appropriately developing students’ English writing skills through answering the following questions

1. What are the writing areas in which students fail the most?
2. Where does the problem of writing deficiency stem from?
3. What can be done to help students develop their writing skills?

In regards of the aforementioned research questions a number of hypotheses were formulated

1. Students face writing problems at different levels including organization, layout and content.
2. The reasons lying behind the problem of writing deficiency are numerous and multifaceted as they include:

- a) Inadequate teaching approaches and methods.
  - b) The negligence of practice in writing instruction.
  - c) Absence of well-defined syllabi.
  - d) Lack of coordination and complementation between different modules.
  - e) Absence of reading module.
  - f) Low readership rates among students.
1. In order to overcome writing deficiency problem, the following actions need to be taken:
    - a) An approach based on eclecticism needs to be adopted.
    - b) More time should be devoted to writing practice.
    - c) Writing syllabus need to be designed in coordination with other modules, namely grammar and reading modules.
    - d) Reading module must be introduced to the curriculum of all the three grades.

#### 4. Data Collection

In order to answer the research questions listed above and test the aforementioned hypotheses, a number of research tools were employed. First, examination scripts of first, second and third year students were analysed in order to pinpoint the areas in which students' writing fell short. It is worth pointing out that a total of 90 examination scripts of Sociolinguistic module, American Civilization module, Written Expression module and Literature module were examined. Second, a questionnaire was administered to both second year students and Written Expression module teachers to investigate the reasons lying behind writing deficiency. Furthermore, structured classroom observations were used to find out about the methods used in writing instruction and the time teachers allot to practice. Finally, first and second year curricula were examined for coordination and complementation between different modules, namely writing, grammar and reading.

#### 5. Data Analysis and discussion

As each research tool was chosen to help investigate a separate aspect or even cross check findings for more reliability, the analysis of obtained data rose a number of issues that the researcher did not anticipate leading to further investigation.

##### 5.1 Classroom Observation

Field observations were structured, as the researcher investigated three aspects of the lecture namely lecturing time, practice time and typology of practice activities. It is worth pointing out that there are four written expression teachers currently teaching at the level of our department, the observation of whom resulted in classifying them under two categories each one consisting of two teachers. The first category consists of teacher A and teacher B, who tend to devote between three to four sessions for lecturing and then dedicate between one and two sessions for composition, correction and feedback provision. Given that lecturing sessions are primarily preserved for grammar instruction and controlled activities at sentence level, teachers within this category employ in practice sessions activities that entail composition at paragraph and essay level. Though, in this category two sessions (33%) out of 6 are devoted to practice, practice sessions also entail significant time of remedial lecturing and copying from the whiteboard resulting in further reduction of actual practice time.

Whereas the second category is represented by teacher C and teacher D, who devote each session for grammar instruction along with short tasks dealing with the taught grammar points directly afterwards. Teachers in this category employ fill in the gap, substitution and completion activities, yet paragraph and essay composition are pretty much ignored. In teacher C's class lecturing and lesson copying counted for more than 80% of session's time as the time devoted to practice did not exceed 18%. Whereas for teacher D, practice time was significantly higher counting for almost 40% of class time, yet the activities entailed little if ever writing as the main aim of the lecture was grammar and conventions.

Despite the fact that "the primary needs of ESL writers consist of extensive and directed practice with global writing functions, as opposed to more extensive language instruction." (Ferris & Hedgecock, 2005, p. 10), written expression module at the level of our department is predominantly devoted to grammar instruction and studying about writing rather than learning to write. Writing instruction in Djilali Liabes University is still stuck in audio-lingual era when writing was used as a tool to test students' ability to apply grammatical rules accurately (Rivers, 1968). The current focus on grammar and controlled sentence level activities that require no real composition on the part of students has already been proven a major failure as students failed to contextualize what they learned and apply it at essay level during semestrial examinations. Furthermore, teachers seem to be ignoring practice that entail extended composition where students actually engage in a real writing process of developing ideas into paragraphs and essays, depriving them of a meaningful experience to enhance their writing abilities.

##### 5.2 Examination Scripts Analysis

The Students' examination scripts were analysed according to "University of Maryland's Freshman Writing Program" and "Six Traits Criteria from NWREL" in order to provide a full description of students writing' strengths and

weaknesses in terms of content, support, organization and mechanics. Though the researcher analysed examination copies of students from all the different grades, i.e. first year, second year and third year, the analysis revealed that students' compositions could be identified in terms of three main categories, despite the grade they are currently in, as students demonstrated different levels of control over the aforementioned four criteria.

*Group One:* compositions are characterized by the following:

- **Content:** Writer maintains clear logical position. The assignment has been followed and fulfilled at a better-than-average level. The paper appropriately addresses its intended audience.
- **Support:** All major points adequately developed and supported. The evidence is detailed, understandable and well organized. The paper may sometimes rely too heavily on the obvious, though the writer does not consistently settle for the obvious. The reasoning is adequate and thoughtful, with awareness of other points of view.
- **Organization:** The introduction and conclusion are clear, but perhaps not as forceful as they could be. Most paragraphs follow well and are appropriately divided, though one or two could be better placed and developed. Most points are logically presented and organized.
- **Mechanics:** The expression is more than competent. Sentence structure is generally correct though some sentences could be improved. Subordination, emphasis, sentence length, and variety are employed with occasional misuse. Vocabulary is acceptable and used correctly. Spelling is accurate except for some complex and irregular words. Periods and capitals are used correctly and punctuation is beginning to be used within the sentence.

*Group Two:* compositions are characterized by the following:

- **Content:** The assignment is followed to some extent. Though the paper presents an appropriate thesis, there are some drifts or lapses in logic, poor sense of audience and a limited sense of purpose. The thesis is too broad or general and the paper consists of repetitions and redundancies.
- **Support:** For the most part, the argument is supported with evidence. However, the evidence is likely to be obvious and the paper may even lack some pertinent information. The reasoning, while generally sound, is predictable and obvious; or the reasoning, while generally good, is occasionally flawed. There is some awareness of other points of view; however, some key points are developed by specific detail, some may be general and some may lack depth.
- **Organization:** There is an implicit sense of organization, but several paragraphs and/or sentences within paragraphs are underdeveloped and misplaced to the extent that the organizational structure is recognizable but disjointed. Transitions are incorrect or missing and disrupt the progression of ideas. Conclusion is absent or only a verbatim reiteration of the introduction.
- **Mechanics:** Sentence structure is generally correct, although the writer may show limited competence with sentence effectiveness, failing to use such elements as subordination, sentence variety, and modifiers to achieve emphasis. The writer demonstrates inconsistent facility in sentence formation and word choice that may result in lack of clarity and occasionally obscure meaning. The vocabulary is fairly simple, with occasional borrowings from French. The paper contains errors in spelling, subject verb agreement, tense choice, misuse of preposition and confusion between nouns and adjectives. Capitalization and punctuation are either misused or absent.

*Group Three:* compositions are characterized by the following:

- **Content:** Subject/position is vague with no unifying statement. There is a poor sense of audience and a limited sense of purpose. The thesis is unclear and cannot be discerned without significant work on the part of the reader as it is significantly characterized by drifts and lapses in logic. The paper moves confusedly in several directions. Writing is insufficient to show that criteria are met and the paper may even fall seriously short of minimum length requirements.
- **Support:** Necessary evidence is out of order and/or missing, and irrelevant evidence may instead be present leading to insufficient or repetitious writing that fails to develop key points.
- **Organization:** writing is flawed by serious disorganization and underdevelopment. The organization is difficult to discern as it seems to a significant degree haphazard or arbitrary. The introduction is unclear, too short or non-existent. As little attempt is made to paragraph writing, paragraphs are not well-developed or arranged, and transitions are incorrect or missing. Conclusion is most of the time missing.
- **Mechanics:** Grammar and spelling mistakes at all the levels are so numerous and consistent that they interfere with understanding. The diction and/or syntax may be so weak that sentences are sometimes incomprehensible for the intended audience, although experienced readers can make sense of what is written. Besides frequent borrowings from French, the used vocabulary is limited, basic and simple. Capitalization use is incorrect and punctuation is absent.

It should be pointed out that the great majority of first and second year students fall under either the second or third category, whereas the first category is mainly represented by a very small portion, fifteen per cent at best, of third year students. It is also worth mentioning that students performed in modules that require revision and memorization, such as

civilization and sociolinguistics, far better than modules that require free writing, ideas generation and extended composition, the case of written expression and literature; this difference can be inferred from the range of technical vocabulary and pertinent supporting evidence employed by students. However, even though students seemed to have memorized a great deal of information they tended to jot them down without careful planning or sufficient development, the fact that affected their marks negatively.

Students seemed unable to present their ideas and information in a systematic and organized manner. It all starts with the introduction as their unfamiliarity with prewriting strategies makes students unable to figure out how and what to start with. Additionally, the absence of preplanning makes the ideas appear disorganised and disjointed, hampering transition from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph. Furthermore, students usually end up with premature ideas and underdeveloped paragraphs because they skip the different stages of writing process and attempt to come with one final polished piece of writing right from the first shot. Moreover, the lack of revision takes a heavy toll on students' compositions as obvious and avoidable mistakes flaw the piece of writing and impair its comprehensibility. More importantly, even if a student wants to carry out a revision, he does not know what to look for, as s/he was not made aware of the traits and conventions of academic writing. Finally, all the emphasis that written expression teachers put on the decontextualized and fragmented grammar instruction counted for nothing, as students seem unable to employ what they have learned and ended up with copies seriously flawed by all types of errors at all levels.

### 5.3 Questionnaire Analysis

Section	Item	level	n°	%
1	1. Do you usually practice writing essays on your own to improve your English writing?	Yes	28	38.35
		No	45	61.64
	2. What type of writing do you do outside university? (respondents could pick more than one answer)	Homework	31	42.46
		Diaries	14	19.17
		E-mail	20	27.39
		Chatting on social networks	43	58.90
		Other types	6	8.21
		Never	2	2.73
		Rarely	22	30.13
		Sometimes	36	49.31
2	3. How often do you read outside the university?	Often	8	10.95
		Always	5	6.84
		Arabic	12(5)	16.43
		French	17(10)	23.28
		English	47	64.38
	4. In which language do you prefer to read? (respondents could pick more than one answer)	French	17(10)	23.28
		English	47	64.38

Data from section one revealed that two thirds of respondents do not practice essay writing on their own, whereas chatting and emailing were favoured by 86% of participants as their preferable space for writing in English. Ignoring essay practice exacerbate the situation even more as the major problem of writing instruction in our department is the marginalization of actual essay writing practice. On the other hand, students' interest in social networking and emailing should be exploited to provide more practice opportunities where students can compose in English while doing something they enjoy. As for the frequency of reading done by students, findings from section two indicated that 32% of informants can be referred to as non-readers compared to the mere 50% who read in a more or less a regular manner. This relatively low rate of readership among our university students can be reduced furthermore if we take into consideration that 20% of regular readers opted for either French or Arabic as the only language in which they read. Given that low readership rates is a national problem in Algeria, does not eliminate the fact that reading is a vital input source for any EFL student, and its lack or absence has a devastating effect on students' academic pursuit. Moreover, it has been widely argued that "the amount of pleasure reading a... student does in English may be used as a reliable predictor of his/her English writing proficiency" (Janopoulos, 1986, p. 767); therefore, imposing reading as a module is one of the solutions not just for alleviating writing deficiency problems but also improving students English proficiency across other skills.

Section	Item	level	n°	%
3	5. How do you find the module of “Written Expression”?	Very interesting	9	12.32
		Interesting	38	52.05
		Not really special	23	31.50
		Do not know	3	12.32
	6. How well did written expression module prepare you for the writing you do in the other courses?	Very well	5	6.84
		Well	15	20.54
		Adequately	37	50.68
		Not very well	12	16.43
		Not well at all	4	5.47
7. Are you familiar with the expression “Six Traits in Writing”?	Yes	6	8	
	No	67	92	
4	8. If yes, have tackled “Six Traits in Writing” in written expression module?	Yes	2	33.33
		No	4	66.66
	9. Are you familiar with the expression “Writing Process”?	Yes	20	27
		No	53	73
10. If yes, have tackled “Writing Process” in written expression module?	Yes	14	70	
	No	6	30	
11. Does your “written expression” teacher give you time to practice writing in classroom?	Yes	51	70	
	No	22	30	
5	12. If yes, how much time does your written expression teacher devote to practice?	Less than 25% of lesson’s time	11	15.06
		25% of lesson’s time	33	45.20
		50% of lesson’s time	6	8.21
		75% of lesson’s time	1	1.36
		More than 75% of lesson’s time	0	0

In the light of data gathered from section three, students at the level of our department can be said to have a positive attitude towards written expression module and its contribution in preparing them for writing they do across the curriculum. If properly employed, this attitude can be major boost for students’ motivation and involvement in written expression sessions. Whereas, concerning students familiarity with two major facets of any EFL writing class namely

“Six Traits” and “Writing Process”, the results obtained from section four raise a lot of questions as around 80% of respondents have no idea what it is meant by these two expressions. Results that may leave any field specialist wondering about the reasons for which such universal and pivotal aspects of EFL writing instruction are being ignored despite their effectiveness proved worldwide by a considerable body of literature and research. As for time written expression teachers devote to practice, participants revealed in section five that practice time does not exceed 25% of sessions’ time, confirming by that the findings of classroom observation. Additionally, even this limited practice time is predominantly dedicated to activities, which entail little if ever composition and primarily focuses on controlled fragmented grammatical aspects rather than actual ideas development.

Section	Item	level	n°	%
	13. Do teachers of other modules give you back your exam answer sheet to see your mistakes?	Yes	16	22
		No	57	78
	14. Do teachers of other modules correct your writing errors?	Yes	14	19
		No	59	81
6	15. If yes, what are the aspects that teachers of other modules focus on the most while correcting your writing? (respondents could pick more than one answer)	The way you present your ideas	7	50
		Organization and structure of writing	11	78.57
		Voice of the author in the piece of writing	1	7.14
		Language and vocabulary that you choose	12	85.71
		Cohesion, coherence and sentence fluency	6	42.85
		Grammar and mechanical aspects (spelling; punctuation; capitalization)	14	100

Section six revealed that 78% of informants do not receive their exam answer sheets to review their mistakes, whereas mere 19% stated that other modules’ teachers do correct students’ writing mistakes, though they predominantly focus on essay structure (78.5%), vocabulary choice (85.7) and mechanics (100%). If a student makes a mistake and then s/he does not get to identify it and learn from it, s/he will end up repeating the same mistake again. In fact, by depriving students of the opportunity to identify their mistakes and receive appropriate feedback on how to avoid them in the future, teachers are missing the whole point that examinations are not just for giving a mark but rather evaluating students’ performance and helping them improve and progress. Furthermore, other modules’ teachers should stop hiding behind “*this is not my area of speciality*” excuse and assume their share of responsibility in helping students improve their writing as this is a shared duty. Equally important, as writing is not the main objective of modules other than written expressions, teachers need to focus on other aspects that may help students fulfil tasks and address questions more properly.

#### 5.4 Syllabus analysis

The analysis of first and second year curricula revealed three main drawbacks. First, writing syllabi designers’ perception of students’ preliminary knowledge seems unrealistic, as they expect the new baccalaureate holders to be able to

- Identify different types of discourse and text ideas.
- Master different reading strategies.
- Compose different types of short texts according to a particular genre.
- Understand nature of language system and different parts of discourse (single words, simple sentences, complex sentences).
- Use language correctly across different situations.

Only a handful of secondary schools’ third year pupils can be considered proficient enough to meet “some” of the aforementioned requirements, a fact that can be confirmed by any Algerian secondary school teacher of English. These perceptions of freshmen preliminary knowledge cannot be met simply because at the level of secondary schools the aim of English language instruction is not to teach the “language” but rather to prepare pupils for “end of secondary cycle examination” (baccalaureate examination), and that is the result of pupils’ parents pressure and “mass production” policy adopted by the ministry of national education. Furthermore, as writing composition counts for mere five marks, and speaking and listening are not included at all in the examination, all the focus is on reading comprehension and grammar activities, which count for 75% of the overall mark.

Second, reading skill is completely excluded from the curriculum despite the fact that “writing competence results somehow from exposure to reading, and that good readers make good writers” (Carson, 1993, p. 85). Moreover, as a tinkering measure, reading is included within written expression module under the name “reading comprehension”; bearing in mind that written expression is taught for mere three hours a week, including another skill in its syllabus will result in nothing but limiting time even further and preventing teachers from covering the syllabus with the needed depth and practice. Equally important, classroom observation and personal conversations with written expression

teachers confirmed that these latter do not allocate any time for reading comprehension activities as time constraints do not allow them to do that. Third, the syllabi lack clarity and precision as objectives and content are described by a very broad and generic language, the fact that impedes traceability and makes it very hard, if not impossible, to verify whether syllabus' objectives are met and content is fully covered.

**6. Limitations of the Study**

Respondents' reluctance was a major hurdle, as out of 150 student questionnaires only 73 were handed back. The problem exacerbated even more with teachers, as out of five written expression teachers, to whom questionnaires were originally administered, only one teacher handed it back. Therefore, teachers' questionnaire was dropt as the number of respondents is insufficient to crosscheck the validity of responses. Furthermore, the unplanned and random arrangement of archive made the identification and localization of a particular sample of students' examination scripts through their first, second and third year impossible, therefore the researcher tried to focus on the same group yet not necessarily the same individuals.

**7. Solutions and Recommendations**

The analysis of the gathered data revealed a number of problems that impair students' writing ability and impede them from achieving the level of proficiency they are aiming for. Additionally, a number of issues that hamper written expression teaching at the level of our department have been identified. On the light of these problems a number of solutions and recommendations are suggested, they are as follow:

First, a writing instruction framework must be put in place to ensure limiting time devoted to lecturing, guarantee enough time for practice and integrate writing process and six traits as central and permanent facets in written expression module. Goals that can be achieved through principled and purposeful eclecticism. Therefore, the researcher suggests the combination of four different approaches, namely genre approach, writing process, writers' workshop and six traits approach, in the following way.

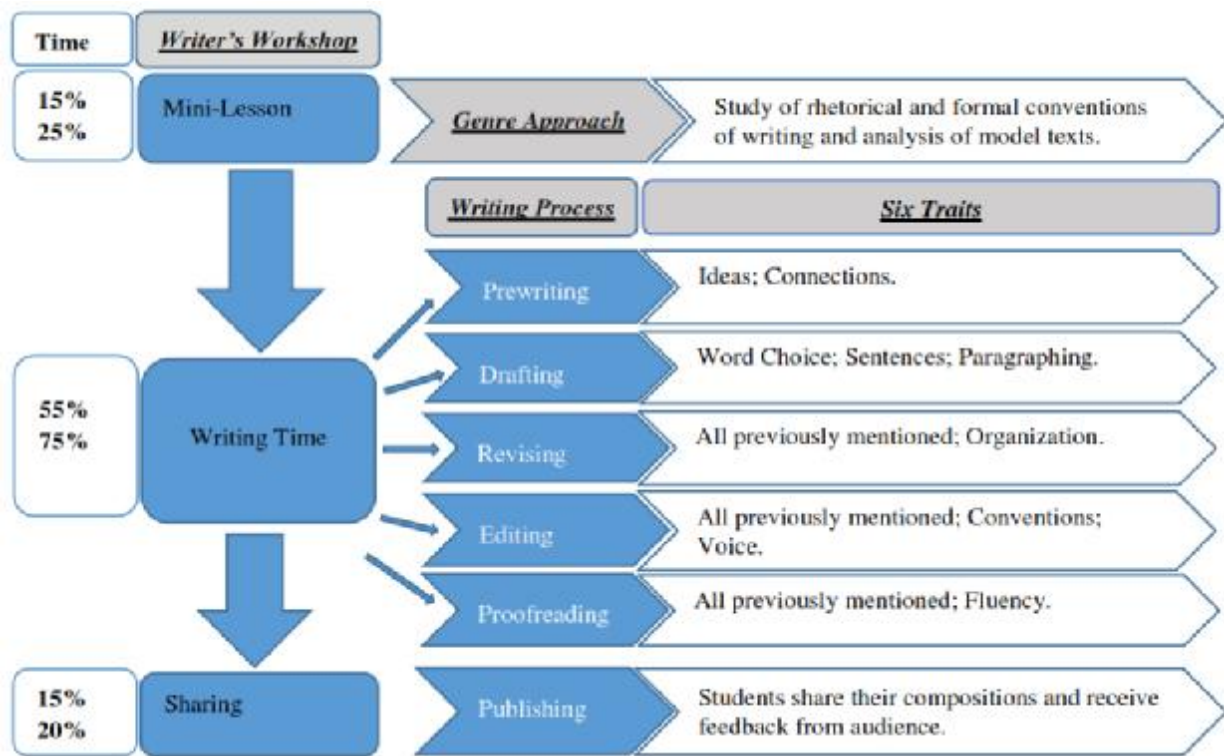


Figure 1. Eclectic Writing Instruction Framework.

Writers' approach serves a scaffold that ensures limiting lecturing time to minimum and freeing more class time for essay level practice, conferencing, feedback provision and sharing. This approach progresses through three main stages that allow the teachers to establish a routine for lessons and provide students with a predictable and unthreatening environment where they can hone their compositional skills. The second approach included in the blend is genre approach, which comes very handy at the first stage of the lesson (mini lesson), not only to teach students particular genres that they need control of in order to fulfil certain functions and help them identify aspects they should include in their compositions, but also to help shift the attention away from grammatical sub-skills and focus more on other major rhetorical and formal conventions of writing.

In addition, writing process is to be employed during the second stage (writing time) and final stage (sharing) of the lesson. The inclusion of this approach is intended to develop and improve students writing by familiarizing them with the same steps that professional writers go through, and help them break down the process of composition into



manageable chunks as they focus on one stage at a time. Going through the different stages of writing process will 1) assist students generate ideas, thoughts, and connections, and plan them logically using effective prewriting strategies; 2) help them write a draft without premature editing and develop their ideas more fully; and finally, 3) encourage them to use revision strategies to make one's draft as reader-friendly as possible and detect any layout or language errors (Zaher, 1994).

Finally, six trait approach goes hand in hand with writing process as students focus on particular aspects of writing during different stages of composition. Getting students habituated to six traits of writing will help them focus at one aspect at a time and carry out revisions that are more efficient. Concentrating on each trait separately helps students 1) break cognitive processes of writing into six key components, 2) provide students with the needed vocabulary to identify, classify, and discuss their own mistakes as well as those of their peers, and 3) help them carry out revisions that are more systematic. At the other end of the spectrum, teachers will have 1) a common language to discuss with their students all the different aspects of their compositions, 2) a framework upon which they may create, plan and deliver their lessons, in addition to 3) assessing their students' compositions more effectively using "Six Traits Scoring Rubric".

Second, introduction of a module for reading is a must as "Our experience as academic writers and teachers of writing confirms our belief that meaningful writing instruction is literacy instruction and that one cannot successfully teach writing without also simultaneously teaching reading" (Ferris & Hedgecock, 2005, p. 22). Reading must be included as an independent module to ensure appropriate instruction of this neglected skill, rather than including it in an ad hoc manner within written expression as the limited time devoted to this latter does not allow that. Therefore, introduction of reading module should happen at the level of first, second and third year curricula to alleviate the seriousness of low readership rates among our students.

Third, written expression module, grammar module and reading module must be designed and taught in coordination. As all the three are dependent on one another, both reading module and grammar module should inform written expression module. Whereas the latter will be a great opportunity for students to practice what they have learned in the other two modules and employ it in a more meaningful and productive way. Furthermore, such a coordination will help written expression teachers avoid teaching grammar as extensively as they are currently doing. First step towards this coordination is by designing the syllabi of the three modules so that they address the same points at the same time, be it in term of grammar, theme, genre or register. Then, the syllabus of each module must be detailed and framed within clear time limits to enable such coordination. Finally, teachers of the three modules should hold regular meetings to ensure that all the modules are progressing in tandem.

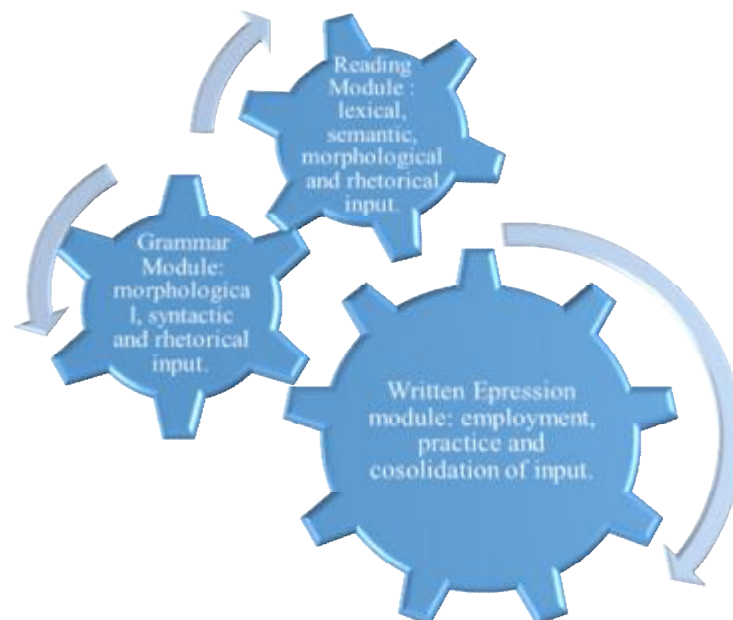


Figure 2. Complementation and Dependability between Reading Module, Grammar Module and Written Expression Module

Fourth, three hours a week is a very limited time for the instruction of such a significant and complex skill like writing. Written expression module must be taught three times a week (one hour and a half for each session) in order to allow teachers enough time to apply writers' workshop and give students enough time to go through the different stages of writing process and practice as much as they should.

Fifth, students must be allowed the chance to see their examination answer sheets after correction, so that they can identify their mistakes and learn from them. Furthermore, all teachers must hold a compulsory correction session after each semester examination, in which they provide students with a model answer and address the most common errors committed by students.

Sixth, as the Algerian pre-tertiary education has been proved unable to equip students with the needed rudimentary writing skills, therefore, the university has to assume that extra burden by lowering the expectation towards students' preliminary knowledge and compensating that by providing thorough and effective curricula that help freshmen build their basic skills and further develop them.

Finally, by preventing students from writing their bachelor degree thesis and replacing it by "a mere seven page proposal", students are deprived of a huge opportunity to conduct a scientific research, read extensively and put pen to paper to compose extended essays. Given that it is a significant learning opportunity, bachelor degree thesis must be reintroduced and students should be required to write a conventional thesis for their bachelor degree.

## 8. Conclusion

As it was revealed by data analysis, students writing problems go far beyond mechanics and layout issues. Besides being unable to address topics in a clear and systematic manner, students face organisational and ideas development issues. All these problems stem from students unfamiliarity with writing process and six traits, as the adoption of these two approaches would help students write in a more effective manner. As for the problems lying behind students' deficiency, they have been attributed to a number of reasons, the most important of which is teaching methods adopted by written expression teachers, who overwhelmingly focus on grammar instruction and neglect the importance of practice that entails purposeful extended composition beyond sentence level. Lack of coordination between grammar and written expression modules in addition to the absence of a well-defined syllabus are also deemed to be among the major reasons perpetuating writing deficiency problem. Moreover, lack of reading done by students and absence of a reading module contributed to the exacerbation of the problem.

In regards of these issues, a number of solutions were suggested including the adoption of writing instruction framework based on eclecticism and systematic use of a set of approaches and techniques in a way that helps cater to students needs more effectively. Furthermore, first and second year curricula need a thorough revision as a module of reading must be included, and the design of writing, grammar and reading syllabi in a coordinated and complementary manner is a must. Additionally, a set of regulations that ensure the provision of correction sessions and allow students the opportunity to identify their mistakes and receive appropriate feedback is one of the potential solutions. Broadly speaking, current practices that nurtured and perpetuated this everlasting writing deficiency problem needs to be addressed in a direct way and eventually eradicated. As previously adopted tinkering and partial solutions did not help alleviate this problem, not even a bit, decisive decisions and long-term solutions need to be taken.

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