

## A Systematic Review of Articles on Iraqi EFL Students Writing Difficulties

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### Abstract

Research articles on the writing of Iraqi EFL students concentrate primarily on offering professional writing operational writing skills. There is a lack of research on the difficulties that students confront and how they overcome them, though. The purpose of this article is to review English language articles about Iraqi EFL learners' difficulties in the field of writing and present an organised evaluation of academic writing research that looks at the difficulties and solutions that students face while writing professionally. The research's main articles have been published between 2014 and 2024. Eight papers published in reliable journals have been identified and analysed using the exploratory technique in a systematic review of literature search recommended in this work. Since the study is conducted in Iraq, the study's theme is relevant to Iraqi EFL students; thus, it is legitimate to examine previous research studies on professional writing difficulties among Iraqi EFL students. The review presents a wider context of writing difficulties faced by Iraqi EFL students and the elements affecting their writing abilities. Furthermore, as previously stated, the systematic review obviously demonstrates that the focus of earlier research was on techniques that enhance students' writing abilities. The review's findings show EFL students encounter three major difficulties when it comes to English writing: a misuse of writing mechanics, struggle with the use of articles, prepositions, verb tenses and the anxiety of writing in English.

Keywords: (article, challenges ,difficulties, EFL students, review, writing skill)

## مراجعة للمقالات العلمية حول صعوبات الكتابة لدى الطلاب العراقيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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### الملخص

تُركز المقالات البحثية حول كتابة طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقيين بشكل أساسي على تقديم مهارات الكتابة العملية في الكتابة الاحترافية. مع ذلك، هناك نقص في الأبحاث التي تتناول الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلاب وكيفية التغلب عليها. تهدف هذه المقالة إلى مراجعة مقالات باللغة الإنجليزية تتناول صعوبات الكتابة التي يواجهها طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقيين، وتقديم تقييم مُنظم لأبحاث الكتابة الأكاديمية التي تتناول الصعوبات والحلول التي يواجهها الطلاب أثناء الكتابة الاحترافية. الدراسة تراجع مقالات بحثية نُشرت في بين الاعوام ٢٠١٤ و٢٠٢٤. تم مراجعة ثمان أوراق بحثية منشورة في مجالات علمية موثوقة، وحُللت باستخدام الأسلوب الاستكشافي في مراجعة منهجية للبحث الأدبي الموصى به في هذا النوع من المراجعات. ولأن الدراسة أُجريت في العراق، فإن موضوعها ذو صلة بطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقيين؛ لذا، من المنطقي دراسة المقالات البحثية السابقة حول صعوبات الكتابة الاحترافية لدى طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقيين. تُقدم المراجعة سياقاً أوسع لصعوبات الكتابة التي يواجهها طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقيين، والعوامل المؤثرة في قدراتهم الكتابية. علاوة على ذلك، وكما ذُكر سابقاً، تُظهر المراجعة المنهجية بوضوح أن تركيز الأبحاث السابقة كان على التقنيات التي تُعزز قدرات الطلاب الكتابية. تظهر نتائج المراجعة أن طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يواجهون ثلاث صعوبات رئيسية عندما يتعلق الأمر بالكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية: سوء استخدام آليات الكتابة، والصعوبة في استخدام ادوات التعريف وحروف الجر وزمن الفعل الصحيح، والقلق من الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية. الكلمات المفتاحية: (مقالة، التحديات، الصعوبات، طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، مراجعة، المهارة الكتابية).

## 1. Introduction

Writing has historically been considered a fundamental component of learning English. Students may express their thoughts, opinions, and knowledge through writing without having to speak with others directly. Excellent writing skills enable students to express themselves clearly, communicate their ideas effectively, and succeed academically in a variety of professional fields (Yoon, 2011). Otherwise, as Richards (2002) states, writing presents a large number of difficulties for students, who find that the most difficult part of learning a second language is producing sentences with proper grammar. Many Iraqi students consider writing to be one of the hardest skills to learn because they find it difficult to come up with ideas, develop them logically, and express them in grammatically correct words.

Professional writing is essential for English language learners to develop their language acquisition since it requires mastery of a variety of abilities, including writing structure, coherence, grammar, and vocabulary (Campbell, 2019). While writing is a difficult endeavour that requires a wide range of abilities, such as planning, critical thinking, and linguistic ability. For EFL learners, it can be quite challenging since they have to deal with the additional challenges of learning a new language and understanding different cultural writing standards. Students usually try to get better at writing in English, but they never fully succeed since writing is difficult. Writing abilities should be maintained throughout time in order to become precise, smooth, and dynamic. When they write, language learners should focus

especially on paragraph structure, appropriate vocabulary usage, sentence patterns, and punctuation. The significance of writing skills is not fully appreciated by most learners. They still struggle with several aspects of English language classes, particularly writing (Ali et al., 2017). Students should be required to offer information and employ writing aspects in addition to learning grammar. The difficulty lies not only in organising and creating ideas but also in translating these concepts into language that is easy to comprehend.

So that, this study investigation's importance lies in its ability to draw conclusions from previous studies that aimed to identify the elements influencing EFL learners' writing abilities and the difficulties they face while composing academically. One could argue that the educational system shouldn't overlook these problems. For improved teaching and more successful classes, language teachers should take into account these key elements and challenges.

## **2. Objectives**

The present review article has two objectives:

- To look into the main academic writing difficulties that Iraqi EFL students face.
- To investigate strategies for instruction that enhance students' proficiency in academic writing.

## **3. Methodology**

The proposed paper reviews the literature on the difficulties and solutions related to academic writing for EFL students using an exploratory

approach. We reviewed eight articles from various educational levels about the difficulties and solutions of academic writing. The primary difficulties with academic writing and treatments were classified based on the literature evaluation, with an emphasis on the consequences that students experienced. There were three steps to the literature review. The first section looked at the academic writing difficulties faced by Iraqi students at various educational levels. Second, it identified several instructional techniques that were employed as remedies in classes on academic writing. Finally, it emphasised instructional techniques that effectively support ESL students in improving their academic writing abilities. Peer-reviewed English-language research publications or studies released between 2014 and 2024 were found using these resources. In the keywords boxes of the databases mentioned above, the following combination of phrases was used to look for previous similar studies: (writing difficulties) or (writing skills) and (EFL students or EFL learners).

#### 4. Reviewing the study findings

By implementing the steps involved in performing a systematic review, eight previous relevant studies on the difficulties and obstacles experienced by EFL learners in writing from 2014 to 2024 were found and evaluated. The results are given in Table 1.

Article/ Study	Number of Participants/ Studies/ Research Design	Results	Suggestions / Recommendation
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Abdul-Kareem, N. T. (2014).	259 EFL students Survey	The current state of education in Iraqi schools follows the same path as that taken by traditional teaching methodologies. The majority of Iraqi EFL students struggle to express themselves in English.	Language teachers ought to devote more time to writing a composition. In order to overcome students' "phobia" of writing, Iraqi EFL students require psychological help in the form of support and encouragement to boost motivation and confidence.
Abdalhussein, M. H. F. (2015).	15 Iraqi students Descriptive Qualitative research	The findings indicated that tenses, prepositions, articles, active and passive voice, verbs, and morphological mistakes were the primary areas of grammatical problems.	As a result, foreign language instructors should concentrate on the most frequent mistakes and attempt to fix them using a variety of resources and techniques. They can use activities and techniques linked to the target language's trouble spots to carry out remedial instruction.
Abbas, S. A. (2016).	160 College students Survey	The participants exhibit an external perspective of academic domain of control, a high degree of writing anxiety, and a poor	Iraqi EFL students should be encouraged to practice writing usually and not assess every ability to write. They should also be
		level of writing performance, according to statistical manipulation of the data obtained.	trained to self-correct their writing mistakes and errors. Finally, they should be encouraged to increase the amount of knowledge they have about how to deal with both internally and externally orientated.

Al-Shujairi, Y. B. J., & Tan, H. (2017).	112 compositions convenience sampling method (interview)	The findings demonstrated that Iraqi high school pupils struggle greatly with the use of articles, prepositions, and verb tenses.	Making mistakes is a natural aspect of learning a language. Therefore, mistakes made by students can be viewed as useful tools to enhance instruction and learning in writing classes. Teachers should encourage their pupils to write.
Nasser, S. M. (2018)	30 first-year EFL students Pre and post-tests	The majority of Iraqi EFL students make errors with the arrangement of writings, subject-verb agreement, tenses, the vocabulary, and the structure of sentences.	Teachers must put in significant effort to help students write better and more creatively while also easing the stress that comes with this task. In addition, students may enhance their writing by employing contests, repetitions, visual aids, collaborative projects, and constructive criticism.
Mohammad, A., Al-Mofti, K. W., & Hussein, J. (2020).	80 third-year English students. Descriptive Qualitative research	According to the findings, the biggest challenge Iraqi college EFL students have while writing in English is "incorrectness in using mechanics of writings," which is followed by "lack of assessment rubrics and marking scheme tools."	It is suggested that EFL writing course instructors concentrate on teaching the "mechanics of writings" during the pre-writing phase so that students can generate ideas and develop writing organisation skills.
Lafta, N. H. (2024).	38 English texts written by third-stage students. Descriptive	The weaknesses of Iraqi EFL learners that were found fall into a number of categories, such as	Iraqi EFL students' writing abilities may be greatly enhanced by offering targeted

	Qualitative research	spelling, punctuation, prepositions, articles, tenses, pronoun agreement, subject-verb agreement, and mistakes in compound words.	teaching, practice tasks, and feedback. Teachers may provide a great deal of help in these areas, allowing pupils to write in English with confidence.
Sabti, A. A., Hassan, A. Y., Turki, H. Y., & Hummadi, A. S. (2024).	100 Iraqi undergraduate students. Survey (Questionnaires)	EFL students have linguistic difficulties, fear of teacher's negative comments, insufficient writing practice, and self-confidence, which were respectively detected as the highest influential elements behind arousing anxiety.	It is crucial for educators to encourage their learners to improve their skills by lowering their anxiety and boosting their confidence.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Writing Difficulties in EFL Classrooms

Eight research papers were evaluated (Abdul-Kareem, N. T., 2014; Abdalhussein, M. H. F., 2015; Abbas, S. A., 2016; Al-Shujairi, et al., 2017; Nasser, S. M., 2018; Mohammad, A., et al., 2020; Lafta, N. H., 2024; Sabti, A. A., et al., 2024) on difficulties faced by EFL learners.

Another study was conducted by Abdul-Kareem, N. T. (2014) between 259 EFL preparatory students, 117 of whom were from the literary branch and 142 of whom were from the scientific branch. The result of this study shows that the majority of Iraqi EFL students, according to this research, are unable to express themselves in writing in English. Additionally, it is clear that the current state of education in Iraqi schools follows the same path that utilises traditional teaching approaches.



In the meanwhile, Abdalhussein, M. H. F. (2015) sought to investigate the analysis of grammatical errors in academic writing produced by Iraqi postgraduate students. Fifteen Iraqi students from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's Faculty of Information Systems participated in this study. Since writing is a broad subject, not all of its facets or problems were covered in this research. Only grammatical mistakes, including tenses, prepositions, articles, verbs, active and passive voice, and morphological errors, were covered in this investigation. The findings demonstrated that Iraqi students at UKM made mistakes in a number of areas, including tenses, prepositions, articles, verbs, active and passive voice, and morphological errors.

In a different study, Abbas, S. A. (2016) chose 160 respondents arbitrarily from two English departments at the University of Baghdad for a different study. The participants exhibit an external orientation of academic locus of control, a high degree of writing anxiety, and a poor level of writing performance, according to the statistical manipulation of the data gathered. Additionally, the study shows no correlation between writing anxiety and academic locus of control orientation, encompassing both internal and external. However, writing performance is highly correlated with internal orientation and adversely correlated with exterior orientation of academic locus of control.

In another form of research, 112 compositions from Iraqi pre-university students were gathered by Al-Shujairi et al. (2017). The convenience sample approach used in this study revealed that Iraqi high school students struggle

greatly with the use of prepositions, articles, and verb tenses. Furthermore, the study appeared to show that most mutual mistakes between EFL learners were the addition and omission of letters in the words. Additionally, the study showed that the most common source of mistakes was the influence of their first language features on the second language which they are learning.

Nasser, S. M. (2018) conducted a survey with 30 freshmen EFL students to determine their level of writing ineptitude. It addresses the challenges Iraqi EFL students face while writing paragraphs that are factual, descriptive, procedural, and opinion-based. The goal of the study is to pinpoint these issues and offer workable remedies. According to the study, improving learners writing abilities is essential, as it is a key component of their academic development.

According to the results of the literature of the study conducted by Mohammad, A., et al. (2020). Difficulties of writing in English encountered by Iraqi EFL learners at university level. "the biggest challenge that confronts Iraqi school EFL learners when writing in English is incorrect use of writing mechanics, followed by a lack of assessment rubrics and marking scheme tools. The other difficulty factors, such as insufficient ideas of the learners and the difficulties of grammar rules, came in third and fourth places. The rankings of the following other factors were nearly similar: the lack of teachers' support, the shortage of resources for consulting, inappropriate techniques for instructing writing, subject inadequacy and the limited time.

Lafta, N. H. (2024). found that Iraqi EFL learners also have a little vocabulary, poor grammar, improper prepositions, article errors, and disruptive errors. Additionally, difficulties with pronoun and subject-verb agreement make it harder to keep statements grammatically consistent. Similarly, even though they are less frequent, compound word mistakes need to be fixed to ensure written communication is clear and accurate.

EFL students' negative views and perspectives of English writing are mostly caused by the fact that writing has been shown to be the most challenging activity for them so that learning the English language might be affected by negative attitudes and the absence of motivations. According to the results of the literature of the study conducted by Sabti, A. A., et al. (2024), they demonstrate how anxiety affects students' views. One of the main things preventing people from presenting themselves properly is language anxiety. More precisely, those with high levels of language anxiety tend to learn a lot, but their success does not match the amount of work they put in. Accordingly, anxiousness may have an effect on people's attitudes, behaviours, and written work when writing is required. These people often describe only a few words, write shorter paragraphs, and produce more complex concepts. Additionally, they frequently make mistakes in their writing, such as using improper grammar, rhetorical devices, and lexical diversity. The results demonstrated that anxiety levels were greater among Iraqi learners overall. Stated differently, they performed better on the

avoidance behaviour anxiety component than on the physical and cognitive components.

## **5.2. Strategies for Overcoming Writing Difficulties in EFL Classrooms**

Based on Table 1, the prior research investigations which they review in this paper have offered numerous strategies for dealing and overcoming the difficulties that Iraqi EFL learners encounter when they are writing in English in their classes. According to Abdul-Kareem, N. T. (2014), in order to overcome their "phobia" of writing, learners require psychological treatment in the form of support and encouragement to foster drive and self-confidence. Teachers of languages should treat their students with tolerance and patience. They should never forget that a successful teacher is like a torch that burns itself out to illuminate the path for others.

According to Abdalhussein, M. H. F. (2015), Iraqi students in the UKM in the context of learning English are proficient in the fundamentals of the language, while they have specific weaknesses in their writing in the English language. Lack of writing practice throughout their college in Iraq or while seeking their high degrees may be the cause of these difficulties in writing the target language. Therefore, foreign language instructors should concentrate on the most frequent mistakes and attempt to fix them using a variety of resources and techniques. Using procedures and exercises associated with the target language's weaknesses, they can carry out

remedial instruction. Additionally, textbook designers must consider these mistakes while creating their contents. Test designers should also build their exams based on these mistakes in order to assess properly to the students' progress.

According to another research study conducted by Nasser, S. M. (2018), students may enhance their writing abilities by employing contests, repetitions, visual aids, group projects, and constructive criticism. Teachers must put in a lot of effort to help learners write better and more creatively while also easing the stress that comes with this task. It is important for the teachers to teach students how to organise paragraphs using appropriate word structures and conjunctions.

Furthermore, Mohammad, A., Al-Mofti, K. W., & Hussein, J. (2020) recommended that teachers of EFL writing classes should concentrate on teaching the "mechanics of writing" during the pre-writing phase so that students can produce thoughts and comprehend writing organisation skills. Moreover, educators should let their students be aware of the testing procedures and rules for scoring that educators will be using for their marketing writing papers. Students should also be given enough time to gather their thoughts and enough opportunities to choose a topic for their writing. When writing, students should employ a variety of strategies.

Lafta, N. H. (2024) proposed several techniques to overcome the difficulties that Iraqi EFL students face during practicing writing in English. Firstly, Iraqi EFL learners should recognise the scope of weakness in English



writing to work on improving and developing it. Secondly, EFL students need instructors help to make their work clear and understandable without punctuation errors, inaccurate prepositions, and disruptive sentences. Thirdly, they should also dominate the errors with pronoun and subject-verb agreement because they make it difficult to keep statements grammatically consistent. In a parallel manner, even though they are less frequent errors, compound word mistakes need to be fixed to ensure written communication is clear and accurate. Lastly, the study showed the emphasis on the essentiality of mastering the number of frequently repeated spelling mistakes by picking up writing instruction rules and practising writing to enhance spelling ability. The study also suggested that students in higher education learning English as a foreign language (EFL) could highly develop their writing skills via extensive practice, involvement in supportive activities, and feedback. Meanwhile teachers could offer great help in these areas, allowing students to write in English with confidence and clarity, which would eventually improve EFL learners academic writing skills. By rearranging popular mistakes and providing appropriate training and a large scope of practice, instructors may support students in upgrading their language proficiency and writing abilities.

A research conducted among 100 Iraqi undergraduate students by Sabti, A. A., et al. (2024) found that there were a number of contradictory factors on the impact of anxiety on EFL learners' writing abilities. On the one hand, writing anxiety is considered a major problem with writing skills, as it

impairs focus and precision. This type of worry is known as "facilitative anxiety", and it has the potential to greatly encourage learners to participate in writing assignments. On the other side, worry has been shown to have a detrimental effect on a learner's ability to improve their writing.

While the study finds another kind of anxiety that has a negative effect on students. The high level of this kind of anxiety was caused as a result of a poor level of English language proficiency in writing in an EFL class. The increase of learners anxiety could lead to social interaction avoidance as a result of their poor knowledge in the target language. The study highlights the importance of social activity strategy for Iraqi EFL learners, which can help them learn a second or foreign language writing. This kind of technique might encourage communicative behaviour among Iraqi learners. More exposure to EFL writing is necessary for Iraqi students because it may boost their self-esteem and lower their anxiety levels, which can help them write better and more satisfactorily. In order to reduce the distance between themselves and their students, teachers must be knowledgeable about the most recent and contemporary teaching techniques to strengthen the bond between them.

## 6. Conclusion

This is unlike the prior review investigations that focused on the EFL students writing. This study tightens the focus of EFL writing difficulties and offers a comprehensive and varied knowledge of how EFL students deal with these challenges and difficulties in EFL classrooms. The review

outlines the difficulties ESL students had when writing academically as well as possible solutions. Writing requires both mental and physical effort, making it a composite talent. EFL students must dedicate time to developing their writing abilities. One of the main causes of Iraqi students' negative attitudes and writing difficulties is thought to be a lack of academic writing practice. Additionally, learners lack language competency, which in turn impacts their writing abilities, as a result of language teachers not having enough time to offer chances for writing practice in the classroom.

Practically. The majority of students mostly struggled with choosing the right grammar, spelling, and weak thought organisation. Using the responses provided in the majority of the research examined in this systematic review, these issues might be resolved. In the future, teachers may use these methods to make writing lessons more engaging and inspiring for ESL students. The most popular recommendations include teachers helping learners with their writing assignments by providing feedback, model compositions for students to use as a guide, providing a clearer description of the assignment at present, and structuring.

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