



## Jordanian Students' Engagement in IELTS Writing Preparation Course: a Case Study

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**Abstract.** Many English foreign learners and particularly the Arab learners in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan encounter several obstacles when learning the English language skills including writing that is considered a crucial skill in communication. Jordanian learners committed many kinds of errors when writing including grammatical and semantic errors. So, the objective of this study is formed to highlight this critical issue of the possible solutions to enable students to overcome the problem of committing errors. Using the case study approach, teachers were introduced to semi-structured interviews to give their opinion about the reasons behind the errors the candidates committed and the solutions to fix the problem. The results showed that, the inadequate syllabus design of materials, and the traditional methods of teaching could be considered among the reasons behind committing errors. Regarding the solutions, the study proposed adopting new methods of teaching that encourage the communicative approach in classrooms will lead to reducing errors. Moreover, improving the syllabus design and train the inexperienced teachers lead to the same result of reducing the number of errors in writing. Finally, the study recommends that much attention to the teaching methods of writing, material design and to the status of English language must be paid by all who concern and related to the education philosophy in Jordan.

**Key words:** English teaching, Grammatical errors, material design, teaching methods.

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### INTRODUCTION

Acquiring a second or a foreign language as Brown (2000) indicates is a considered an obstacle that lasts for long time. It is a long, complex process that includes many linguistics errors due to the exposition to the new language system. This fact motivates scholars and teacher to pay more attention on the possible solutions to reduce the rate of committing errors in writing.

Arabic is an official language in Jordan and English is a second language that is commonly used as a medium of communication in many areas, such as business, politics and administration. In the region, English is used informally by educated people. Even Bedouins, who do not undergo formal schooling since they live in cities in the desert, have the ability to speak in English and other languages with tourists with whom they study different languages, including English.

English language education in Jordan started in the 1920s, when the Transjordanian Emirates was dominated by political movement (Alhabahba et al, 2016). English is essential for business, politics and tourism purposes in Jordanian culture and education. At university level, English is one of the main qualifications of Jordanian universities to train graduates for their future jobs both in Jordan and abroad (Al-Khasawneh, 2014). English Language was taught in Jordan between the ages of 11 and 2000, when the education overhaul was introduced to allow children to study English as a foreign language at the age of six when they were in kindergarten.

Four basic language skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing) are also required for students of Jordanian as they continue their early learning of English. However, as Abed Al-Haq (1997) said, most Jordanian EFL students are unable to write and to face sentential difficulties. In addition, for various linguistic and educative reasons they are unable to create a successful prose. For starters, it is difficult for many Jordanian EFL students to express their ideas in writing due to mistakes. The Arabic essence in which the words are spoken causes issues in the correct orthodoxy for students of the EFL in general, and of Jordan in particular. This causes lost vocabulary, leading to



a fracturing of phrases and inadequate understanding. Students, for instance, are attempting to type the wrong word in Arabic but in English so they can't pronounce it right, for instance, by writing the word "Madrasti" (Al-zuoud & Kabilan 2013). English language education in Jordan does not seem to depend on developing lifelong strategies, it seems, but on the modern instructor and on other obstacles, including teaching the textbook. National recommendations for job training programs in English must be drawn up, which should depend on the outcome of sound studies" " (Alhabahba et al, 2016, p.1).

Arab professors, Jordanian included, say that text books are protected from top to bottom regardless of abilities and competencies gained by the students during the learning process. Since Jordan's students focus on quantities and lack continuity, they rely on memorization without knowing and they are not adequately advised on learning to have a beneficial effect on the grades. Furthermore, English and Literature graduates in Jordan are not properly trained how to learn about teaching and how to deal with teaching difficulties. They are frequently called English teachers without a qualified national test which gives teachers full control of the teaching process, including numerous pronunciations, grammatical and structural errors (Alhabahba et al, 2016).

Alkhalwaldeh (2010) points out, however, that English teachers at Jordan government schools, especially high schools, face many challenges in English teaching, which hinder their pursuit. The high number of classroom pupils, the student hostile attitude toward English, a shortage of English language skills for students, the absence of EFL preparation programmes, irrespective of the amount of students at school, the lack of readiness to teach and prepare for the newly appointed EFL teachers, the absence of teacher training in fashion.

The key goal of the English writing courses designed for foreign language learners is to assist them improving their performance to meet the academic rules and enable them to reach the level of free errors writing. So, the need to learn well-organized and free errors writing properly is the main goal all the elements of learning process want to achieve. Learners see that it is very necessary to learn English and concentrate on achieving proper communication in writing. Teachers also see that it is necessary to concentrate on the new methods of teaching as a suitable way to motivate the learners' appetites of acquiring languages for better communication. Syllabus designers also see that providing materials with cultural issues of the target language is helpful too. Therefore, introducing learners to different kinds of writings and preparing them to achieve free errors writing is not that easy burden due to the challenges may encounter learners of the foreign language. So, the study poses: What are the solutions to decrease the number of the number of grammatical errors committed by the candidates in writing task?

The question of the study is important because it seeks a response that will provide teachers with new knowledge that could be used to further improve their teaching methods. It is hoped that the results of this research would make it easier for teachers to provide their learners with more positive input rather than simply suggestions about whether or not the written work is successful.

#### Method

Using the case study approach in the current study reflects many positive points as enabling the researcher to examine the data within the context of the study that is about the Jordanian students' engagements in IELTS course preparation. It is very applicable due to its features in the possibility of conducting the research in a specific setting with a limited number of participants. This study will be conducted in the language center, Alzarqa Private university in AlZarqa city in Jordan with only four IELTS trainers. This approach enables the researcher to examine the real-life phenomenon in depth too. The study selected the convenience sampling because it selects persons who are effortlessly reachable and it is usually used in educational research when selecting participants from a classroom setting (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). So, the study is a qualitative study. It generates data through the semi-structured interview with 6 IELTS trainers at



the language center, Alzarqa Private university in AlZarqa city in Jordan. The qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews are analyzed by looking at themes that emerge.

### **The Analysis of the EFL Teachers' Interviews**

The researcher used semi-structured interviews to evaluate explanations by lecturers of the mistakes committed by applicants in the writing process. Four EFL teachers were contacted to support the researchers in collecting information and expertise on the study paper. The interviews lasted 25 to 30 minutes with each one. On the basis of the emerging problems associated with Jordanian IELTS' errors in training of course the applicants and their explanations, the results of the semi-structured interview were discussed. The triangulation is known as a powerful technique, according to Cohen and Manions (1994), since it gives numerous perspectives on a single phenomenon.

The four teachers remark on the strategy of insisting on the importance of English in universities in Jordan, which pay no attention to training for such foreign examinations. They added that most of English language students do different kind of errors including grammatical. In the first teacher's view, "most students of the English department are alumni of state schools where English teaching is neglected even at early stages (1st and 2nd) when primary students are required to write books of memories, without dwelling on relevant regulations. This may mean the lack of instruction for recently hired teachers in particular." I assume that emphasis on academic writing should be taken as a separate course from high school to graduate graduation level, and that it would definitely improve their ability to write properly." He added that English students do not even undergo academic education instruction during their university studies.

Another teacher (MT2) also said "most of IELTS candidates in Jordan chose to take IELTS not because they are ready enough to take it, or because they are motivated to acquire more language skills and be ideal English learners .On the contrary, most of them have enrolled in preparation courses to guaranty having a job after graduation, or having a chance of completing their graduate studies since they believe that English language is the main requirement for almost all jobs not only in Jordan but also abroad. Therefore, having good preparation course only doesn't guaranty IELTS". Students in Jordan always look for preparation course in the four English skills (reading, writing listening and speaking), but they need more training in writing due to the lack of their experience in academic writing as mentioned before about the polices of universities of not providing academic course writing and the lack of motivation toward learning academic writing. Thus, having preparation courses and selecting the students' goal of achieving EILTS in short period is not that excellent idea. This idea refers to the inability of preparation course from preventing students committing errors. The third teachers (MT3) said "the orientation course is not enough to qualify our students to be proficient in English language, or at least help them to write a correctly, since writing courses are not included in the education system of schools and universities studying plan". he also added in this regard that "students in general have a weak English language competence as a result of the Education system in which student start studying English seriously at the age of 8 in the third grade, which is too late to acquire a language appropriately. He also said, "English language teachers in the governmental schools are still using the traditional way of teaching (teacher centered approach), in which students are only listeners and do not have the chance to practice the language in the correct way". So, the training that students attain prior and during the university level is not enough to let them write English language confidently without committing errors.

Interviewed teachers have reflected on the mistakes of their students whether they decline or improve when they pass to a higher stage of the training course. Teachers reflected on the types of mistakes in this respect. The four teachers interviewed claimed that, when transferring to higher-level classes, the mistakes became less possible due to more experience and more exposure to



English. Most said that semantic errors decrease as students' progress to a higher level, which could relate to the growth of students' skills from being subjected to more writing processes and more practice.

When asking about the reasons for their English language students' errors. (MT2) told the researcher that English language students face a problem with their writing, because of their reading habits. He added: "English Language learners do not read extensively and seem reluctant to enhance their competences and decrease their errors". In addition, (MT1) said: "English Language learners lack the reading habits to develop and enhance their spelling power. They do not read extensively and are not excited to do so. These students are not very much motivated to read books, novels, and other activities on English writing neither by the syllabus nor by related sources".

Another teacher (MT3) comment on the reasons of committing errors of Arab EFL learners by saying: "teachers at schools and Universities are not aware of the use of new models of teaching English writing. Even some of these EFL teachers never come across curriculum that focuses mainly on teaching writing as independent identity. As they do not know what is the importance of that in developing their students' language quality and skills". He added that: "Some English language curriculums' designers and planners at higher education in Jordan lack the awareness of new ideas in the field of teaching writing. These designers and planners do not update themselves with new important teaching models of writing. They go on producing the same EFL teaching materials for many years without incorporating new models that are relevant to decreasing errors".

The fourth teacher (MT4) commented on this as "Our students have great problem with writing errors due to the lack of language use and practice. They find it difficult to meet the language requirements because of the simple and limited vocabulary deposit they possess, as well as mother tongue interference and lack of exposure. Most often, the limited exposure to native language culture prevents them from elaborating and decreasing writing errors". He also added "In Jordan, even if English as a Foreign Language syllabus and curriculum at university stage are modern, EFL teachers tend to be too conservative and traditional. Sometimes, some of them resist the idea of using new methods and like to use traditional method of doing things with classroom practices which leads to more errors".

The four EFL teachers at the chosen center questioned if they could help students to learn English in Arabic to eliminate mistakes. They decided that it was important to offer input on student mistakes to help students develop their skills in writing by avoiding the same mistakes in their next job. They both say they typically provide their students with input by fixing and testing certain mistakes and neglecting others such as, for example, correction of some grammatical errors and the orthographic mistake. They said that the majority of EFL teachers in Jordan have a degree in English and Literature, and so they are not literary or language teachers, such as orthography, grammar and language. they are not closely supervised. For example, (MT2) said: "I am doing my hardest to give my students input on such mistakes in writing. However, in Jordan EFL writers do not give input on mistakes and styles of students, since others do not identify them and do not know their value. Surprisingly, some of my colleagues never focused on writing errors as a significant component of language skills since most of them come from literature background and seldom involve in linguistic issues".

The EFL teachers were also asked to elaborate about how students' errors could be minimized. They both agree that EFL students can reduce their errors by using and learning vocabulary. One of them said (MT1) "I'm trying to solve the incompetence of my EFL students to reduce their mistakes by building up their vocabulary. This helps them develop their writing ability." EFL teachers in Jordan have proposed several suggestions and guidelines for writing teachers to help students eliminate their mistakes. They both accept that English Language and Literature teachers should stop the use of outdated approaches and that they should be conscious of and apply modern teaching methods. For instance, one of the respondents (MT2) said: "I think EFL teachers in Jordan



should avoid somewhat using conventional methods when teaching writing and. They should rather be aware of other teaching writing methods and use them when necessary”.

In order to give students, the ability to develop a broad multicultural vocabulary, which avoids them from being surprised at a later stage, EFL teachers also recommend some changes to the language course (starting with school and completion with universities). They would like to make them comprehensive, rather than rely only on Arabic and Islamic cultures. In order to allow students to learn about their own context, for example, the organization suggested the use of communication methods to teach English. He also recommends teaching English in Jordan from grade one to grade three, and encouraging students to practice writing as a regular exercise to give them more training. Interviews have revealed that the four EFL teachers have variations and parallels in their approach to teaching writing to their pupils. They are also very concerned about the development of their students' writing and found out that their students have experienced a great deal of trouble in creating acceptable writing. These problems are attributed to a variety of causes, such as lack of cross-culture, school system, curriculum and conventional instructional techniques for classroom practice. They also found that the lack of knowledge in the creation of modern teaching styles in the field of writing is one of the factors that could be related to the failure of their students to write well. The findings of the interviews also reveal that Jordanian students face the same challenges in writing in English, regardless of their culture and background.

The main points obtained from the teachers who participated in the study were about providing data on the reasons behind the weakness of students in writing. So, teachers were asked to give their 'yes' or 'no' answers about the following points:

The nature of English as a second language and the students' motivation toward English.

The teaching and learning environment and the chance to practice English.

The effects of improving methods of teaching, improving syllabus designs, and improving writing practices.

Regarding the first point that discusses the nature of English and student's motivation toward it, the results obtained from the teachers indicates that they are all agree that the nature of English as a second language can be considered one of the key reasons behind candidates' weakness in writing. This result is also confirmed when analyzing the candidates' papers that indicated that candidates suffer from the lack of control on the rules of English. For the motivation of the candidates toward English, three of the teachers agreed that candidates suffer from the lack of motivation toward learning English writing as must. They explained their point of view by stating that the candidates' weakness in controlling the rules of English language can be inferred from their lack of motivation toward learning English.

Regarding the second point of teaching and learning environment, teachers said nothing about the role of using the mother tongue language in English classes and they considered it a minor issue when discussing the weakness of the candidates in writing. They said that it may be a considerable point if we discuss speaking skill. This fact, as they asserted, does not neglect the importance of the lacking practice chances of English writing except the given small time during the class. They meant that there are no real workshops that give the candidates the opportunity to practice writing thoroughly.

Finally, teachers were agreed about the importance of improving the methods of teaching English writing. They said that adopting new methods of teaching writing and give much attention to practices could be a helpful way to decrease the candidates' errors in writing and increase their ability to write well. In this regard, they stressed on the importance of developing the designs of writing syllabuses and redirect their contents to meet new objectives that are fit with the international objectives of reaching professional products. So, they concentrated on forming new designs that give the candidates much time for writing practices.



The above findings expose that teachers agreed upon the status of English as a second language to be one of the major reasons behind the candidates' weakness in writing performance. In other words, candidates need enough knowledge of English grammar, semantic, punctuation, spelling and morphology. The inadequate knowledge of the preceded knowledge may cause weakness in their ability to be creative in this language and infer the rules of English. Teachers also concentrated on adopting new approaches to enable them creating English- English teaching and learning environment. Moreover, they stressed the importance of designing new syllabuses with new objectives that meet the international objectives of achieving standard products. This could be achieved if there is a concentration on the time the candidates need to practice writing more in an English -English environment.

So, the inferred data expose clearly that many obstacles could be found when discussing what prevent candidates from achieving high scores in EILTS writing exam. These obstacles can be summarized as: t the candidates' weak foundation, the candidates' limited English background, the nature of English itself as second language, the teaching and learning environment, the methods of teaching, the syllabus designs, and the lack of chances to practice English writing.

#### Recommendations

Increasing and decreasing candidates' errors depend on teaching strategies. Teachers actually have many methods in dealing with candidates' errors. Some follow the instant correction strategies and concentrates on every single error committed by the candidate. Some other follow the strategy of self-correction by letting the candidate observe the error and then correct it. It is better to avoid correction instantly at each error the candidate committed. The following instant and direct correction does not help improving the efficiency of the candidate; it makes them feel anxious and uncomfortable. Instant correction is needed and helpful because it improves communication sufficiency. In addition, confidence and trust is needed to be built between teachers and candidates because it enables them to deal with the matter of committing errors in a friendly and enable teachers to tell their candidates of the importance of avoiding errors. Thus, they convince their candidates that there is no place for frustration, and shame in this matter.

Indeed, correction the errors committed by the candidates needs the awareness of teacher about the sources of them. Knowing the source enables teachers to find the suitable technique to solve the problem the candidates face and explain the relevant rule related to the kind of each error. this actually needs a full awareness of candidates of the aim of the correction that is why concentrating on the significance of self-correction is preferable because candidates are not always aware of the aim behind the teacher correction, especially if this teacher correction is made with anger. So, we can say that teachers' correction must be avoided at all, but it means that it is recommended to stop and correct every single error instantly and in a humiliating way. As stated above, instant correction may disturb the learning process and could present a negative impact on the candidates. This to avoid any possibility of raising the negative factors such as fear and anxiety that may increase the number of errors committed by the candidates and may lead to reduce the motivation of them toward acquiring writing sufficiently. Thus, corrections are proposed not to be applied by teachers.

## CONCLUSION

The current study is conducted to investigate the possible solutions for improving the performance of the Jordanian EILTS candidates in writing. The semi-structured interview with the teachers was employed to provide the possible reasons behind the weakness of the candidates in writing performance. The key points achieved from teachers indicated the candidates' weak foundation, teaching and learning environment, and teaching methodology. The results indicated that many obstacles prevent candidates from achieving professional writing: the weak foundation of



candidates, the status of English as a second language, teaching and learning environment, and lack of chances to practice English writing. The study ends with the recommendations. The recommendations listed in this study are limited and may not be generalized to meet the desires of all English students. At the same time, these recommendations add a contribution to the topic of the study and to the field of teaching and learning English. In addition, more studies are needed to cover the areas this study and other studies did not cover such as the other kinds of errors the students may commit like pragmatic and semantic errors.

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