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Challenges faced by EFL teachers when teaching writing skill
Case study: first year university students.

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Declaration of Originality

We, Mehdi Mohamed Abdelmalek and Wafa Zahani, hereby declare that this dissertation, submitted in partial fulfilment of the Master's degree in English Language Studies at the Department of English, University Chadli Bendjedid – El Tarf, is our own original and independent work. It has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification, and all sources consulted have been fully acknowledged. Any material drawn from other scholars has been clearly identified and attributed throughout the text and bibliography. We understand that plagiarism constitutes a serious violation of academic integrity and accept full joint responsibility for the accuracy and originality of all content presented here.

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Dedication

To my beloved parents, whose endless sacrifices, prayers, and unconditional love have been my greatest source of strength and inspiration throughout my academic journey. Your belief in me never wavered, even when I doubted myself. This work is as much yours as it is mine.

To my dear brothers and sisters, for your constant encouragement, patience, and for always believing that I could achieve anything I set my mind to. Your support has meant more to me than words can ever express.

- **Mehdi Mohammed Abdelmal**

Abstract

The teaching of writing skills in EFL contexts is widely recognised as one of the most demanding tasks faced by language educators today. This dissertation investigates the challenges encountered by EFL teachers in teaching writing to first-year university students at the Department of English. It addresses three core questions: what challenges teachers face, how pedagogical, institutional, and material factors interact to hinder effective instruction, and what recommendations can improve the teaching of writing at the university level. The study adopts a descriptive approach, employing two questionnaires administered to EFL teachers and first-year students. Data were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively across four categories: the teaching process, feedback and correction, content and materials, and assessment. Findings reveal an interconnected set of challenges, including difficulties managing large mixed-ability classes, providing adequate scaffolding, and balancing accuracy with fluency. Feedback practices were hampered by time constraints and students' tendency to disregard written comments.

Keywords: EFL, writing, teaching challenges, writing skills, first-year university students,

Abstract in Arabic

يُعدّ تدريس مهارات الكتابة في سياق تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من أكثر المهام تحديًا التي يواجهها معلمو اللغات اليوم. تتناول هذه الأطروحة التحديات التي يواجهها أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في تدريس مهارة الكتابة لطلاب السنة الأولى جامعي بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية. تعالج الدراسة ثلاثة محاور رئيسية: التحديات التي يواجهها الأساتذة، وكيفية تفاعل العوامل البيداغوجية والمؤسسية والمادية في إعاقه فاعلية التدريس، والتوصيات الكفيلة بتحسين تعليم الكتابة على المستوى الجامعي اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي، مستخدمةً استبيانين موجّهين لأساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وطلاب السنة الأولى على حد سواء. وقد خضعت البيانات للتحليل الكيفي والكمي وفق أربعة محاور: العملية التعليمية، التوجيه و التصحيح، المحتوى والمواد التعليمية، والتقييم كشفت النتائج عن جملة من التحديات المتشابهة، أبرزها: صعوبة إدارة الفصول الكبيرة ذات المستويات المتباينة، وتقديم الدعم البيداغوجي الكافي، وتحقيق التوازن بين الدقة اللغوية والطلاقة التعبيرية. كما أثرت القيود الزمنية سلبيًا على ممارسات التغذية الراجعة، فضلًا عن ميل الطلاب إلى إهمال التعليقات الكتابية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، الكتابة، تحديات التدريس، مهارات الكتابة، طلاب السنة الأولى جامعي.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CEFR – Common European Framework of Reference for Languages EAP – English for Academic Purposes

EFL – English as a Foreign Language ELT – English Language Teaching ESA – Engage, Study, Activate

ESP – English for Specific Purposes ESL – English as a Second Language

ICT – Information and Communication Technology L1 – First Language

L2 – Second Language

N – Number of Participants Q – Question

TEFL – Teaching English as a Foreign Language ZPD – Zone of Proximal Development

Chapter One

Introduction

Writing is widely regarded as one of the most cognitively demanding skills to teach in any language, because it requires the explicit mastery of interrelated competencies such as grammar, vocabulary, discourse organisation, rhetorical convention, and audience awareness that must be consciously taught and refined over time. Writing proficiency is considered a core academic objective, yet remains persistently challenging for both learners and instructors. First-year university students arrive with highly varied linguistic backgrounds, limited experience with academic writing conventions, and deeply rooted anxiety about writing in a foreign language, while their teachers struggle to bridge that gap with large class sizes, insufficient time, and limited institutional support. This dissertation investigates the challenges faced by teachers when teaching writing to first year university students. The dissertation starts with an introductory chapter, followed by chapter two a review of the literature. Chapter Three presents the research methodology. Chapter Four analyses the findings across five thematic categories. Chapter Five discusses the findings, concludes the study, and puts forward practical recommendations.

Background of the Study

The teaching of writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts has evolved considerably, moving from product-oriented approaches dominant in mid-twentieth century pedagogy through process-based methodologies in the 1980s, to contemporary genre-based and sociocultural perspectives. Scholars such as Harmer (2004) emphasise that effective writing instruction must engage the linguistic, cognitive, and social dimensions of written production, while Holliday (1994, 2005) foregrounds the ideological tensions arising when native-speaker norms and Western academic conventions are applied in non-Western settings.

In the Algerian university context, EFL writing instruction is further complicated by a multilingual sociolinguistic landscape, and the rapid expansion of English programmes. First-year students are expected to develop foundational academic writing skills within a single year, across courses that must simultaneously cover grammar, vocabulary, text organisation, and writing process all within large, mixed-proficiency classes and with limited teacher training in writing pedagogy specifically.

Despite writing's centrality to academic success, existing research has focused predominantly on student difficulties, leaving teacher challenges largely underexplored. The present study addresses this gap.

Statement of the Problem

Although writing is acknowledged as a foundational academic skill, it remains one of the most difficult competencies to develop among EFL learners at the university level. EFL teachers working with first-year students face a series of overlapping challenges that hinder effective writing instruction. These challenges include managing large mixed-ability classes, providing meaningful feedback, and selecting culturally relevant materials. Despite these well-documented difficulties, locally grounded empirical research systematically examining these challenges remains scarce. Without a clear understanding of what these obstacles are, it is difficult to design appropriate support structures, revise curricula, or develop targeted professional development programmes. This study therefore addresses the following central problem: what are the main challenges EFL teachers face when teaching writing to first-year university students?

Research Questions

In order to achieve the objectives outlined above, this study is structured around the following research questions:

1. What are the main challenges that EFL teachers face when teaching writing to first-year university students ?
2. How do pedagogical, institutional, and material factors interact to hinder effective writing instruction in EFL university context?
3. What recommendations can be proposed to improve the teaching of writing to first-year university students?

Research Hypotheses

Based on the existing literature and the preliminary observations that motivated this study, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1. EFL teachers face significant challenges in teaching writing skill, spanning pedagogical, institutional, ideological, and material dimensions.

Hypothesis 2. Pedagogical, institutional, and material factors do not operate in isolation but interact cumulatively to hinder effective writing instruction, creating a structurally constrained teaching environment that limits both teacher practice and student development.

Hypothesis 3. Targeted improvements at the institutional level — including reduced class sizes, investment in professional development, the provision of culturally relevant materials, and the adoption of process-oriented assessment practices, would meaningfully enhance the quality of EFL writing instruction at the first-year university level.

Research Objectives

The present study is guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To identify and describe the main challenges that EFL teachers encounter when teaching writing to first-year university students.

2. To examine how pedagogical factors such as balancing accuracy and fluency, managing mixed-ability and large classes, providing adequate scaffolding, and allocating sufficient time for the writing process — interact with institutional constraints and material limitations to hinder effective writing instruction.

3. To formulate evidence-based recommendations for improving the conditions of EFL writing instruction at the first-year university level, with specific reference to professional development, class size reduction, and culturally inclusive materials.

Aims of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to produce a comprehensive, empirically grounded account of the challenges facing EFL teachers in teaching writing skill to first-year university students. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to the theoretical understanding of EFL writing pedagogy while simultaneously offering practical, context-sensitive recommendations for teachers, curriculum designers, and educational policymakers.

The significance of this study is threefold. First, it makes an empirical contribution by generating original, locally grounded data on a topic that has received limited research attention. Second, it makes a pedagogical contribution by identifying specific areas where teacher support, professional development, and curriculum design are most urgently needed. Third, it makes a theoretical contribution by situating local findings within the broader international literature on EFL writing pedagogy, thereby enriching scholarly understanding of how global challenges manifest in specific sociolinguistic and institutional contexts.

Research Methodology and Design

This study adopts a descriptive research design, which is appropriate given its primary aim of systematically identifying and describing the challenges associated with teaching and learning writing skill in the EFL context. The descriptive approach allows for the collection and analysis of data that accurately reflects the experiences and perceptions of both teachers and students regarding EFL writing instruction at the university level.

The primary data collection instruments are two structured questionnaires, one administered to EFL teachers and the other to first-year university students. The questionnaires were designed to elicit both quantitative responses through close-ended items and qualitative insights through open-ended questions. This mixed-methods approach enables the study to capture a comprehensive understanding of the challenges surrounding EFL writing instruction from both teachers and learners perspectives.

The study is positioned within a case study framework, which is well suited to the investigation of complex, context-dependent phenomena within a bounded institutional setting. While the case study design limits the generalisability of the findings, it allows for a level of contextual richness and analytical depth that broader survey-based approaches cannot provide. The data collected were analysed thematically, with findings organised around the five principal challenge categories identified in the literature review: the teaching process, feedback and correction, power dynamics and ideology, content and materials, and assessment.

Limitations of the Study

As with any empirical investigation, this study is subject to a number of limitations that must be acknowledged in order to ensure a transparent and accurate interpretation of the findings. First, the study relies exclusively on self-reported data collected through a questionnaire. While this instrument is well suited to capturing teachers' perceptions and experiences, it is subject to social desirability bias, whereby respondents may present their practices and challenges in a more favourable light than the reality warrants. The absence of classroom observation data means that the study cannot independently verify the challenges reported by participants.

Second, although the study incorporates data collected from both EFL teachers and first-year university students through questionnaires, it does not include additional sources of data such as classroom observations, interviews, or document analysis. The inclusion of such methods could have provided a more comprehensive and triangulated understanding of the challenges associated with teaching and learning writing skills in the EFL context.

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations refer to the conscious choices made by the researchers to define and narrow the scope of the study. This study is deliberately delimited in several respects. In terms of population, The study focuses primarily on the challenges faced by EFL teachers while also incorporating students' perspectives, teachers working at other year levels, in other departments, or at other institutions are not included. In terms of content, the study concentrates on the teaching of writing skill and does not seek to address challenges related to the teaching of other language skills such as reading, listening, or speaking, except insofar as these intersect directly with writing instruction. The study also does not address the broader question of student writing achievement or proficiency levels, focusing instead on the teacher's pedagogical experience.

Methodologically, the study is delimited to a questionnaire-based approach and does not incorporate classroom observations, interviews, or document analysis, which would have broadened its scope beyond the constraints of the present project. These delimitations are not

weaknesses but rather deliberate decisions that allow the study to maintain a clear focus and produce findings of sufficient depth within the available time frame.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation follows IMRAD structure, consisting of a general introduction, four chapters, and a general conclusion.

- **Chapter One (Introductory chapter to the study)** presents the background of the study, statement of the problem, limitations and delimitations of the study, aims of the study, research questions and hypotheses, and the structure of the dissertation.

- **Chapter Two (Review of Literature)** reviews the relevant literature on EFL writing instruction, writing pedagogy, and the challenges encountered by EFL teachers and learners.

- **Chapter Three (Method)** describes the research design, context, sample, data collection tool (questionnaire), pilot study, and data analysis procedures.

- **Chapter Four (Results and Discussions)** presents and interprets the findings obtained from the online questionnaire completed, discusses the findings, provides pedagogical recommendations based on the findings, acknowledges the limitations of the study, and suggests directions for future research.

Conclusion

This chapter presents an overview of the dissertation. It starts with the importance of writing skill at the highly academic university level. It identifies the challenges faced by EFL teachers when teaching writing to first-year university students, and provides a background of the study, identifies the research questions, hypotheses, and objectives that guided this research. It also shows the limitations and delimitations of the study. Finally, a detailed description of the structure of the dissertation is mentioned, explaining briefly the contents of each chapter.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

Introduction

This chapter presents a literature review on the challenges faced by EFL teachers when teaching writing to first-year university students, along with possible classroom solutions. The review is organized into two main parts. The first part examines the nature of writing and the teaching of writing in the EFL classroom. The second part identifies and analyzes the various types of challenges that confront teachers of written expression, followed by practical classroom solutions drawn from the literature.

PART ONE: WRITING AND TEACHING WRITING

Defining Writing in the EFL Context

Writing is a fundamental language skill that presents unique characteristics distinguishing it from other modes of communication. Unlike speaking, which occurs in real-time with immediate feedback from interlocutors, writing is a solitary activity that requires sustained concentration and self-monitoring. As Harmer (1998, p. 79) observes, writing serves multiple purposes in language learning: it provides "reinforcement" of previously learned language, contributes to ongoing "language development," accommodates different "learning styles," and stands as "a basic language skill" in its own right.

The cognitive demands of writing are substantial. Flower and Hayes (1981) conceptualized writing as a complex cognitive process involving planning, translating, and reviewing. For second language writers, these processes are further complicated by the need to operate in a language they are still acquiring. Kormos (2012) notes that L2 writers must allocate limited

attentional resources across multiple demands, including content generation, linguistic encoding, and monitoring for accuracy. For first-year university students, who are transitioning from secondary education to higher education, this cognitive load is particularly challenging.

The Importance of Teaching Writing

Writing instruction in the EFL classroom serves several crucial functions. First, it provides visual demonstration of language construction, helping students internalize grammatical structures and vocabulary through the physical act of production. Second, it contributes to language development by engaging students in the mental activity required to construct coherent texts. Third, it accommodates diverse learning styles, offering reflective learners the opportunity to process language at their own pace. Finally, writing is a necessary skill for academic and professional success, enabling students to participate in international academic and professional communities (Hyland, 2016).

For first-year university students, the ability to write effectively in English is not merely an academic requirement but an essential tool for future professional success. In the contemporary globalized economy, writing skills are prerequisite for participation in international discourse communities.

Approaches to Teaching Writing

Product-Oriented Approach

The product-oriented approach emphasizes the formal features of texts and the importance of accurate production. In this approach, students study model texts, analyze their features, and produce parallel texts following similar patterns. Harmer (1998, pp. 80-81) illustrates this through his example of teaching postcard writing, where students examine a model postcard before writing their own versions.

The product approach typically involves three stages: analysis of model texts, controlled practice of specific features, and free production following the model (Nunan, 1999). While critics argue that this approach can lead to mechanical, formulaic writing, it remains valuable for lower-proficiency students who need structure and support.

Process-Oriented Approach

The process-oriented approach emerged from research on how expert writers compose (Emig, 1971; Flower & Hayes, 1981). This approach emphasizes writing as a recursive process involving planning, drafting, revising, and sharing. Harmer's (1998, pp. 82-83) example of newspaper article writing illustrates this approach: students discuss newspapers, match headlines with stories, analyze headline conventions, brainstorm ideas, write headlines, draft articles, and share their work.

In L2 writing pedagogy, the process approach typically involves multiple stages: prewriting (generating ideas), drafting (getting ideas on paper), revising (improving content and organization), editing (correcting language errors), and publishing (sharing with readers). As Raimes (1983) notes, this approach shifts the focus from the teacher's evaluation to the writer's development.

Genre-Based Approach

Genre-based approaches emphasize the social purposes of writing and the distinctive features of different text types. Drawing on systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994), genre-based pedagogy explicitly teaches students the structural and linguistic features of specific genres such as reports, explanations, or arguments.

As Hyland (2004, p. 11) explains, genre-based approaches are grounded in the understanding that "writing is a social activity and that texts are not autonomous objects but are produced by

people for particular purposes and audiences." Genre-based pedagogy typically involves a cycle of teaching activities: modeling (analyzing examples of the target genre), joint construction (teacher and students collaboratively compose a text), and independent construction (students produce their own texts). For first-year university students who need to master academic genres, this explicit, scaffolded approach has proven effective (Hyland, 2007).

Balancing Multiple Approaches

For first-year university students, the challenge lies in finding the right balance between these approaches. Too much emphasis on product can lead to mechanical, unengaged writing. Too much emphasis on process, however, can leave students without the structural support they need. Hyland (2003) argues that effective writing instruction must attend to both process and product, helping students develop strategies for generating and organizing ideas while also providing clear models of target genres.

The Role of Models and Scaffolding

Harmer's (1998, p. 81) concept of "parallel writing" reflects a broader pedagogical strategy of providing models that students can use as scaffolds for their own writing. The theoretical foundation for this approach lies in Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the related concept of scaffolding. Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) defined scaffolding as the support provided by a more knowledgeable other that enables learners to perform tasks they could not accomplish independently.

However, the use of models raises important questions about creativity and appropriation. Tribble (1996, p. 58) argues that the goal of using models should not be to encourage mere imitation but to provide students with "a framework within which they can make their own meanings." Research by Tomlinson (2011) suggests that effective use of models involves not just presenting examples but helping students analyze them critically.

PART TWO: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Challenges Related to the Content of Writing

Selecting Appropriate and Engaging Topics

One of the teacher's most fundamental challenges is choosing topics that will engage students while remaining within their linguistic capabilities. Harmer (1998, p. 80) emphasizes that writing tasks "will depend on their age, interests and level." For first-year university students, topics that are too simplistic can be demotivating, while topics requiring specialized knowledge may be inaccessible.

The challenge is compounded by the diversity of students' backgrounds and interests. In a typical first-year class, students may come from different academic disciplines and possess different reasons for learning English. Harmer (1998, p. 80) suggests that "when we have a much more mixed group... we will choose writing tasks which we think are generally useful but which, more importantly, they are likely to enjoy doing."

Solutions: To address this challenge, teachers can adopt a learner-centered approach to topic selection. This involves conducting needs analysis at the beginning of the course to identify students' interests, academic goals, and professional aspirations (Graves, 2000). Teachers can also engage in topic negotiation, presenting several options and allowing students to vote on which topics to explore (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000). Additionally, offering choice within structure—allowing students to choose specific focuses within a given genre—balances instructional needs with student engagement.

Ensuring Cultural Appropriacy

When teachers select topics based on the assumption that all students from a particular country share the same cultural background, they risk reinforcing stereotypes and marginalizing students whose experiences do not fit expected patterns.

Solutions: Teachers can adopt a critical pedagogical approach that treats culture as a dynamic resource for learning. This involves selecting diverse models from various cultural contexts, including texts produced by successful L2 writers (Canagarajah, 2002). Teachers should engage students in explicit discussion of cultural assumptions embedded in texts, asking questions such as "What does this text assume about its reader?" (Kubota, 2004). Writing tasks can be designed to invite students to draw on their own cultural knowledge and experiences, comparing cultural practices and analyzing how cultural values are reflected in different communication styles.

Challenges Faced by First-Year Learners

Psychological Barriers: Anxiety and Fear of Errors

Writing in a foreign language can be an anxiety-provoking experience. Harmer (1998, p. 23) notes that "adults are frequently more nervous of learning than younger pupils are. The potential for losing face becomes greater the older you get." This anxiety is often heightened in writing, where errors are permanently visible. Research on second language writing anxiety (Cheng, 2004) has identified three dimensions: somatic anxiety (physical symptoms), cognitive anxiety (worries about evaluation), and avoidance behavior.

Solutions: Teachers can implement strategies that create a supportive, low-stakes writing environment. Low-stakes writing activities such as freewriting, journals, or quickwrites allow students to practice without evaluation pressure (Elbow, 1998). Process-oriented feedback that focuses on drafts rather than final products helps students see writing as developmental. Positive reinforcement through encouraging comments "anything from 'Well done' to 'This is a good story'" (Harmer, 1998, p. 84)—maintains motivation. Creating a supportive classroom culture that normalizes errors as part of learning reduces fear of making mistakes.

Cognitive and Linguistic Barriers: Generating Ideas and L1 Interference

First-year students often struggle with generating ideas. Harmer's (1998) techniques such as "altering dictations" (p. 81) and using music to stimulate writing (p. 116) address this challenge. Additionally, students face linguistic barriers related to transfer from their first language. Harmer (1998, p. 62) identifies "interference from the students' own language" as a major source of errors.

Solutions:

Teachers can provide explicit instruction in prewriting strategies including brainstorming, clustering or mind mapping, freewriting, and questioning (Raimes, 1983; Rico, 1983; Elbow, 1998). To address L1 interference, contrastive analysis can explicitly compare features of English with students' first language (Connor, 2011). Noticing activities draw students' attention to specific linguistic features (Schmidt, 1990). Error analysis helps students understand the sources of their errors (Corder, 1967). Corpus-based instruction shows how words and structures are actually used by proficient writers (Hyland, 2007).

Script and Handwriting Difficulties

For students whose first language uses a non-Roman script, writing in English presents an additional challenge. Harmer (1998, p. 84) acknowledges that "many nationalities do not use the same kind of script as English, so for students from those cultures writing in English is doubly difficult."

Solutions:

Teachers can provide explicit handwriting instruction for students who need it, including special classes or group sessions (Harmer, 1998, p. 85). Model texts with clear script serve as examples. Encouraging typing bypasses handwriting difficulties while preparing students for academic and professional writing. Handwriting practice materials, such as lined paper demonstrating letter position and height, support script development.

Challenges Faced by Teachers

The Teaching Process: Scaffolding and Balancing Accuracy and Fluency

Teachers face complex decisions about how much support to provide and when. Harmer's (1998) ESA framework (Engage, Study, Activate) provides a structure for these decisions. For first-year university students, providing enough support to prevent frustration while gradually withdrawing support to encourage independence is a key challenge.

Solutions: The gradual release of responsibility, moving from teacher modeling to guided practice to independent writing (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983)—provides a structured framework. Strategic use of the ESA framework allows teachers to vary activity sequences. Integrating skills by combining writing with reading, speaking, and listening makes writing more meaningful. Differentiated instruction provides different levels of support for different students based on their needs (Tomlinson, 2014). Explicit strategy instruction teaches students strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Graham & Harris, 2005).

The Feedback Process: The "Red Pen" Dilemma

Perhaps no aspect of teaching writing is as fraught as error correction. Harmer (1998, p. 84) captures the problem: "Most students find it very dispiriting if they get a piece of written work back and it is covered in red ink." Yet ignoring errors entirely is equally problematic.

Solutions: Focused feedback—telling students that for a particular piece of work only specific error types will be corrected—prevents overwhelming students (Harmer, 1998, p. 84). Using correction symbols (S = spelling, WO = word order) makes correction look less damaging. Peer feedback, when accompanied by explicit training, reduces teacher workload while promoting collaborative learning (Min, 2006). Feedback as dialogue through conferences or written responses positions feedback as conversation rather than judgment (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). Self-assessment using criteria or checklists develops metacognitive awareness (Harris & McCann, 1994). Emphasizing revision ensures feedback is acted upon (Harmer, 1998, p. 84).

The Final Product: From Summative Assessment to Learning Opportunity

In many educational contexts, writing is primarily assessed rather than taught. Harmer's (1998) approach suggests a different vision: the final product as one stage in an ongoing learning process.

Solutions: Creating authentic audiences—having students share their work through class noticeboards, publications, or collaborative projects—increases engagement (Harmer, 1998, p. 83; Magnifico, 2010). Using portfolios allows assessment of progress over time (Hamp-Lyons, 2007). Implementing self-assessment promotes reflection and metacognitive awareness.

Balancing formative and summative assessment ensures support throughout the writing process while meeting grading requirements (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Celebrating completion through reading celebrations or publication validates student achievement.

Conclusion

This literature review has examined the challenges faced by EFL teachers when teaching writing to first-year university students and has presented possible classroom solutions. The review was organized into two main parts: the first part explored the nature of writing and approaches to teaching writing in the EFL classroom; the second part identified and analyzed various types of challenges related to content selection, learner characteristics, and teacher practices, along with corresponding solutions.

The solutions discussed emphasize the importance of creating supportive classroom environments, providing balanced feedback, and developing critical cultural awareness. These approaches position students as active participants in their own learning and recognize writing as a tool for meaning-making rather than simply a set of skills to be mastered.

Chapter Three

Method

Introduction

This research investigates the challenges that EFL teachers face when teaching writing to first-year university students. In the previous chapter, we reviewed the relevant literature on EFL writing instruction and the main difficulties encountered in this context. This chapter provides a comprehensive account of the approach followed in conducting this study. It describes where the study took place, who the participants are, what research design was adopted, and which instruments were used to gather the data needed to answer the research questions.

The Research Design: The Method

The descriptive method was chosen for this study owing to its suitability for investigating educational phenomena as they naturally occur. This approach allows the researchers to collect detailed information about the perceptions and experiences of both teachers and students without manipulating any variables. By combining quantitative items, in the form of Likert-scale statements, with open-ended questions, the study is able to capture both measurable patterns and individual perspectives. Two questionnaires were designed and distributed electronically via Google Forms: one targeting first-year students and one targeting EFL teachers at the same department. The links were shared with participants during and after class sessions through available communication channels within the department.

Participants

The study involved two groups of participants. The first group consists of first-year undergraduate students enrolled in the English Language Studies programme during the academic year 2025/2026. These students were selected because they are the direct recipients of writing instruction at the level under investigation. The second group consists of ten EFL teachers responsible for delivering written expression courses to first-year students in the same department. Both groups were invited to participate voluntarily, and all were assured that their responses would remain entirely anonymous and confidential.

Data Gathering Instruments and Procedures

In order to collect the data required for this study, the questionnaire was selected as the main research instrument. A questionnaire is a set of written questions designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from participants within a relatively short period of time. It provides a practical and efficient means of gathering information from multiple respondents simultaneously, and it allows participants to respond anonymously, which tends to encourage more honest and candid answers. Two separate questionnaires were developed for this study: one for students and one for teachers.

The Students' Questionnaire Description

The student questionnaire was designed to collect data on first-year students' perceptions of and difficulties with writing in English. Participants were asked to respond by selecting the answer that best reflects their opinion, and to provide written answers in the spaces provided for open-ended questions. The anonymity of respondents was ensured throughout. The questionnaire is divided into three sections.

Section One: Background Information. This section gathers basic information about the participants, including how long they have been studying English (Q1) and whether they write in English outside of class (Q2).

Section Two: Students' Writing Perceptions. This section examines students' attitudes and experiences related to writing in English. It includes Likert-scale statements on their enjoyment of writing (Q3), the difficulty of writing compared to speaking (Q4), the importance of writing for their future (Q5), and their confidence as writers (Q6). A second set of statements covers their perceptions of classroom writing activities, including how well they understand writing tasks (Q7), their interest in the topics given (Q8), the time available for writing (Q9), and the quality of teacher instruction and feedback (Q10–Q11).

Section Three: Challenges and Recommendations. This is the core section of the questionnaire. It addresses writing anxiety (Q12–Q14), difficulties with generating and organising ideas (Q15–Q16), linguistic challenges related to grammar, vocabulary, and L1 interference (Q17–Q19), and mechanical difficulties such as spelling, punctuation, and handwriting (Q20–Q22). It also investigates students' attitudes towards teacher feedback and error correction (Q23–Q27). The section concludes with multiple-choice items on preferred writing activities (Q28), preferred feedback formats (Q29), and perceived improvement strategies (Q30), followed by two open-ended questions asking students to name their three biggest writing difficulties (Q31) and to suggest what their teacher could do to help them improve (Q32).

The Teachers' Questionnaire Description

The teacher questionnaire was designed to investigate the perceptions and experiences of EFL teachers regarding the challenges they face when teaching writing to first-year university students. It also explores the strategies teachers use to address these challenges and the institutional or professional changes they consider necessary. Teachers were asked to select the response that best represents their opinion and to provide written elaboration where required. The questionnaire is divided into three sections.

Section One: Background Information. This section collects general information about the participants, specifically their years of experience teaching EFL writing (Q1) and the average size of their writing classes (Q2).

Section Two: Teachers' Writing Perceptions. This section contains five Likert-scale statements exploring teachers' professional confidence in teaching academic writing (Q3), their view of the curriculum's suitability for first-year students (Q4), the sufficiency of time for providing feedback (Q5), the adequacy of available teaching materials (Q6), and their assessment of how well prepared students are when they arrive at university (Q7).

Section Three: Challenges and Recommendations. This section is the most substantive part of the teacher questionnaire. It includes nine Likert-scale statements addressing a range of pedagogical and institutional challenges: managing mixed-ability classes (Q8), the effect of large class sizes on feedback (Q9), insufficient time for the writing process (Q10), balancing accuracy and fluency (Q11), limited student motivation (Q12), scaffolding difficulties (Q13), institutional pressure against process-based approaches (Q14), lack of culturally relevant materials (Q15), and conflicts between formal assessment and formative writing practices (Q16). The section then presents four open-ended questions inviting teachers to identify their most significant challenge (Q17), describe the strategies they have found most effective (Q18), suggest institutional or policy changes that would improve writing instruction (Q19), and indicate what forms of professional development would best support their teaching (Q20).

Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter has described the methodological approach adopted in this study. The descriptive method was applied through two questionnaires administered electronically via Google Forms to first-year students and EFL teachers. The instruments were designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data covering the full range of challenges associated with EFL writing instruction. The next chapter will present the data analysis and findings in response to the study's research questions.

Chapter Four

Results and Discussions

Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses, and discusses the data collected through the two questionnaires administered to EFL teachers and first-year university students. The first part is devoted entirely to the teacher questionnaire, examining the responses of ten EFL writing instructors across three sections: background information, writing perceptions, and challenges and recommendations. Each item is presented with a corresponding pie chart, followed by a concise analytical commentary grounded

in the
relevant
literature.

Analysis of Teachers' Questionnaire

Section I – Background Information

Q1 – How many years have you been teaching EFL writing?

- ☐ Less than 3 years ☐ 3–5 years ☐ 6–9 years ☐ More than 9 years

The largest proportion of participants (40%) had been teaching EFL writing for two to five years, while 30% had between six and ten years of experience. A further 20% had more than ten years of experience, and only 10% had fewer than two years. This distribution indicates that the sample is predominantly composed of teachers with a moderate to high level of professional experience, which lends credibility to their perceptions and judgements regarding the challenges they face in the writing classroom.

Q2 – What is the average size of your writing class?

Class sizes in the sample are notably large. Half of the participating teachers (50%) reported an average class size of 31 to 40 students, while 30% indicated that their classes regularly exceed 40 students. Only 20% worked with groups of 20 to 30 students. None of the respondents reported classes of fewer than 20. These figures confirm a structurally challenging instructional context, as the literature consistently identifies large class sizes as one of the most significant barriers to effective writing instruction and individualised feedback provision (Ferris, 2011; Hyland, 2016)

Section II – Teachers' Writing Perceptions

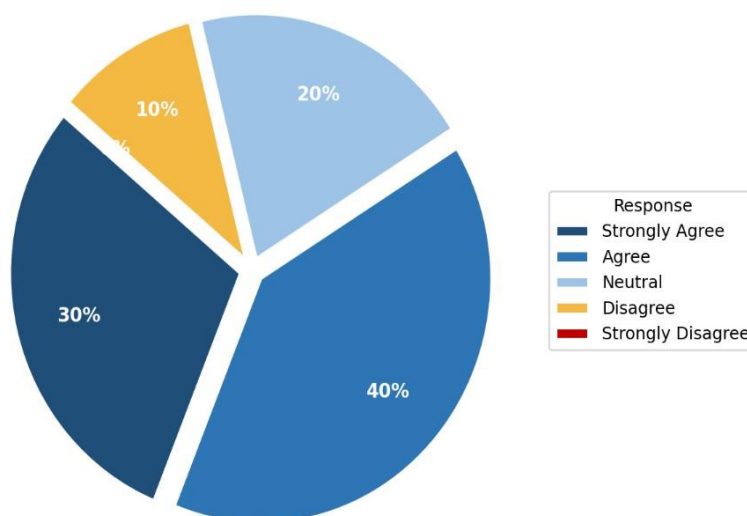
Q3 – I feel confident in my ability to teach academic writing to first-year students.

Figure 1 shows that 70% of teachers expressed confidence in their ability to teach academic writing, with 30% strongly agreeing and 40% agreeing. Only 10% disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. This relatively high level of professional self-efficacy, even in the face of the structural and pedagogical challenges described in subsequent items, is consistent with Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, which suggests that experienced practitioners tend to sustain professional confidence through accumulated expertise and adaptive coping strategies.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q3. I Feel confident in my ability to teach	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 1:*Professional Confidence in Teaching Academic Writing*

Figure 1 - Professional Confidence in Teaching Academic Writing (Q3)

**Q4 – The writing curriculum is well-suited to the needs of first-year students.**

Responses to Q4, illustrated in Figure 2, indicate considerable dissatisfaction with the current writing curriculum. Forty percent of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed that the curriculum is well-suited to the needs of first-year students, while only 30% expressed agreement. The remaining 30% were neutral. These findings echo concerns raised in the literature about curriculum design in EFL contexts (Paltridge, 2014), particularly the tendency of prescribed syllabi to lag behind current theoretical understanding of writing pedagogy and to inadequately address the actual linguistic and developmental needs of beginning university writers.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q34 The writing curriculum is well-suited to the needs of first-year students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 2:*Suitability of the Writing Curriculum*

Figure 2 - Suitability of the Writing Curriculum (Q4)

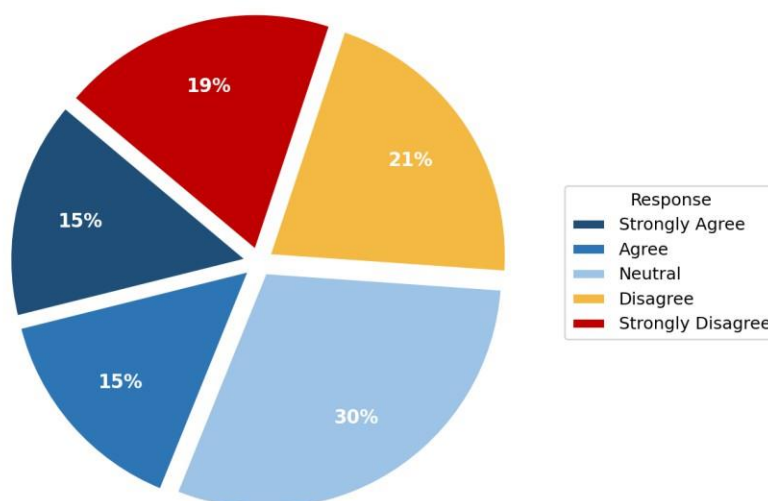
**Q5 – I have enough time to provide meaningful feedback on students’ writing.**

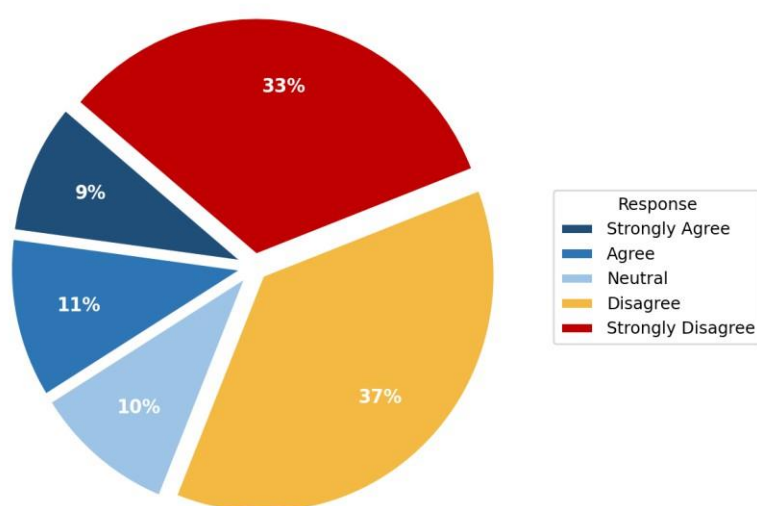
Figure 3 presents one of the most striking findings of the entire teacher questionnaire. Seventy percent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they have sufficient time to provide meaningful feedback on student writing. Only 20% agreed with the statement, while 10% remained neutral. This near-consensus reflects a systemic problem well documented in the second language writing literature: under conditions of large class sizes and heavy teaching loads, the time required for detailed, individualised written feedback becomes practically unmanageable (Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Ferris, 2011).

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q5 I have enough time to provide meaningful feedback on students' writing.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 3:

Availability of Time for Meaningful Feedback

Figure 3 - Availability of Time for Meaningful Feedback (Q5)



Q6 – The available teaching materials adequately support writing instruction.

As depicted in Figure 4, 60% of teachers indicated that the available teaching materials do not adequately support writing instruction, with 40% disagreeing and 20% strongly disagreeing. Only 20% expressed agreement, while another 20% were neutral. This dissatisfaction with available materials aligns with Holliday's (2005) critique of mainstream EFL textbooks, which are predominantly designed for Western learner populations and often fail to resonate with the cultural backgrounds and rhetorical traditions of Algerian university students. The absence of locally developed writing materials is a recurring concern in studies of EFL pedagogy in North Africa

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q6 The available teaching materials adequately support writing instruction.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 4:*Adequacy of Available Teaching Materials*

Figure 4 - Adequacy of Available Teaching Materials (Q6)

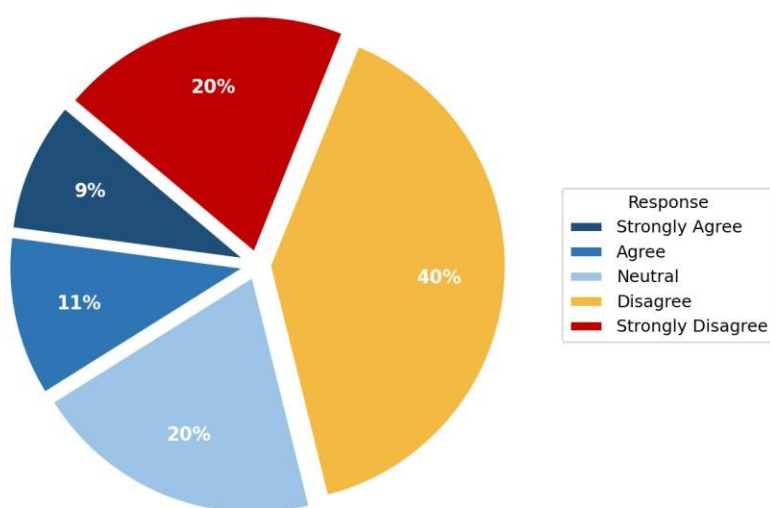
**Q7 – Students arrive at university with sufficient writing preparation.**

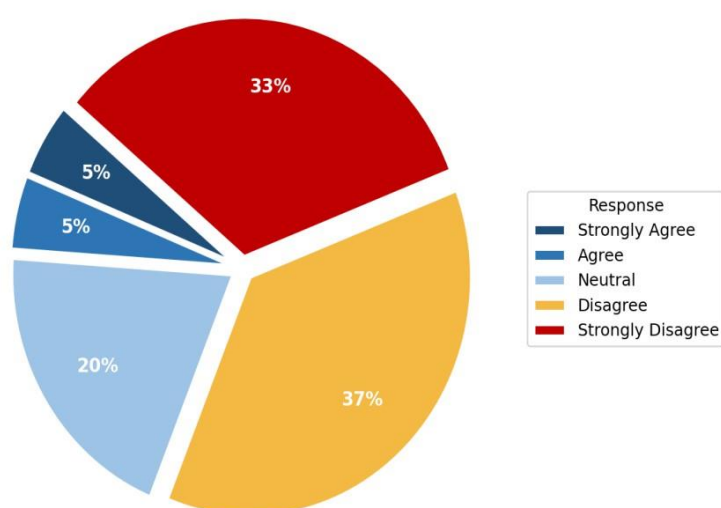
Figure 5 reveals that 70% of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the view that first-year students arrive at university with sufficient writing preparation. Only 10% agreed, while 20% were neutral. This finding carries significant pedagogical implications: if the vast majority of teachers perceive their students as inadequately prepared for university-level writing, then a substantial portion of instructional time must inevitably be devoted to remedial work — bridging the gap between secondary-school level competency and the academic writing demands of higher education — at the expense of more advanced compositional skills.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q7 Students arrive at university with sufficient writing preparation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 5:

Perceived Level of Students' Prior Writing Preparation

Figure 5 - Perceived Level of Students' Prior Writing Preparation (Q7)



Section III – Challenges and Recommendations

The third and final section of the teacher questionnaire presented nine Likert-scale items targeting specific pedagogical, institutional, and material challenges, followed by four open-ended questions inviting qualitative elaboration.

Q8 – Managing mixed-ability classes is a major difficulty in writing instruction.

As shown in Figure 6, 80% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that managing mixed-ability writing classes constitutes a major difficulty. This high level of agreement reflects the

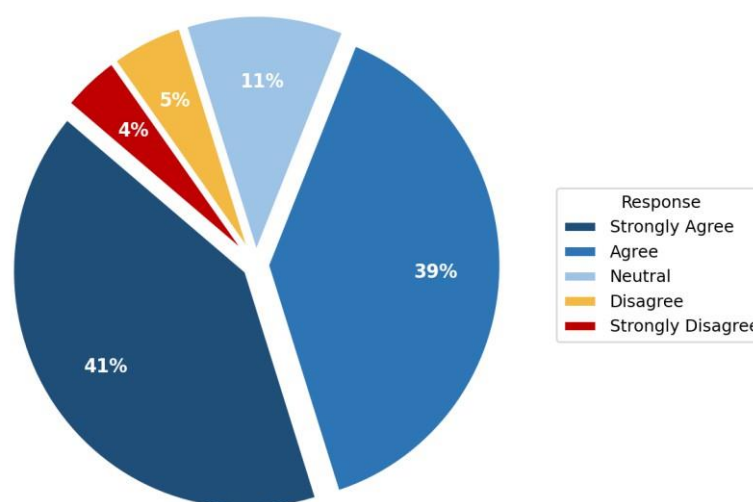
reality of first-year English department intake, where students arrive with a wide range of proficiency levels developed through diverse educational backgrounds. Designing writing tasks that are simultaneously accessible to underprepared students and sufficiently challenging for more proficient ones requires a degree of instructional differentiation that is difficult to achieve in practice, particularly given the large class sizes reported in Q2 (Tomlinson, 2014).

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q8 Managing mixed-ability classes is a major difficulty in writing instruction.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 6:

Difficulty of Managing Mixed-Ability Classes

Figure 6 - Difficulty of Managing Mixed-Ability Classes (Q8)



Q9 – Large class sizes prevent me from providing effective written feedback.

Figure 7 presents perhaps the single most emphatic finding of the teacher questionnaire: 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that large class sizes prevent them from providing

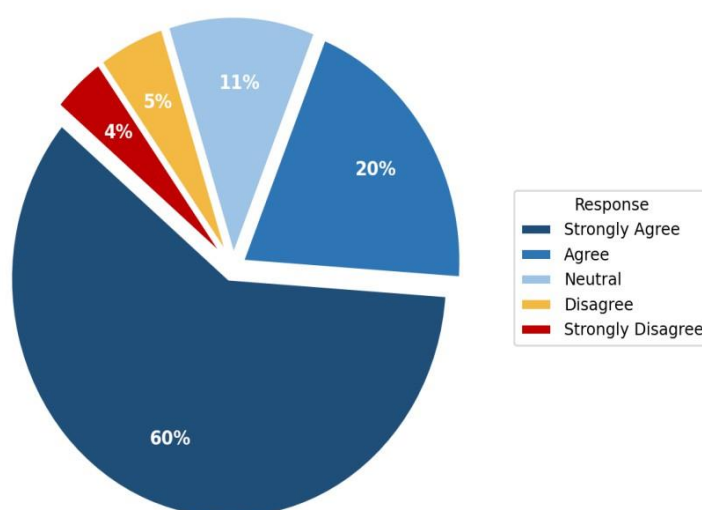
effective written feedback, with 60% selecting the strongest possible response. Not a single teacher strongly disagreed. The relationship between class size and feedback quality is one of the most consistently reported challenges in the EFL writing literature (Hyland, 2013; Ferris, 2011). When a teacher is responsible for responding in writing to the work of 35 to 45 students, the logistical and temporal demands render comprehensive, developmental feedback virtually impossible.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q9 Large class sizes prevent me from providing effective written feedback.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 7:

Large Class Sizes Preventing Effective Written Feedback

Figure 7 - Large Class Sizes Preventing Effective Written Feedback (Q9)



Q10 – There is insufficient time to cover all stages of the writing process.

Figure 8 shows that 64% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that there is insufficient time to cover all stages of the writing process, while a minority disagreed. This majority consensus

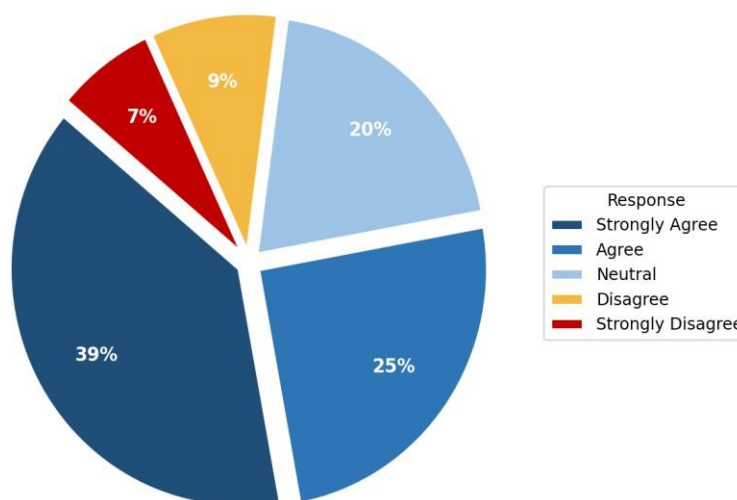
directly validates Hypothesis H2 and reflects the fundamental incompatibility between the time demands of process-oriented writing pedagogy — which requires planning, drafting, feedback, and revision cycles — and the constraints of a standard semester-based curriculum. As Badger and White (2000) have argued, genuine process writing instruction is simply not realisable within systems designed around single-draft, product-focused assessment.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q10 There is insufficient time to cover all stages of the writing process.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 8:

Insufficiency of Time for the Writing Process

Figure 8 - Insufficiency of Time for the Writing Process (Q10)



Q11 – Providing adequate scaffolding for beginner writers is difficult.

As depicted in Figure 9, 80% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that providing adequate scaffolding for beginner writers is a significant difficulty. Scaffolding — understood in the

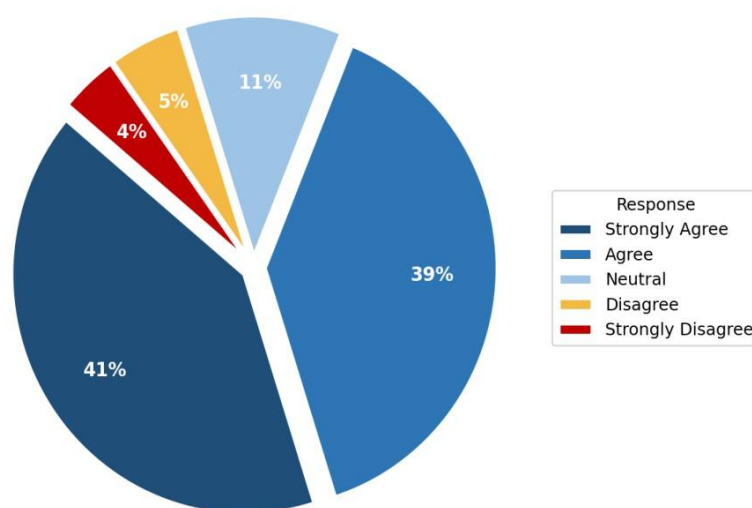
Vygotskian sense as the strategic, temporary support that allows a learner to operate within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) — is particularly demanding in writing classrooms characterised by large numbers of students with disparate needs. Effective scaffolding requires individualised guidance, careful modelling, and strategic sequencing of tasks, resources that are difficult to deploy at scale under the working conditions described by respondents in earlier items.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q11 Providing adequate scaffolding for beginner writers is difficult.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 9 :

Difficulty of Providing Adequate Scaffolding

Figure 9 - Difficulty of Providing Adequate Scaffolding (Q13)



Q12 – Institutional pressure discourages process-oriented writing approaches.

Figure 10 illustrates that 60% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that institutional pressure discourages the adoption of process-oriented writing approaches. This finding

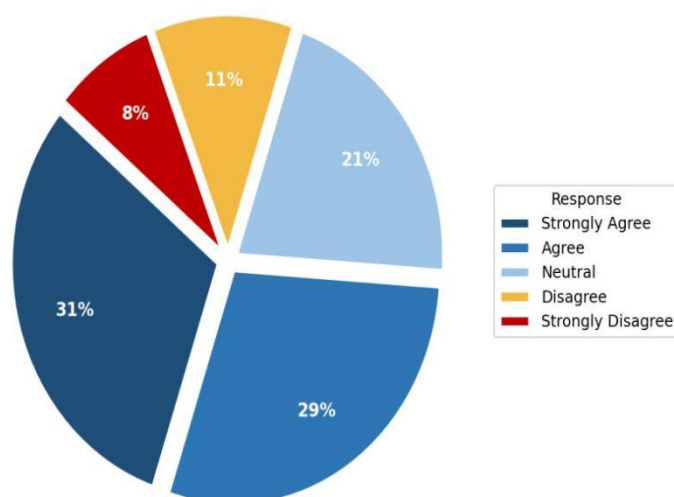
corroborates Hypothesis H5 and reflects a structural tension between the pedagogical ideals promoted in the applied linguistics literature and the institutional realities of assessment-driven educational systems. Teachers who wish to implement multiple drafting cycles, writing conferences, or portfolio-based assessment are frequently constrained by rigid syllabi, summative examination schedules, and administrative priorities that leave little room for formative, process-centred activities.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q12 Institutional pressure discourages process-oriented writing approaches	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 10:

Institutional Pressure Against Process-Oriented Approaches

Figure 10 - Institutional Pressure Against Process-Oriented Approaches (Q14)



Q13 – I lack access to suitable, culturally relevant writing materials.

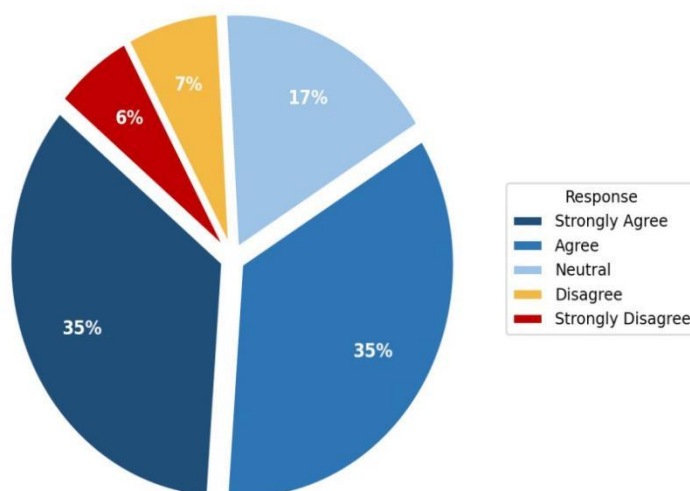
Seventy percent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they lack access to suitable, culturally relevant writing materials, as shown in Figure 11. This result substantiates the concern raised in Section II (Q6) regarding the adequacy of available teaching materials and reinforces the theoretical argument advanced by scholars such as Canagarajah (2002) and Holliday (2005) that mainstream EFL writing textbooks, produced predominantly in and for Anglo-American educational markets, frequently fail to resonate with the cultural backgrounds, prior knowledge, and rhetorical expectations of North African university students.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q13 I lack access to suitable, culturally relevant writing materials.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 11:

Lack of Access to Culturally Relevant Writing Materials

Figure 11 - Lack of Access to Culturally Relevant Writing Materials (Q15)



Q14– Formal assessment requirements conflict with formative writing practices.

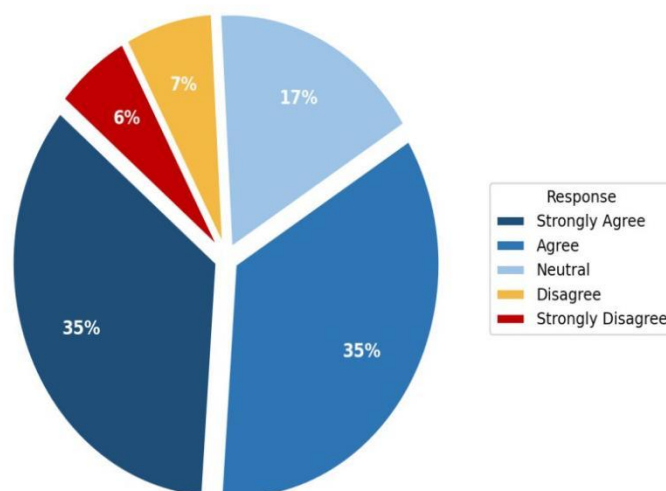
As illustrated in Figure 12, 70% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that formal assessment requirements conflict with formative writing practices. This finding aligns with Shohamy's (2001) critique of high-stakes testing regimes in language education, which tend to reduce writing to a single, unrevisable product evaluated against fixed criteria rather than as an evolving process. When institutional assessment is structured around end-of-term examinations, teachers face a structural disincentive to invest time in the kind of iterative, feedback-rich, revision-based instruction that the literature identifies as most conducive to genuine writing development.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q14 Formal assessment requirements conflict with formative writing practices.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 12:

Conflict Between Formal Assessment and Formative Practices

Figure 12 - Conflict Between Formal Assessment and Formative Practices (Q16)



Open-Ended Responses – Teacher Questionnaire

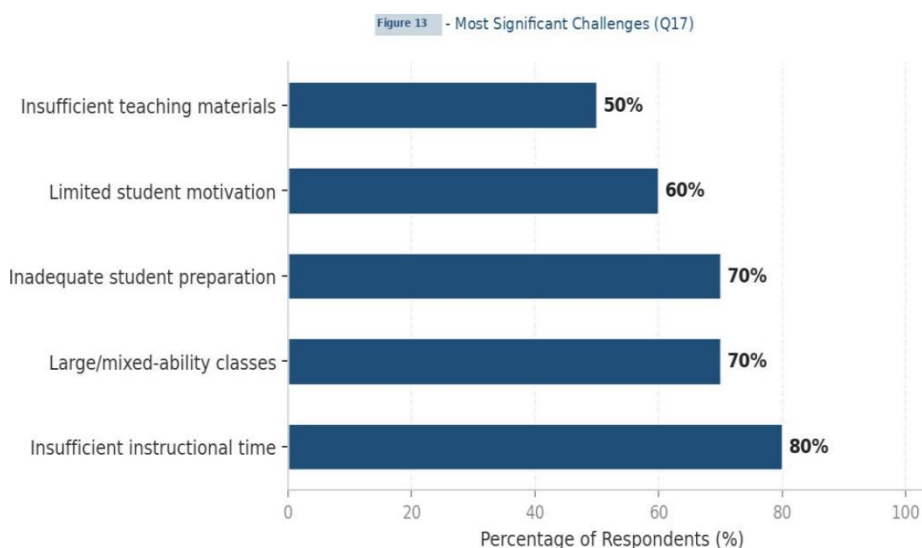
Questions 17 to 20 invited teachers to respond freely to four open-ended prompts. Given the small sample size ($n = 10$), the responses were analysed thematically and are presented in the bar charts below, which summarise the most frequently recurring themes across participants' answers.

Q15– Most significant challenge when teaching writing to first-year students

As Figure 13 illustrates, the theme cited most frequently was the lack of instructional time (80% of responses), closely followed by issues relating to large or mixed-ability classes (70%) and inadequate student preparation (70%). Limited student motivation was identified by 60% of respondents, while 50% mentioned insufficient teaching materials. These thematic patterns confirm and elaborate the quantitative findings reported in the Likert-scale section, painting a coherent picture of EFL writing instruction as structurally constrained from multiple directions simultaneously.

Figure 13:

Most Significant Challenges in Teaching Writing

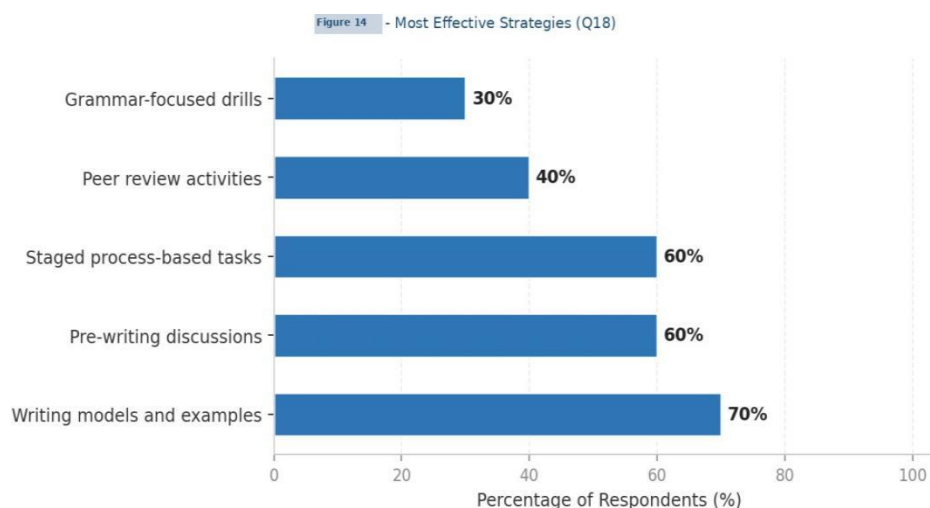


Q16 – Most effective strategies for overcoming these challenges

Figure 14 summarises the strategies that teachers reported finding most effective. The provision of writing models and examples was the most frequently cited approach (70%), followed by pre-writing discussions for idea generation (60%) and staged, process-based writing tasks (60%). Peer review activities were mentioned by 40% of respondents, while grammar-focused drills were cited by 30%. These preferences suggest that teachers favour scaffolding-based, student-centred approaches in principle, even if their implementation is constrained by the institutional and structural conditions described above.

Figures 14:

Most Effective Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

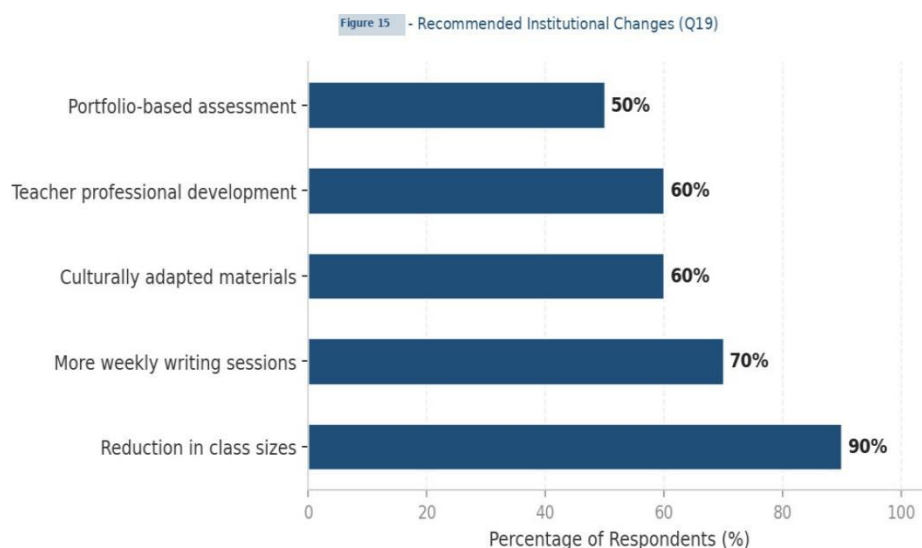


Q17– Institutional or policy changes that would most improve writing instruction

As shown in Figure 15, the most widely endorsed institutional change was a reduction in class sizes (90%), reflecting the near-universal identification of large classes as a root cause of the challenges described throughout the questionnaire. Increasing the number of weekly writing sessions was recommended by 70% of respondents, while the provision of culturally adapted materials and investment in teacher professional development were each cited by 60%. The introduction of portfolio-based assessment was advocated by 50% of participants.

Figure 15:

Recommended Institutional Changes

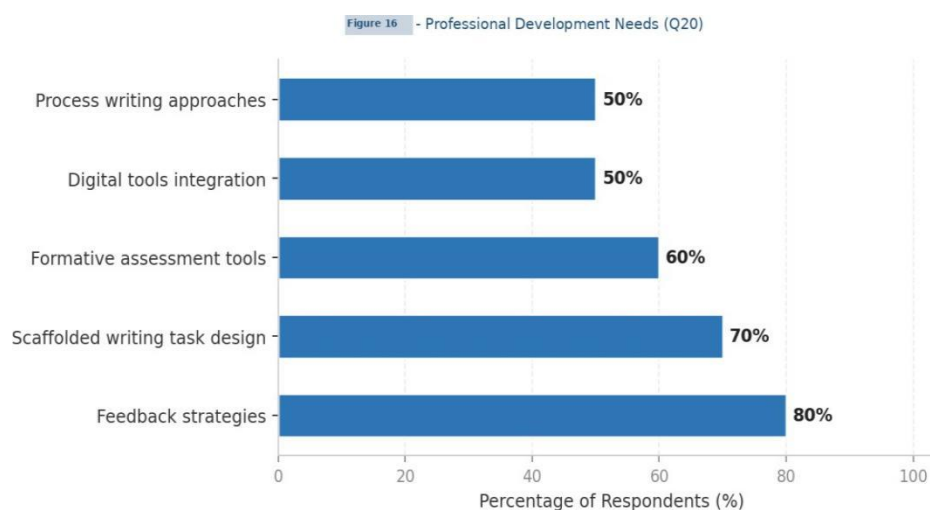


Q18 – Professional development most needed to support writing instruction

Figure 16 reveals that the professional development area identified as most valuable by teachers was feedback strategies (80%), followed by scaffolded writing task design (70%) and formative assessment tools (60%). The integration of digital tools into writing instruction and the development of process writing approaches were each cited by 50% of respondents. These preferences indicate that teachers are aware of the gap between current practice and pedagogical best practice and are actively seeking the knowledge and tools to bridge it.

Figure 16:

Professional Development Needs



Part Two: Analysis of Students'

Questionnaire

Section I – Background Information

Q1 – How long have you been studying English?

- ☐ Less than 3 years ☐ 3–5 years ☐ 6–9 years ☐ More than 9 years

After the distribution of students' length of English language study. The majority of participants (44%) had been studying English for between six and nine years, indicating at least secondary-school level exposure to the language prior to entering university. Thirty percent had studied for three to five years, 16% for more than nine years, and only 10% for fewer than three years. While this distribution might suggest a relatively substantial prior exposure to English, the teacher questionnaire data — in which 70% of instructors reported that students arrive with insufficient writing preparation — indicates that duration of study alone does not translate into writing proficiency, particularly in the domain of academic composition.

Q2 – Do you write in English outside of class?

- ☐ Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Independent writing practice in English outside the formal classroom setting is markedly limited in the sample. More than half of respondents reported that they never (26%) or rarely (36%) write in English informally, while only 10% indicated that they do so often. This low rate of autonomous writing practice is pedagogically significant: extensive writing beyond the classroom is recognised as a key driver of writing development, contributing to vocabulary consolidation, fluency, and the internalisation of genre conventions (Krashen, 2004; Hyland, 2016).

Section II – Students' Writing Perceptions

Section II comprised three items exploring students' attitudes towards writing in English, their confidence, their perception of the importance of writing, and their experiences of classroom writing tasks and teacher support.

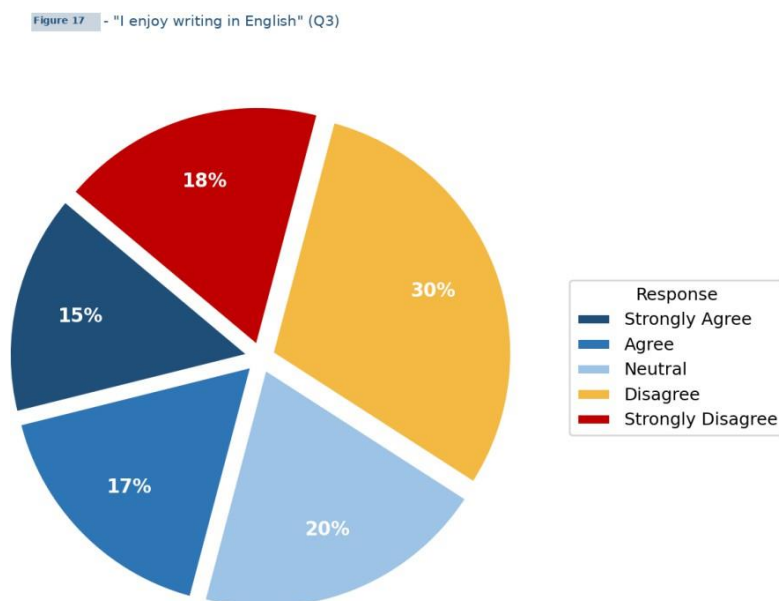
Q3 – I enjoy writing in English.

Figure 17 reveals that attitudes towards writing in English are predominantly negative within the sample. Forty-eight percent of students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that they enjoy writing in English, while only 32% expressed a positive orientation. Twenty percent were neutral. These findings are consistent with the extensive body of research documenting the anxiety, reluctance, and demotivation that many EFL learners associate with writing tasks (Daly & Miller, 1975; Horwitz, 2001).

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q3. I enjoy writing in English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 17:

I enjoy writing in English



Q4 – Writing in English is more difficult for me than speaking.

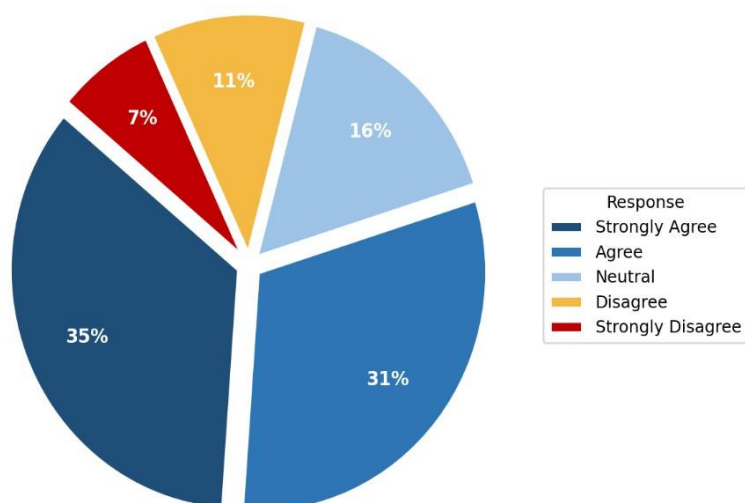
As shown in Figure 18, 66% of students agreed or strongly agreed that writing is more difficult for them than speaking, while only 18% disagreed. This near-consensus perception of writing as the more demanding skill reflects findings reported consistently in the second language acquisition literature. Writing requires the simultaneous management of grammatical accuracy, lexical selection, textual organisation, and genre conventions in the absence of the real-time interactional support that speaking provides (Tribble, 1996; Hyland, 2003).

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q4. Writing in English is more difficult for me than speaking.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 18:

Writing is more difficult for me than speaking

Figure 18 - "Writing is more difficult for me than speaking" (Q4)



Q5– I feel confident when I write in English.

Figure 19 presents one of the most pedagogically significant findings of the student questionnaire: 54% of respondents expressed a lack of confidence when writing in English, with

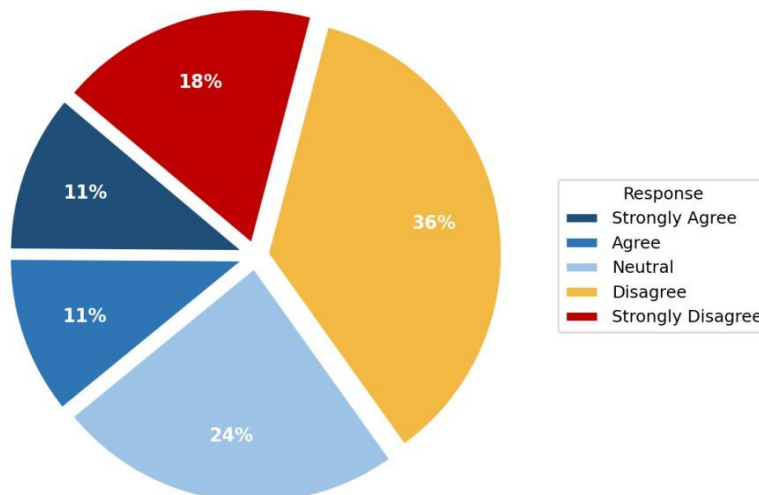
36% disagreeing and 18% strongly disagreeing. Only 22% expressed confidence, while 24% were neutral. These low levels of writing self-efficacy are consistent with findings from studies of EFL writing confidence among Arab learners (Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Pajares & Valiante, 2006).

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q5. I feel confident when I write in English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 19:

I feel confident when I write in English

Figure 19 - "I feel confident when I write in English" (Q6)



Section III – Challenges and Recommendations

Writing Anxiety

Q6 – I feel anxious when the teacher asks us to write in class.

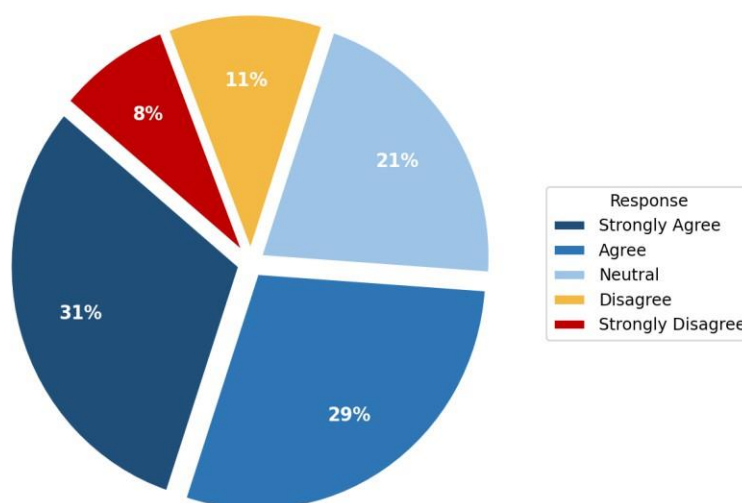
Figure 20 shows that 60% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they feel anxious when asked to write in class. This level of writing apprehension is consistent with the theoretical framework developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) on foreign language classroom anxiety and with the writing apprehension model of Daly and Miller (1975), both of which identify in-class writing performance as a particularly high-stakes affective context for language learners.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q6. I feel anxious when the teacher asks us to write in class.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 20:

I feel anxious when asked to write in class

Figure 23 - "I feel anxious when asked to write in class" (Q12)



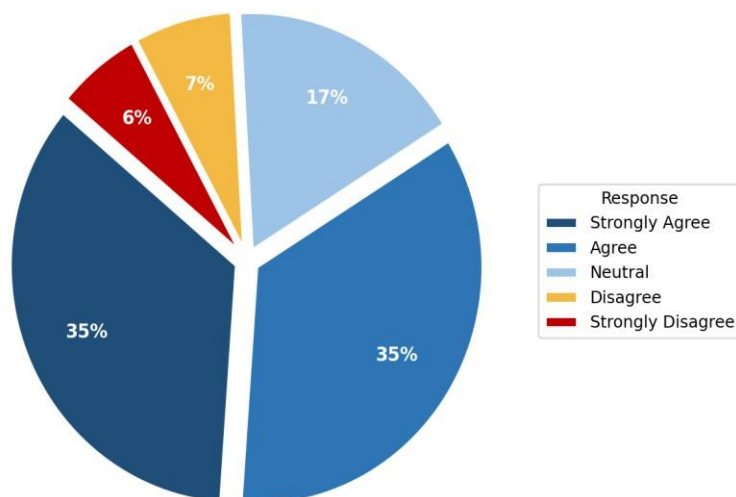
Q7 – I am afraid of making mistakes in my writing.

Fear of making mistakes was the most strongly endorsed anxiety item in the questionnaire: 70% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, as shown in Figure 21. This high rate of error anxiety has direct pedagogical implications, as research demonstrates that fear of error tends to produce conservative, hedged writing strategies — students preferring to use only language they are certain is correct, thereby avoiding the linguistic risk-taking that is essential for vocabulary acquisition and stylistic development (Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q7. I am afraid of making mistakes in my writing.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 21:*I am afraid of making mistakes in my writing*

Figure 24 - "I am afraid of making mistakes in my writing" (Q13)

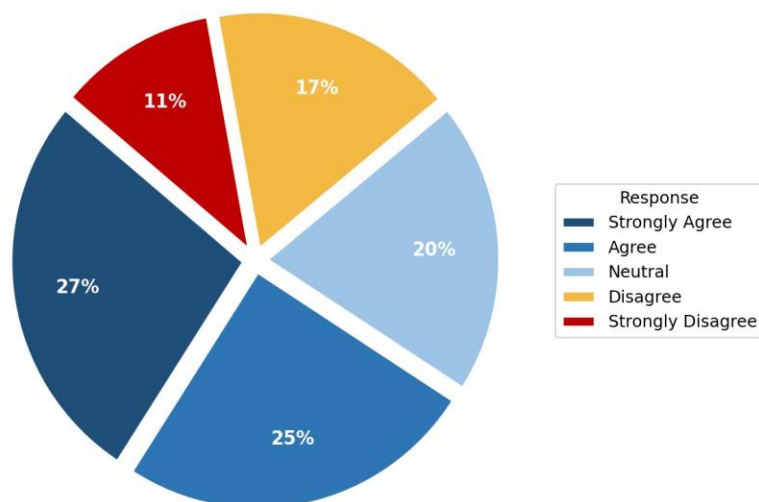


Content and Organisation Difficulties

Q8 – I often do not know what to write about.

Figure 22 shows that 52% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they often do not know what to write about, highlighting a significant difficulty with idea generation and topic engagement. This difficulty may stem from several interrelated factors: unfamiliarity with assigned topics, limited background knowledge, difficulty accessing ideas in a second language, or an absence of explicit pre-writing instruction.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q8. I often do not know what to write about.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 22:*I often do not know what to write about***Figure 26** - "I often do not know what to write about" (Q15)**Q9 – I have difficulty organizing my ideas in English.**

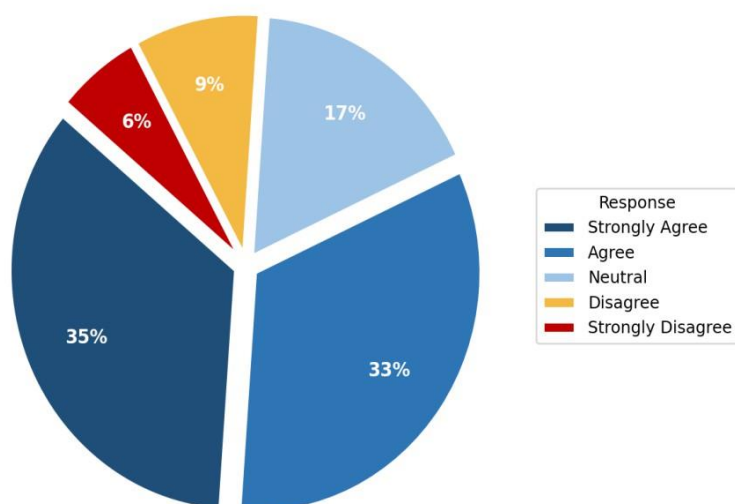
Difficulty in organising ideas was endorsed by 68% of students, as Figure 23 illustrates. This finding reflects one of the most consistently reported challenges in EFL writing research: the transfer of L1 rhetorical patterns into L2 writing, which can produce texts that appear logically disjointed or structurally unconventional by the standards of English academic discourse (Kaplan, 1966; Connor, 1996).

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q9. I have difficulty organizing my ideas in English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 23:

I have difficulty organising my ideas in English

Figure 27 - "I have difficulty organising my ideas in English" (Q16)



Linguistic Challenges

Q10 – I struggle with English grammar when I write.

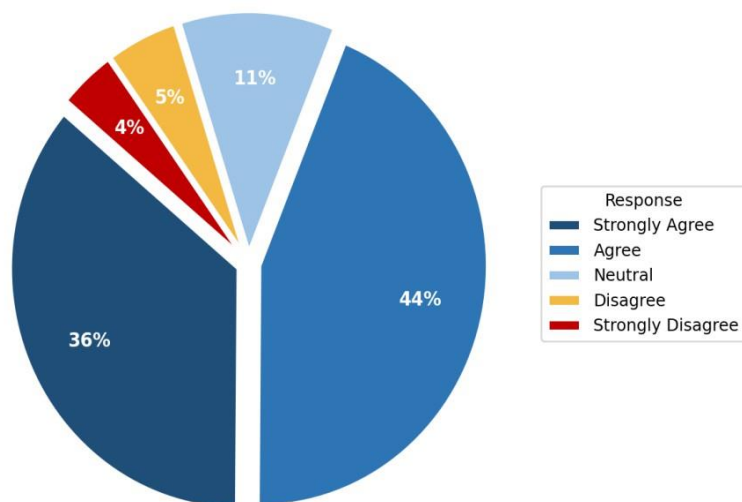
Grammatical difficulty was the most widely reported challenge in the entire student questionnaire. Figure 24 shows that 80% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they struggle with English grammar when writing, with 36% selecting the strongest possible response. This finding confirms the dominance of grammatical difficulty as a barrier to writing quality for Algerian EFL learners (Selinker, 1972; Swan & Smith, 2001).

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q10. I struggle with English grammar when I write.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 24:

I struggle with English grammar when I write

Figure 28 - "I struggle with English grammar when I write" (Q17)



Q11 – I do not know enough vocabulary to express my ideas.

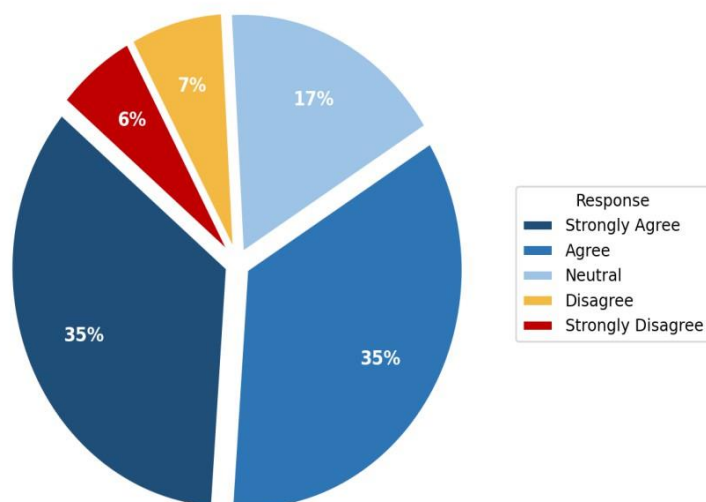
Vocabulary limitation was identified as a significant challenge by 70% of students, as shown in Figure 25. Limited lexical resources represent a fundamental constraint on writing quality in EFL contexts: without the vocabulary to express subtle distinctions, vary expression across a text, or employ the academic register expected at university level, student writers are forced either to oversimplify their ideas or to resort to direct L1 transfer (Nation, 2001; Read, 2000).

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q11. I do not know enough vocabulary to express my ideas.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 25:

I do not know enough vocabulary to express my ideas

Figure 29 - "I do not know enough vocabulary to express my ideas" (Q18)



Q12 – I translate from my native language to English when I write.

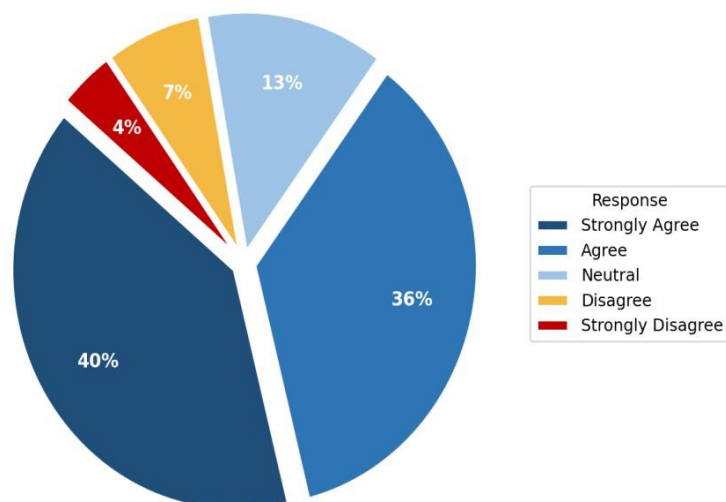
Figure 26 reveals that 76% of students reported relying on L1 translation when writing in English, with 40% strongly agreeing — the highest rate of strong agreement for any Likert item in the questionnaire. This pervasive reliance on translation is consistent with findings from studies of Algerian EFL learners (Abderrahmane, 2015) and reflects the limited automaticity of L2 writing processes among novice writers who have not yet internalised sufficient L2 linguistic resources.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q12. I translate from my native language to English when I write.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 26:

I translate from my native language when I write

Figure 30 - "I translate from my native language when I write" (Q19)



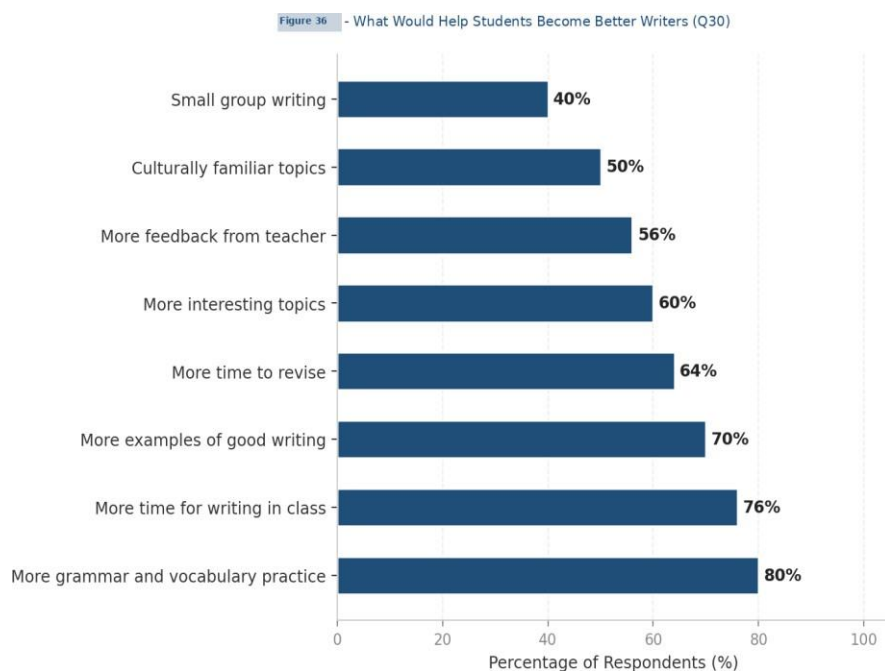
Preferences and Recommendations

Q13 – What would help you become a better writer in English?

Figure 27 presents students' responses to the question of what would most help them develop as writers. More practice with grammar and vocabulary was the most frequently endorsed option (80%), followed by more time for writing in class (76%), more examples of good writing to follow (70%), and more time to revise their work (64%). More interesting topics and more feedback from the teacher were each selected by 60% and 56% of respondents respectively.

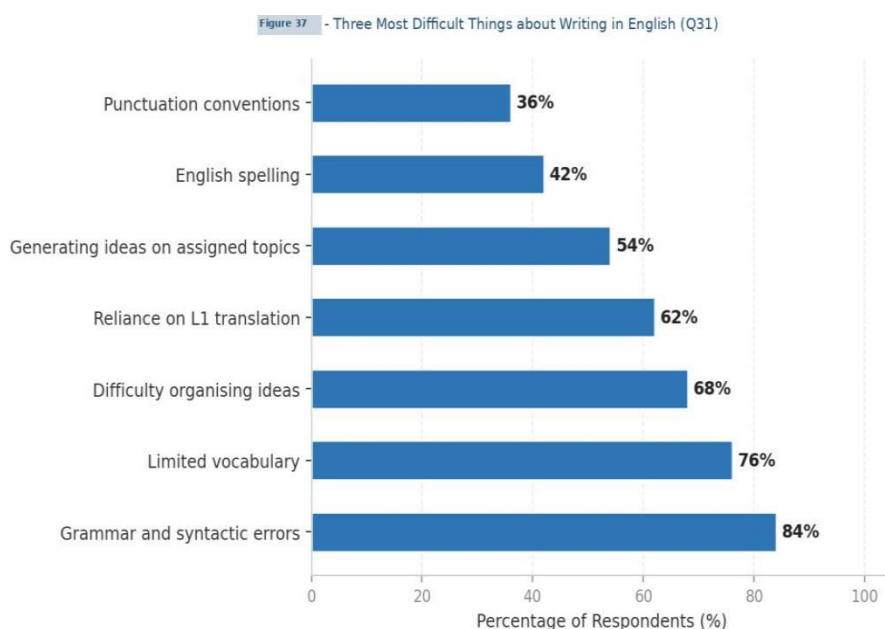
- ☐ More time for writing in class
- ☐ More interesting topics to write about
- ☐ More examples of good writing to follow
- ☐ More practice with grammar and vocabulary
- ☐ More feedback from the teacher
- ☐ Opportunities to write about topics from my own culture
- ☐ Working in small groups when writing
- ☐ Having more time to revise my work

Figure 27:
What Would Help Students Become Better Writers



Q14 – What are the three most difficult things about writing in English for you?

Figure 28 presents a thematic summary of the open-ended responses to this question. Grammar and syntactic errors were cited most frequently (84% of respondents), followed by limited vocabulary (76%), difficulty organising ideas (68%), reliance on L1 translation (62%), difficulty generating ideas on assigned topics (54%), English spelling (42%), and punctuation conventions (36%). These open-ended responses closely mirror and elaborate the patterns identified in the Likert-scale data of Section III

Figure 28:**Three Most Difficult Things about Writing in English****Conclusion**

The analysis of the student questionnaire reveals that first-year EFL students face a combination of affective, linguistic, and contextual barriers that current instructional practices are not fully equipped to address. Writing anxiety, fear of error, and low self-efficacy are pervasive and interact with the grammar and vocabulary limitations most widely reported by students. Heavy reliance on L1 translation further reflects the limited automaticity of their L2 writing processes. Beyond these difficulties, students show limited engagement with writing outside the classroom and tend to overlook teacher feedback, despite expressing clear motivation to improve. They consistently prefer personally relevant, culturally familiar writing tasks and feedback approaches that acknowledge strengths before addressing errors. These findings, viewed alongside the teacher questionnaire data, will be synthesised and discussed in Chapter Five

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the present study, derived from two questionnaires administered to EFL writing teachers (10 participants) and first-year university students (50 participants) converge on a coherent picture of writing instruction. Taken together, they provide strong empirical support for the central hypothesis that EFL teachers face a wide, interconnected set of challenges spanning pedagogical, institutional, and material dimensions. The following subsections discuss the findings in relation to each of the three research hypotheses.

Hypothesis H1: The Multidimensional Nature of EFL Writing Challenges

H1 proposed that EFL teachers face significant challenges spanning pedagogical, institutional, and material dimensions. The data unequivocally support this hypothesis. Across all three sections of the teacher questionnaire, a coherent and mutually reinforcing pattern of difficulty emerged: teachers reported dissatisfaction with the curriculum (40% disagreed that it is well-suited to first-year students), a lack of adequate teaching materials (60% disagreed that available materials support writing instruction), insufficient institutional time (64% agreed that time is inadequate), and structural barriers — particularly large class sizes — that directly impede the kind of process-oriented, feedback-rich instruction that the literature endorses. These findings align closely with Hyland's (2016) characterisation of writing instruction in resource-constrained EFL contexts as operating at the intersection of multiple overlapping pressures, none of which can be addressed in isolation from the others.

The student questionnaire corroborates this multidimensional picture from a complementary perspective. Students reported challenges spanning the affective dimension (writing anxiety, low self-efficacy), the linguistic dimension (grammar, vocabulary, and L1 transfer), the metacognitive dimension (difficulty generating and organising ideas), and the pedagogical dimension (perceived inadequacy of teacher feedback and task instructions). The convergence of both data sources on a picture of systemic, structural inadequacy rather than individual incompetence is one of the most significant findings of the present study: the challenges

documented here cannot be resolved by individual teacher effort alone but require institutional intervention.

Hypothesis H2: The Interaction of Pedagogical, Institutional, and Material Factors

H2 proposed that pedagogical, institutional, and material factors do not operate in isolation but interact cumulatively to hinder effective writing instruction. This hypothesis is strongly confirmed across multiple convergent findings. Large class sizes (80% of teachers report classes of 31 or more students) directly impede the provision of individualised feedback; insufficient instructional time (64% agreement on Q10) is itself partly a product of institutional timetabling decisions; the absence of culturally relevant materials (70% agreement on Q15) compounds the motivational disengagement already produced by large, heterogeneous classes. Each factor reinforces the others, creating what Ferris (2011) and Hyland (2013) describe as a structurally constrained teaching environment in which no single intervention is sufficient on its own.

The interaction between assessment structures and pedagogy is particularly illustrative of this cumulative dynamic. Seventy percent of teachers agreed that formal assessment requirements conflict with formative writing practices (Q16), and 60% reported that institutional pressure discourages process-oriented approaches (Q14). These institutional constraints interact with material limitations — the absence of locally developed resources — and pedagogical challenges such as managing mixed-ability classes (80% agreement, Q8) to produce a teaching context in which even well-intentioned, theoretically informed teachers are structurally prevented from implementing best practice. Student data mirror this dynamic: 76% reported insufficient time to complete writing tasks, 62% reported relying on L1 translation, and only 36% reported that their teacher always or often explains how to organise writing — a pattern consistent with instruction that is compressed, resource-poor, and unable to deliver the sustained scaffolding that writing development requires.

The student affective data constitute some of the study's most significant findings within this hypothesis. The finding that 70% of students fear making mistakes (Q13) and that 54% lack confidence when writing (Q6) is consistent with research on foreign language writing anxiety (Cheng, 2004; Horwitz et al., 1986) and reflects the cumulative impact of a teaching environment characterised by large classes, limited feedback, and assessment pressure. The simultaneous findings that 84% recognise writing as important for their future (Q5) yet only 32% enjoy writing in English (Q3) reveal a motivational paradox: students are instrumentally motivated to improve but affectively inhibited from engaging with the process — a pattern that Dörnyei (2001) attributes directly to constraining classroom conditions rather than individual disposition.

Hypothesis H3: Recommendations for Improving EFL Writing Instruction

H3 proposed that targeted improvements at the institutional level would meaningfully enhance the quality of EFL writing instruction. The findings provide strong empirical grounding for this hypothesis. Ninety percent of teachers endorsed class size reduction as the most urgently needed institutional change (Q19), 70% recommended increasing the number of weekly writing sessions, and 60% each identified the provision of culturally adapted materials and investment in teacher

professional development as priorities. Fifty percent advocated for portfolio-based assessment. These are not abstract theoretical preferences but concrete, actionable changes with strong support in the international literature.

The student data provide complementary evidence for the types of changes that would be most impactful from the learner's perspective. Eighty percent requested more grammar and vocabulary practice, 76% more time for writing in class, and 70% more examples of good writing to follow (Q30). Seventy percent preferred to receive positive comments before corrections (Q29), and 72% recommended that teachers provide more writing models and examples (Q32). Together, these teacher and student recommendations converge on a set of institutional and pedagogical priorities — reduced class sizes, culturally relevant materials, process-oriented assessment, professional development in feedback strategies, and explicit instruction in writing organisation — whose implementation would directly address the challenges identified under H1 and H2.

Pedagogical Recommendations

The findings of this study yield a set of concrete, evidence-based recommendations addressed to EFL writing teachers, curriculum designers, and institutional policymakers. They are organised around seven thematic areas.

Reducing Class Sizes and Restructuring Contact Time

The single most impactful structural change would be a significant reduction in class sizes. The data leave no ambiguity: 80% of teachers identify large classes as a primary barrier to effective

feedback, and 64% report insufficient time for the writing process. The international literature consistently suggests that groups exceeding 25 students are very difficult to teach using process-oriented, feedback-intensive approaches (Hyland, 2016). Institutional decision-makers should consider introducing writing-specific class size caps, redistributing students across smaller groups, and increasing the number of weekly writing sessions to allow multi-stage tasks that unfold across sessions.

Adopting an Integrated approach Pedagogy

This study recommends that teachers adopt an integrated approach drawing on product, process, and genre traditions. Concretely, this means organising instruction around multi-stage task sequences that include explicit pre-writing activities, structured drafting phases, feedback, and mandatory revision, following Badger and White's (2000) integrated model. Pre-writing activities deserve particular emphasis, given that 52% of students report not knowing what to write about (Q15), and explicit instruction in text organisation is essential given that 68% report difficulty organising their ideas (Q16) while only 36% report that their teacher always or often explains how to do so (Q10).

Developing Strategic and Sustainable Feedback Practices

Given the severe time constraints under which teachers operate, this study recommends adopting a focused correction approach — concentrating feedback on a limited set of frequently occurring error types rather than attempting comprehensive correction. Focused feedback has been shown to be more effective in promoting long-term accuracy development and is substantially less time-consuming (Ferris, 2002). Teachers should also invest in developing students' feedback literacy through structured revision tasks that require students to respond to specific comments and submit a revised draft alongside the original. Peer feedback, gradually introduced through structured protocols, can further reduce the teacher's workload while building students' critical reading and revision skills (Liu & Hansen, 2002).

Addressing Writing Anxiety and Building Self-Efficacy

The high levels of writing anxiety documented in the student questionnaire demand a sustained pedagogical response. Teachers should prioritise the creation of a low-threat classroom environment in which errors are normalised as part of the learning process. The regular use of low-stakes writing activities — quickwrites, journals, freewriting — that are not formally graded provides students with frequent writing practice without evaluative pressure, lowering the affective filter and supporting fluency development (Krashen, 1985). Teachers can support self-efficacy by beginning feedback with genuine recognition of strengths — a preference endorsed by 70% of students (Q29) and by sequencing tasks from more accessible personal genres to more challenging academic forms, building confidence progressively (Pajares & Valiante, 2006).

Developing Culturally Responsive Writing Materials and Tasks

The department should invest in locally produced or adapted writing materials that draw on Algerian cultural contexts, use texts by successful multilingual writers as models, and design tasks around topics personally relevant to students' experiences and aspirations. The most preferred student writing activities — personal narratives (70%), career-related writing (60%), and letters and emails (56%) — provide directly actionable guidance for task selection. Using personally meaningful genres as a bridge to more formal academic writing is consistent with a long tradition in composition pedagogy (Elbow, 1998) and with the principle that writing for authentic purposes generates greater engagement than writing for artificial examination tasks.

Reforming Assessment Practices

The conflict between institutional assessment and process-oriented pedagogy can only be resolved through institutional reform. This study recommends that the department initiate a formal review of its writing assessment practices with a view to introducing portfolio-based assessment as a complement or alternative to single-draft, timed examinations. A portfolio approach allows for the demonstration of development over time and has been extensively documented as an effective instrument for EFL writing assessment in comparable higher education contexts (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000). In the shorter term, teachers can introduce formative practices within existing structures through ungraded in-class drafts, reading responses, and peer review activities,

consistent with Wiliam's (2011) evidence that regular low-stakes feedback is substantially more effective in driving learning than infrequent high-stakes assessment.

Investing in Professional Teacher Development

Teachers' most pressing professional development need is feedback strategies (80%, Q20), followed by scaffolded task design (70%), formative assessment tools (60%), and digital writing tools (50%). This study recommends a regular programme of departmental workshops addressing these areas, alongside collaborative professional learning — peer observation, lesson study, and shared curriculum development — which has been shown to be more effective than one-off training events in producing sustained changes in classroom practice (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

Directions for Future Research

The limitations of the present study simultaneously define an agenda for future research. The most immediate extension would be a triangulated investigation combining questionnaire data with classroom observation and semi-structured interviews, providing the depth and independent verification that the present design was unable to offer. A longitudinal study tracking a cohort of first-year students across a full academic year would allow for examination of writing development over time and the evaluation of specific pedagogical interventions — process-oriented instruction, peer review, portfolio assessment — on student outcomes.

Future research should also extend the investigation to multiple departments and institutions across Algeria to determine whether the challenges documented here reflect broader systemic patterns and to identify contextual factors that moderate their severity. Action research studies, in which teachers systematically implement and evaluate new feedback or instructional strategies, would generate locally grounded, practice-relevant evidence directly applicable to professional development. Finally, the ideological dimension of EFL writing instruction — native-speakerism, cultural assumptions in materials, and the politics of academic writing conventions — warrants more systematic empirical investigation in the Algerian context, through discourse

analysis of current textbooks and interview data on teacher and student responses to those assumptions.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses the study's findings against the three research hypotheses — all of which are substantially confirmed — and translated those findings into seven concrete pedagogical recommendations. It has also situated the study within an honest account of its methodological boundaries and mapped out productive directions for future research.

Taken together, the findings, recommendations, and critical reflections presented here affirm that improving EFL writing instruction at Université Chadli Bendjedid – El Tarf requires coordinated action at the classroom, departmental, and institutional levels, and that the present study provides a meaningful empirical foundation on which such action can be built.

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Appendices

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Appendix A: Teacher’s Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of a research study investigating the challenges EFL teachers face when teaching writing skills to first-year university students. Your responses are confidential and will be used solely for academic research. Please answer as honestly as possible. Thank you.

SECTION I – Background Information

- Q1.** How many years have you been teaching EFL writing?
☐ Less than 2 years ☐ 2–5 years ☐ 6–10 years ☐ More than 10 years
- Q2.** What is the average size of your writing class?
☐ Less than 20 students ☐ 20–30 students ☐ 31–40 students ☐ More than 40 students

SECTION II – Teachers' Writing Perceptions

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q3. I feel confident in my ability to teach academic writing to first-year students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q4. The writing curriculum is well-suited to the needs of first-year students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q5. I have enough time to provide meaningful feedback on students' writing.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q6. The available teaching materials adequately support writing instruction.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q7. Students arrive at university with sufficient writing preparation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

SECTION III – Challenges and Recommendations

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q8. Managing mixed-ability classes is a major difficulty in writing instruction.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q9. Large class sizes prevent me from providing effective written feedback.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q10. There is insufficient time to cover all stages of the writing process.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q11. Balancing accuracy and fluency in writing tasks is challenging.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q12. Students show limited motivation towards writing activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q13. Providing adequate scaffolding for beginner writers is difficult.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q14. Institutional pressure discourages process-oriented writing approaches.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q15. I lack access to suitable, culturally relevant writing materials.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q16. Formal assessment requirements conflict with formative writing practices.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q17. In your opinion, what is the most significant challenge you face when teaching writing to first-year students?

Q18. What strategies or approaches have you found most effective in overcoming these challenges?

Q19. What institutional or policy changes would most improve writing instruction at your department?

Q20. What type of professional development would help you better support students in developing their writing skills?

Thank you sincerely for your time and cooperation.

Appendix B: Student’s Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of a research study investigating the challenges that first-year university students face when learning to write in English. Your responses will remain anonymous and will not affect your grades. Please answer honestly. Thank you for your cooperation.

SECTION I – Background Information

Q1. How long have you been studying English?

☐ Less than 3 years ☐ 3–5 years ☐ 6–9 years ☐ More than 9 years

Q2. Do you write in English outside of class (e.g. social media, journaling)?

☐ Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

SECTION II – Students' Writing Perceptions

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q3. I enjoy writing in English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q4. Writing in English is more difficult for me than speaking.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q5. I feel confident when I write in English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

SECTION III – Challenges and Recommendations

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q6. I feel anxious when the teacher asks us to write in class.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q7. I am afraid of making mistakes in my writing.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q8. I often do not know what to write about.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q9. I have difficulty organizing my ideas in English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q10. I struggle with English grammar when I write.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q11. I do not know enough vocabulary to express my ideas.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q12. I translate from my native language to English when I write.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q13. What would help you become a better writer in English? (You may tick more than one)

- ☐ More time for writing in class
- ☐ More interesting topics to write about
- ☐ More examples of good writing to follow
- ☐ More practice with grammar and vocabulary
- ☐ More feedback from the teacher
- ☐ Opportunities to write about topics from my own culture
- ☐ Working in small groups when writing
- ☐ Having more time to revise my work

Q14. What are the three most difficult things about writing in English for you?
