



Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra
Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of Foreign Languages

MASTER THESIS

Letters and Foreign Languages
English Language
Sciences of the language

Submitted and Defended by:

BELDIA Rayane

**Students' Attitudes toward Using Diaries as a Tool to Develop
the Writing Skill
Case of First Year EFL Students at Biskra University**

Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Foreign Languages as Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Sciences of Language

Board of Examiners

Dr. SLIMANI Said	MCB Biskra	Chairperson
Mr. AOUNALI Walid	MAA Biskra	Supervisor
Mrs. MESSAIBI Samira	MAA Biskra	Examiner

Academic Year: 2021-2022

Dedication

I dedicate this work to:

My parents for their endless love support and scarifies.

My beautiful mother.

My beloved father

My sisters Maroua, Safa, Nour.

My little brother haroun

My best friend Maroua

My aunt Saadia

My grandfather and grandmother

All my family and friends .

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to Allah for giving me the courage and chance to complete my dissertation.

I would like first to thank Mr.Aounali Walid for his supervision, for his assistance and guidance.

My thanks to all my teachers and students who accepted to be a part in my study and to answer my questionnaire.

My final thanks go to my family for being there for me all the time, and for my friends for their help and cooperation.

Abstract

The aim of this research work is to investigate English Foreign students' attitudes towards using diaries as a tool to develop their writings skills. This research tried to investigate the difficulties that first year students encounter when writing; moreover, to explore how students perceive the writing skill. Current researches have found many strategies that aim at improving the writing process. One of most significant strategies is using diaries as a free writing technique to enhance students' writing skills. We shed light on this tool because most EFL classes face numerous difficulties in writing. This study used a descriptive method. To gather data a students' questionnaire was administered to 35 first year students whom were chosen randomly to fill in the questionnaire. The results and findings obtained from the questionnaire confirmed that using diaries would develop EFL students' writing skills. In other words, the findings revealed that writing diaries would improve EFL students' writing skills from many aspects including grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and paragraph coherence. Finally, some recommendations were proposed at the end of this study.

List of Abbreviations and acronyms

EFL: English as a foreign language

ESP: English for specific purposes

Etc: et cetera (and so on, and so forth)

GBA: genre based approach

i.e: in other words

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General Introduction

To master English as a foreign language, learner should master the four foundational skills which are divided into the receptive skills and the productive skills. Productive skills consist of speaking and writing while the receptive skills cover listening and reading. It means that students should be able to use English either receptively or productively.

Furthermore, in the real life communication, being able to speak in English is not enough. It is because not all communication activities can be held in the form of spoken language, but they sometimes need written form. Writing is both mental and physical process: the physical process can be seen in the written form and the mental process cannot be seen because it is in the human brain. As known writing is an important skill that both teachers and students should focus on its development.

Writing is considered as an innate process that people use to communicate and convey their messages, ideas, and knowledge (Iftanti, 2016). In that sense students should develop their writing skills especially for learning English as second language. Since writing is a complex process; students have to find out amusing and interesting ways to develop their writing skills and to be competent in it. According to Maslawati and Moses (2019) writing has become a complex process for students due to several reasons: the lack of vocabulary, lack of confidence, poor spelling, and poor grammar and the lack of practice. Those reasons are the source of students getting frustrated and unconfident while writing. As mentioned above, students should find out alternative methods to improve and enhance their writing skills. There are many ways such as writing poems, lyrics songs or keeping diaries in which they write about their daily lives and experiences.

Diaries is one way for students to develop their writing skills because it is a constant process, students will write daily about their journey in school or about their

problems, so the more they write the better they become in writing. According to Nordiques (2019) a diary is a daily record of one's thoughts, feelings and events. Diary writing can be considered as a type of conversation or a monologue, also as a form of autobiography. Moreover, most students are familiar with keeping a daily journal of what they have dealt with in a particular day. They find it a way to free their heads and relieve their minds from the pressure. The best way to master any skill is to practice. Exposing students to diary writing will contribute to improve the language focuses and the English skills of students. Writing covers many components such as grammar, the content of the writing, tenses and the expressions used in writing. When students write a diary, they develop those components subconsciously. Students can develop the language focuses through the use of diary. As known, language focuses are grammar and vocabulary.

In grammar, students when writing a diary, he\she is expressing or telling events that she\he have dealt with in the past, moreover; students develop a wide range of new vocabulary when writing daily diaries. (veritasari, 2008).Hence, it is precisely in this context that this thesis aims to use diaries as an alternative method to improve students' writing skills. In particular this research aims to determine the ability and the interest of students in writing diaries.

1. Statement of the Problem

Writing skill is one of the fundamental skills that all students need to master to be able to communicate effectively. It is a tool to convey one's messages, ideas and knowledge; therefore, students need to improve their writing skills to be competitive communicators. They should learn the basics of writing such as grammar, punctuation, capitalization and some linguistic rules. However, when students are asked to write a small paragraph, they get blocked due to the lack of practice inside and outside the classroom. The lack of practice makes students inhibit writing. Also, the lack of motivation is

considered as an internal factor that contributes to poor writing skills. Accordingly, teachers should figure out practical techniques to inspire students to write because psychological factors are the key to producing high- quality work.

Considering that, this research tries to bring novel technique which is improving students' writing skills through the use of diaries. Writing a diary is an amusing way for students to feel free while writing. It allows them to explore new ideas and to develop a wide range of vocabulary. When writing a diary, students write down in a paper whatever they feel or experience in their daily lives without putting too much emphasis on grammar and rules. Step by step students subconsciously will find themselves practicing grammar and reaching their vocabulary. As a result using diaries may have a significant impact on the development of the students writing skills.

2. Aim of the Study

The aims of this study are to:

- Identify the difficulties that students face while writing and the reasons behind those difficulties.
- Investigate students' attitudes toward diary writing.
- To explore the role of diary writing in developing EFL students' writing abilities.

3. Research Questions

Through this study, the research aims at answering the following questions:

1. What are the difficulties that students face while writing?
2. what are the reasons behind the difficulties that students face in writing?
3. Can writing diaries be an effective tool in improving students' writing skills?
4. Does diary writing engage students to practice writing?

4. Research Hypothesis

H: if EFL students use diaries as a free writing strategy, their writing ability will be improved.

5. Research Methodology

This study is conducted on the first year at the English department of Biskra University. In this study, we used the descriptive method to gather data and to validate our research aims. We used a qualitative data collection method. A questionnaire will be administered to first year English students to see how they perceive the use of writing diaries as a tool to improve students' abilities in writing.

6. Research Structure

Our research is divided into two chapters. The first chapter will discuss the literature review about our research; we will consider the approaches of the writing process as well as the components and stages of writing. A section will be devoted to personal writing :diaries and its types. Besides, the second chapter will consider the field study and methodology; that is, we define our population, samples and we will describe and analyze the results. Then, we will conclude our dissertation with practical implications and recommendations based on the results we have got.

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Introduction

To achieve a good proficiency in English as a foreign language, learners are supposed to master the four skills which are divided into the receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). Writing is the most important skill that both learners and teachers should put emphasis on because it requires efforts, time, practice and the mastery of some cognitive skills. Moreover, Learners should learn how to write effectively and coherently in order to convey a well structured message. Writing is a fundamental skill which is considered as a tool for communication and translating abstract ideas to written form; however, it is considered to be as the most difficult and challenging skill to learn. Thus, this chapter intends to present an overview about the writing skill, including some definitions of writing, its importance and its elements. It will also consider the stages of writing, as well as, the approaches of teaching writing. Moreover, it discusses the difficulties in teaching the writing skill.

1.1 Definitions of the Writing Skill

Writing skill bears a significant role in each domain; it is a means for communication and for translating ideas and thoughts into a written form. However, writing is regarded as the most complex and challenging skill to master. By its definition, writing is the process of using graphic symbols to convey or translate ideas and thoughts which have been heard or read into a written form (Oxford Dictionary, 2005). In addition, Adiyati (2018) asserted that some people use writing as an alternative means for conveying their messages when they are unable to communicate them through spoken language.

(Widdowson, 2001, p. 62) asserted that “Writing is the use of visual medium to manifest graph logical and grammatical system of the language. That is to say, writing in one sense is the production of sentences as instances of usage”. This means that writing is

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the process of translating abstract ideas (non visual) to concrete ones (visual).in the same line of thought, (Gautam, 2019) stated that writing is a way of exploring ones thoughts, feelings and ideas for the sake of creating a message into the form of written language. Furthermore, writing is a set of written symbols that represent the sounds, syllables, or words of language using punctuation, capitalization, spelling as well as word formula and role (Durga and Rao, 2018). Thus, students should be competent and aware of the different rules of writing as well as its mechanics in order to produce a coherent and meaningful piece of writing.

Similarly, Hyland (2003) said that writing:

“Marks on a page or a screen, a coherent arrangement of words, clauses and sentences structured according to a system of rules” (p, 3). In this light, Hilton and hyder (1992) claimed that “writing requires greater precision and care than speech as it is a more formal act of producing a permanent record. When we speak, we gauge our listeners’ response and instantly clarify if any points which have not been comprehended. As no such interactions take place in a piece of writing, our communication skills have to be unambiguous” (p, 7).

That means that writing needs effort, time and constant practice more than the other skills. When students write, they should produce a clear and comprehensive message to the readers; moreover, they should provide the audience with an interesting piece of writing in order to gain their attention.

In general, writing is a crucial skill that students need to improve in order to communicate, effectively, a meaningful and understandable message. Also, writing is not like other skills, it does not occur naturally so students need to practice it constantly, they should learn about the different linguistic rules as well as to be competent in the several components of this skill to produce a clear, coherent and understandable piece of writing.

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1.2 The Importance of Writing

Writing is a one of the significant skills that facilitate communication; it is considered to be as a means to convey one's thoughts, ideas and knowledge into a written form. In this context students should be aware of the role of writing and they should be competent in its various components, stages, and approaches. First, writing helps students to develop their communication skills by giving them an alternative way to express their ideas or to translate what they have been read and heard into a written form. Second, writing is helpful in improving students' vocabulary, grammar and other linguistic aspects. Last but not least, writing constantly allows students to be able to use the language rules such as spellings, punctuation and capitalization as well as to convey a structured, clear and coherent message.

According to Klimova (2012) writing is crucial skill that students should put extra efforts on; it has several advantages and benefits because it helps students to:

- Express their own ideas, thoughts and feelings.
- Reinforce students' communication.
- It is a tool through which students express themselves and their personalities.
- It assists language development at many levels: grammar, vocabulary and discourse.

As said by Dwivedi (2019) "writing skill will improve one's communication skills. It filters the knowledge and brain" (Para. 5). That is to say, writing skill accouters students for communication, and fosters them to develop thinking skills. It allows students to translate their thoughts, experiences and knowledge into a written form with clarity and cohesion.

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1.3 The Elements of Effective Writing

In order to convey an understandable message to the readers, students should use clear, well structured and coherent ideas that are related to the subject. According to Wildbers (2021), the elements of an effective writing are: organization, clarity, word choice and ideas.

1.3.1. Organization

Organization in writing is putting ideas together in a logical order. It entails keeping the reader focused on the main points. In this sense, Wilbers (2021, p.1) stated that “Good organization is logical and sequential. It guides the reader between divisions of the materials”. Organization makes writing more effective and clear because it allows students to convey structured ideas. Moreover, organization is defined by Nordquist (2019) as “Organization is the arrangements of ideas, incidents, evidence or details in a perceptible order in a paragraph, essay or speech. It is also known as the elements’ arrangements dispositio, as in classical rhetoric”. That is to say, organization is the clear order of thoughts and ideas; it is what enable the reader to understand what is between lines.

Furthermore, a strong organizational pattern guides writers as they start constructing their first draft. Having an ideas about how they will order their paragraphs will help them transmit their thoughts more effectively (“Writing for success”, n.d). In this sense, organizational techniques in writing help both writers and readers stay focused on the main idea. Without clear organizational patterns the reader can get confused and distracted from the main points; therefore, eventually he/she can lose interest.

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1.3.2. Clarity

In writing clarity is a very important element through which the reader can understand what the writer has written. Clarity is a key in attracting the reader's attention and interest. According to Milliman (2019) "When our writing is unclear, our meaning is muddled, and when our meaning is muddled, our readers cannot properly engage with our work"(para.1). From the point of Milliman (2021) being a good writer is not about using complex and extensive vocabulary; however, a good writing is using simple sentences that help your readers grasp what you are attempting to convey. In this context Milliman (2019) proposed tips and explained them as follows:

- **Keep sentences clear and simple**

Using long, complex and indirect sentences may distract the reader from the right point so that he/she may lose interest. Keeping the sentences simple, short and sticky will provide an enjoyable reading and lead directly to the point

- **Readability**

Readability is all about word choice and building up a well structured and organizes sentences. It is about making your writing easy to read and absorb, not hard.

The writer should ask himself the following questing before and after writing:

- Am I using sentences strait to the point?
- Am I jargon?
- Am I using complex word?

- **Chose specific and vivid words**

In writing, it is not sufficient to use short, simple sentences or to make your writing more understandable, the words you pick must provide meaningful information to

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the reader. Moreover the writer must avoid vague words because they only distract the reader's mind and create ambiguity.

1.3.3. Coherence

Coherence in writing is being unified and meaningful; it makes writing more accessible to the reader. According to (Poudel, 2018), "Coherence, generally, is the contextual appearance of the utterances in the text. More specifically, it is contextual fitness in the text that contributes in understanding the meaning or message" (p.5). Coherence bears a significant function in establishing unity between or among the text's propositional elements.

Also Slawson, whitton and wiemelt (2010) argued that coherences is attained when ideas, words and phrases are well formed and associated together. In addition, coherence allows the reader to make sense of the principle elements of any piece of writing. Likewise, Poudel (2018) views coherence as "The result of the interpretation of the meaning of the text, and it depends on the relation between the audience and the text" (P, 5). Subsequently, coherence has a vital role in achieving and producing a comprehensive piece of writing.

1.3.4. Mechanics

Writing mechanics are the different rules that should be in any piece of writing; those rules are related to grammar, spelling and capitalization. According to Nordquist (2019), writing mechanics encompasses the different aspects or writing including abbreviations, punctuation and grammar. Moreover, (Pflugrad, 2020) defined mechanics as the different parts of speech and how those parts are connected to form a coherent piece of writing. Also, mechanics include the rules of writing language and having knowledge

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about those rules is crucial to convey clear and organized ideas. It is directed to make the writing systematic.

1.4 . Approaches of Writing

1.4.1 The Product Approach

The product approach was emerged in the 1960s as a traditional way to teach writing. The focus of the product-oriented approach is on what is learnt at the end of the learning process (the outcomes). According to (Gautam, 2019) the main focus of the product approach to teaching writing is the final product; Its main concern is making students fluent and competent in the several aspects of language when they write coherent and organized piece of writing. This means that, any piece of writing is based on models given by the teacher. Gautam (2019) stated that in the product approach “the learners do not strive for getting through the various consecutive processes during their learning endeavor” (p.79).

Moreover, in this approach students start from prewriting to editing and correcting. Its emphasis is on developing students’ grammatical structure. In other words, the main aim of the product approach is that learning how to write involves understanding the grammatical structure lexis of the language and finally reproducing those features precisely. Furthermore, Khan (2014) pointed out that the product oriented approach in class is providing students with a model text usually written by native speakers to reproduce a text from the own writing style and help them accurate linguistic knowledge. In this approach modeling is the core or as called “model based approach”. As stated by Pasand (2013) modeling is considered to be as an effective source for students; it helps them to master the various aspects of writing including: grammatical structures, vocabulary, organization and coherence if accordantly integrated into the context of writing process. Besides, Pasand (2013) said that “product based approach encourages the

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learners to use the same plan in different setting, apply the same forms, regardless of content, thereby inhibiting writers rather than empowering or liberating them ”(p.76). more precisely, the product approach provide students with a sample that they follow when they write; they use the same form, instructions and rules they have learnt.

This approach consists of four stages: familiarizing, controlled stage, guided and free writing (Ghufron, 2016). The following table identifies those stages:

Table 1.1 Stages of the product approach suggested by (Ghufron, 2016)

Familiarization	Controlled writing	Guided writing	Free writing
The first stage in which students are provided with models of composition, in this stage students deal the different aspects and features of writing such as lexis and grammar.	In this stage, students practice grammar and vocabulary in order to use them in their prewriting. So here teachers are centered.	Students are allowed to write using the grammar and vocabulary they have dealt with in class. Students in this stage respond to stimulus provided by the teacher. They still not independent writers.	Students have the freedom to write from their own using the same form and patterns they have dealt with.

The product approach was criticized for only paying attention to grammar and spelling, it does not give the opportunity to students to construct texts from their own and it does not allow them to be creative. Its main concern is on the writing steps rather than the meaning (Ghufron, 2016).

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1.4.2 The process approach

The process approach bears an important role in teaching writing and it is considered as the most used methods to teaching writing in the classroom. The process approach claims that the final draft of the writer involves several stages or a various set of activities. The writer has the freedom to construct, add or remove ideas when he/she revise her/his paper; the focus of the process approach is on fluency rather than accuracy (Nemouchi, 2009.77). Moreover, the goal of the process approach is to make students more creative.

According to (Zakime, 2018), the process approach helps students to create and construct a well structured piece of writing. In addition, it provides students with a chance to brainstorm what they want to write, produce, revise and edit the final draft before administering it. Brown (2001) stated that the process approach includes: prewriting, drafting, revising and editing. According to him the following steps identify and explain the points that the writer goes through when he/she write.

✓ **Pre-writing**

In this stage, students generate ideas by brainstorming and they gather, organize their thoughts through free writing, mapping, clustering and branching. During this stage the teacher is only a supporter if necessary.

✓ **Drafting**

After students have outlined and organized their thoughts and ideas in the pre-writing stage, they put them into paragraphs that allow the reader to understand the message. Students can narrow, omit or add information.

✓ **Revising**

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In this step, students can go back and revise their texts. They restructure their ideas, add, change or eliminate sentences to make sure that their word choice and order is appropriate. Also, feedback is quite important and it can provide by either the teacher or student.

✓ **Editing**

In this last step, students proofread; check punctuation, spelling and grammar to produce well structured and coherent sentences.

The process approach contrasts the product approach (traditional approach) which is based on giving students a sample (writing topic model) and asking them to imitate the model text. However; the process approach main emphasis is on creative process, I.e. students are given freedom within the task.

1.4.3 Genre approach

The word “Genre” in Merriam Webster Dictionary (n.d) is defined as “category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content», which means that each text has its specific type and purpose. In the same line of thought, (Hedge, 2000, p.264) defined genre as follows:

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rational for the genre. This rational shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constraints choice of content and style.

The genre approach is mostly used in ESP class (English for specific purposes).also; it identifies the style and type of each text.

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From another point of view, Trusle (2021) asserted that GBA is a teaching method that puts emphasis on content rather than form. It is becoming a popular method in the writing classroom. The main principle of the genre-based approach is that ‘language is functional’ (Nemouchi, 2009, p.92). Furthermore, Trong (2011) claimed that genre approach focuses on the relationship between context and genres.

Genre based approach emphasizes the importance of exploring the social and cultural context of language use on a piece of writing, the context decides the purpose of a text, an overall structure of a text in terms of language features and text features often in the form of linguistic conventions (Luu, 2011, p.123).

In genre approach, students cannot produce a text without being explicitly taught the linguistic patterns and convention of that text with regard to language features. In addition, genre approach is an extension to the product approach.

1.4.4 The Free Writing Approach

Free writing approach puts emphasis on quantity rather than quality. It teaches writing by giving students free-writing tasks that allows them to write freely about any topic with a minimal correction of errors (Raimes, 1983). The main focus in this approach is on content rather than form, it is helpful for students to practice writing and to develop their writing skills without worrying about language rules, form, grammar and spelling, i.e. students write without teacher interference. Free writing approach allows students to get rid of fears of writing; it helps them to be more motivated and creative as well as to develop their writing skills. Moreover, free writing approach increase the flow of ideas and the ability to produce written language easily (Raimes, 1983).

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1.5 The Process of Writing Development

Writing is a complex process that includes at least four specific stages: prewriting, drafting, revising and editing. It is a recursive process because when you revise you might turn back to the prewriting to change or to expand the ideas again (Seow, 2005).

1.5.1 Prewriting

Abas & Abd Aziz (2016) asserted that the prewriting stage takes place before writing the first draft. In this stage the writer try to determine which idea should come first and order the ideas according to their aims. According to them: students first generate the main ideas of a given topic and get rid of all the irrelevant ideas. Then, they should organize the ideas by constructing a topic sentence to each element and the topic sentence should refer to the whole idea or element. Finally the writer should order the elements appropriately. In this stage the writer should consider the readers and act upon this by developing arguments that strongly support the main ideas (Abas & Abd Aziz, 2016).

1.5.2 Drafting

Williams (2003) defined drafting as follows “producing words on a computer or on a paper that match (more or less) the initial plan for the work” (P. 106-107). Therefore, drafting is writing according to what is planned before in the prewriting stage and in this step students should not worry about grammar. In this stage, students do not focus much on spelling, capitalization and punctuation. This draft tends to be writer-centered; the writer should write so many drafts until she/he write the final draft. Additionally, in this stage students should focus on clearly describing and illustrating their ideas into coherent and organized paragraphs.

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1.5.3 Revising

Williams (2003) defined revising as “literally re-seeing the text with the goal of making large scale changes so that text and plan match” (p.101-106). Revising takes place after students finish their final draft and determine the mistakes to correct them. In this stage students revise and make changes if required that identify the connection between the plan and the text. Also, students should consider the reader’s needs and expectations. Here, the text becomes reader-centered.

1.5.4 Editing

Editing comes after revising and it is the final step in the process of writing. The main purpose of this step is giving your final draft a professional appearance, checking and correcting spelling, mechanics, capitalization and punctuation (Abas & Abdaziz, 2016, p.377).

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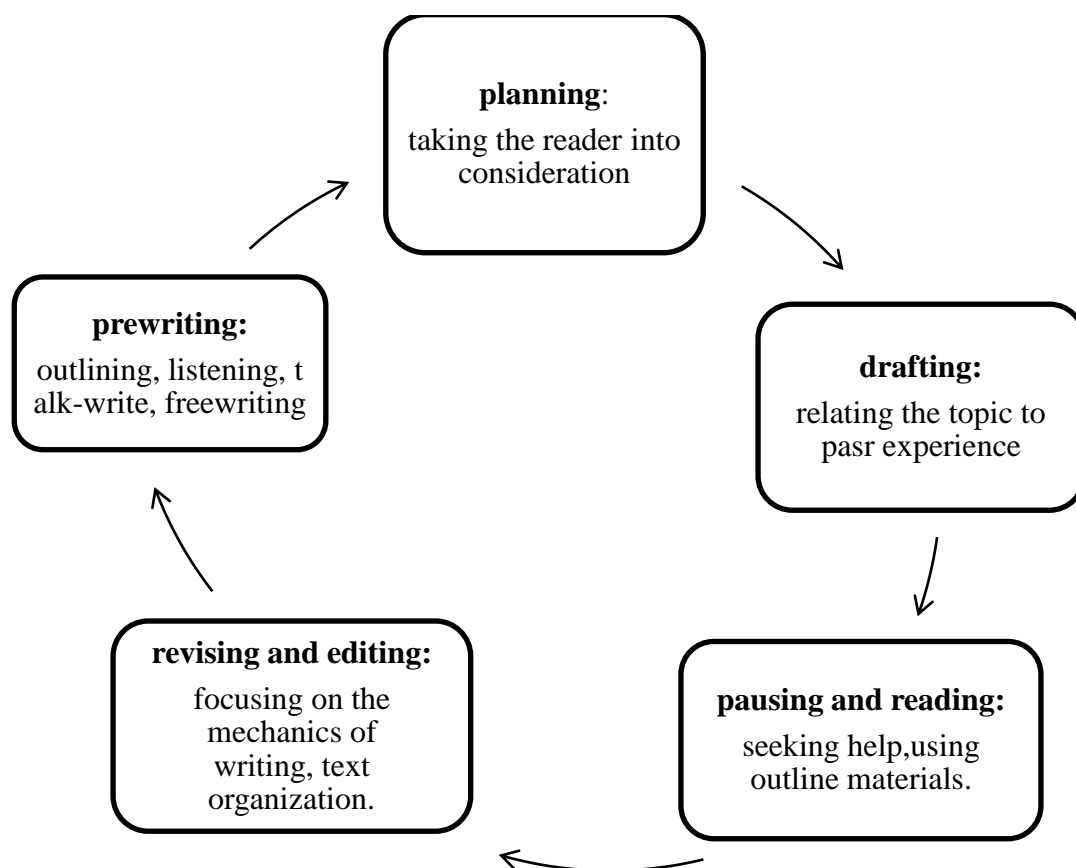


Figure 1.1 The Stages of the Writing Process According to (Abas & Abdaziz, 2016, p.377)

1.6 Difficulties in Learning Writing Skill

Writing is one of the most important skills that students should master, However; students face numerous difficulties and challenges when they write due to several reasons such as lack of practice, lack of vocabulary and lack of motivation. Vocabulary in the first place is the essence element of an effective writing skill because it is the key element through which students build and construct sentences. When students have poor vocabulary, they fail in expressing themselves clearly; on the other hand, good vocabulary can help students to successfully transmit a clear message.

Another challenge facing students in writing is having poor grammar as said by Moses & Maslawati (2019)

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“Grammar provides information that helps the reader to understand its meaning. It is a structure that conveys the detailed meaning of the writer to the reader. Grammar also explains the forms and structure of words, called morphology and how they are arranged in sentences, called syntax” (P.3388). This means that grammar makes any piece of writing easier, clear, structured and interesting to read; however, incorrect grammar may mislead the reader’s attention and destroy the meaning of the text.

Having poor and limited grammar will cause a problem for students in building up correct sentences. In addition, the lack of exposure to books and reading material is the core of those difficulties. More precisely the reason behind the lack of vocabulary is the lack of reading because reading and writing are interrelated, the more students read, the more they develop a wide range of vocabulary. Last but not least, the psychological aspect or the lack of motivation is an obstacle that students face in writing. Motivation is the most important factor of producing a high quality work so teachers should provide their students with activities that motivate them to write and engage in the writing process.

Conclusion

Writing is an essential skill that demands extra efforts and practice from students. Students should be aware of the different components and rules of the writing process in order to effectively communicate and convey clear messages; however, learning writing is considered as a complex and challenging process. Despite of its complexity and difficulty, it is one of the most needed skills in every domain. This chapter provided an overall overview of the different approaches of writing given by different authors. Also it presented the process of writing as well as the importance of writing. Finally it discussed the difficulties faced by students and the reasons behind those difficulties. For that reason

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in the next chapter, we will provide a useful technique to help EFL students improve their writing skills.

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Chapter two: diaries

Introduction

As mentioned in the first chapter, writing skills is one of the most important skills that students should master to effectively convey a well structured message. However writing is considered as a heavy task to master due to its complexity difficulty; moreover, students face numerous challenges while writing such as lack of vocabulary, motivation, spelling, and lack of exposure to reading materials and texts. Students should find helpful and motivational techniques to improve their writing skills. This chapter tends to present an effective strategy which is using diaries as a tool to develop the writing abilities.

2. 1. Definition

As a means of recording daily life, the diary gradually became popular in Europe between the Renaissance and the Eighteenth century as a result of a number of technological and socioeconomic advances (Oacea, 2013).

Journaling defined in Merriam-Webster as “A record of experiences, ideas, or reflection kept regularly for private use” or is “An account of day-to-day events “. In this context, journaling is a type of writing that is related to a specific person, it is a way through which a person expresses his feelings, ideas, experiences and opinions. Also, diaries or journals are one type of writing which people use to indicate or record activities, reflections or feelings. (Sheble and Wildmuth, 2009) also defined diaries as “Diaries capture life as it is lives by an individual over time “(P.1). This means that diaries are a regular record of people’s daily life, memories, activities and experiences.

According to Nordquist (2019) diary is considered as a personal record of people’s experiences, opinions, thoughts and daily lives. Moreover, diary is a type of conversation

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or monologue. Dincel and Savur (2018) asserted that diaries are a type of motivational and spiritual journals that reflect or present spiritual issues. In addition, Diaries are defined as a form of autobiographies, life, memories, and recorded events. Last but not least, diary is a mirror reflects one's life, memories, feelings and events.

2.2. Types Of Journals

Journals are collections of people's personal writing that reflect and express their life experiences, daily events, perspectives and thoughts. Also, journals create an opportunity for students to freely generate their ideas, to explore their understanding without being worried about the teacher's feedback or assessment. In addition, journals can be an effective tool to develop students' critical thinking and useful to improve students' communication skills (Michael, 2012).

2.2.1 Learning Journals

Learning journals are related to learning issues and matters, students usually use learning portfolios to reflect what they have learnt and to overcome some learning difficulties. Learning journals usually are written in a notebook and they can also be a tape record. Students create their own learning journals based on their own questions and the difficulties they face during learning process as well as the sequential themes and questions addressed by the teachers (Berchoud, 2002). Moreover, learning journals are mostly used in high education as a tool to facilitate the learning process "They seem to be helpful in personalizing and deepening the quality of learning and in helping learners to integrate the material of learning" (UCD teaching. p.1). A learning journal allows students to freely express their opinion about a particular issue which make them more active and related learners. It includes a variety of formats and shapes.

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2.2.2. Diaries

Diaries began to arise in the late Renaissance when the importance of an individual state to get more attention. In the 19th century, there was a great emphasis on the use of diaries as well as it was the period of publications of many diaries such as: Pepys's written by "Sir Walter Scott" and the diary of "Henry crabs Robinson" (Tikkanen, 2019). A diary is as a mirror of one's personality, feeling, opinion and daily events. A personal diary is a record of person's daily life. As stated by Merriam Webster dictionary is "A record of events, transcriptions or observations kept daily or at frequent intervals". Sheble and Wildemuth (2009) stated that "Diaries capture life as it is lived by an individual over time (p.1). In other words, diaries is a record of people's life experiences and daily lives, they are a reflection to a person's personality, predictions, perspectives and observations.

2.2.3. Dream Book or Log

A Log is a booklet used to reflect and interpret one's dreams. According to Merriam Webster dictionary a dream books defined as follows "A book claiming to interpret the significance of dreams especially as omens of the future". In other words, dream books are a record and reflection of dream experiences. Moreover, a log is a written record of an occurrence it's similar to psychiatric treatment, students who are afraid and have some concerns of certain aspects of learning may experience dreams about them as a result, they write about their dream in a booklet which may help them to find solution and relief the minds(Moon,1999).

2.2.4. Autobiography, Life Story and Memories

Autobiography, the biography of oneself narrated by oneself Autobiography works can take many forms, from the intimate writing, made during life that were not necessarily

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intended for publication (including letters, diaries, journals, memoirs and reminiscences) to a formal book-length autobiography” Britannica (2020, para1). Autobiography is a mirror for one’s life story narrated by the person him/herself it is the record or the reflection of one’s life story.

2.2.5. Spiritual Journals

Spiritual journals differ from other journals in the form and style. Spiritual journals express one’s feeling and emotions; moreover, spiritual journaling is a therapeutic practice that introduces people’s problem, experiences and feelings. Also spiritual journals rely on the relationship between the person and himself. It helps students to make conversations with themselves (Wiggins, 2011).

Wordsworth (2006) stated that “Keeping a spiritual journal allows you to see where you have been, where you are heading and also acts as a GPS of sorts. It is also a sacred place to recognize who you are. This type of journal also becomes the fertile soil where seeds of inspiration and intention are able to grow and manifest” (para2). That is to say that spiritual journal serves as a therapy for people who struggle in their lives and it is considered as a means by which people discover their inner world.

2.2.6. Professional Journals

Professional journal is an academic publication produced by professional organization that is directed at a specific professional readership such as: Doctors, Teacher, Attorney, Engineers, or accountants. They could include research papers, studies and practical articles relevant to the field (Rathe, 2021).

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2.2.7. Interactive Reading Log

This type of journals based on the student feedback and reaction to what they read. It allows the writer to read and think in the same time; in addition, it is used as a mean for growth in knowledge, ability to read between lines and capacity to express oneself the goal of interactive reading is to put more emphasis on reading and engagement with the author while putting less emphasis on intensive or structured writing about a certain topic (Woods, 2018).

2.2.8. Electronic Journals

As the name indicate electronic journal, an academic formal publication in electronic form or written on electronic base (Lisbdnetwork, 2013). According to Kumar (2017) “E-journals are any formal or serial publication available in electronic format. E-journals may also be defined as those, where the text is read on and/or printed from the end user’s computer rather than as a print or paper” (page, 02). Electronic journals are a series of publications available in digital format.

2.3 Journals VS Diaries

Most people believe that a journal is the same thing as diaries. Nevertheless, there is distinct difference between the two. The two terms are used interchangeably; however, there is difference between them explained by (Holloway, 2021) as follows:

- Diary is a booklet or a notebook used to keep track of daily events as they occur. It is a daily record of one’s daily life experiences. Besides that, people use diaries as a way to relief their minds from any kind of feelings and emotions

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- The dates on calendar; on the other hand, aren't always bound by the contents of a journal random thoughts, ideas, experiences, emotions and anything else that comes to a person's mind can be written down in journals
- Diaries are a mirror and that reflect a person's daily life; however, journals can take place at anytime.
- Diaries are a regular process unlike journals that can be done when the writer/person feels in the mood to write
- Journals can be used in many ways but it is mostly used in exploring and generating ideas while a diary is used to keep track of daily events and experiences on a disciplined manner.

Journals and diaries can mean the same thing but a journal is a personal record of events, observations and thoughts; however, a diary is booklet where you keep track on certain things.

2.4 Diary Writing as a Reflective Tool

Some researchers assume that writing on a regular basis can develop students abilities and make them flexible and smarter. Practice can enhance student's academic performance as well as their writing skills; moreover, diary writing helps students to overcome their difficulties and fears of writing. Since it is a free task, students will write without constraints. Additionally, teachers can figure out the setbacks and the difficulties that their students face so they help them to overcome those difficulties by assigning more free tasks, they also can identify what strategy can help students and facilitate the learning process; in other words, diary writing can reflect the problems students encounter when they write because learners are in control of their learning process (Moon, 1999).

As stated by Klimova (2013, p. 120) "Reflection deepens learning. The act of reflecting is one which causes us to make sense of what we've learned, why we learned it,

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and how that particular increment of learning took place. Moreover, reflection is about linking one increment of learning to the wider perspective of learning – heading towards seeing the bigger picture. Reflection is equally useful when our learning has been unsuccessful – in such cases indeed reflection can often give us insights into what may have gone wrong with our learning.”

Writing a diary is an unquestionably useful method for the learning process. However, it is not as simple as it appears, because not all students are eager to share their personal writing with their teachers, and not all students are willing to write diaries constantly. Nevertheless, keeping diaries is beneficial to both the students and teachers in collecting feedbacks from students about their learning restrictions and difficulties.

2.5 The Advantage of Writing Diaries

Keeping a diary or a journal is very helpful strategy for students to express their thoughts, feelings, opinions, emotions, difficulties they face in learning daily routine also a diary is a regular task which can motivate students to write constantly without putting emphasis on language rules and structures.

There are several benefits to keep writing diary proposed by (InnerDrive, 2018):

- ✓ **Develop students' writing style:** Writing diaries can help in improving student's writing skills as we all agree practice makes perfect and the best way to master any skill is practice so writing diaries allows students to write worrying about grammar, punctuation and the structure of sentences; moreover, writing constantly will help students rich their vocabulary and develop wide range of phrases and words. In addition, writing regularly will improve student's thinking process as well as make them more active and flexible
- ✓ **Self expression/venting out:** writing diaries is a way to express ourselves and to convey our messages, structures, punctuation, grammar and syntax can all be

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transcended which writing down our emotions and thoughts, allowing us to freely express ourselves when we write, our thoughts break free from the confines of our agitated minds and appear on the page in front of us.

- ✓ **Inspire creativity:** writing diaries is a great way to discover the inner an hide creativity of people. Any idea that comes to mind where we write it, we let our imagination to go wild. Writing down our feelings and thoughts will help to brain-dump the anxiety, fears and negative emotions; moreover, it help in reducing stress and release any sort of accumulated feelings.

- ✓ **Reduce stress:**

Writing diaries help people to get rid of their anxieties, fears and frustrations. A great way to relive stress is to write thoughts and feelings down; it allows people to free their minds from tension and pressure they face during the day.

- ✓ **Generate and brainstorm ideas:**

The advantage of writing diaries includes the ability of processing and keeping track of people's ideas. Diary writing helps in organizing thoughts in a comprehensive way. Moreover, writing diary allows people to organize and archive their thoughts, plans, memories and stories.

- ✓ **Helps to learn from past experiences:**

Learning from the past experiences and events is much useful when it is related to reflection because when people reflect about their experiences, they learn lessons and they draw conclusion from what they gone through.

- ✓ **Improves communication skills:**

Writing diaries give space for people to express their personalities, opinions and perspectives. Thus, they can easily communicate themselves with others. Moreover, diaries allow people to clear their thinking which result a clear and

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understandable communication. Writing diaries can be used to assist students learn to express themselves more effectively and it improves their self-efficiency.

2.6 Problems and Issues with Diary Writing

Diary writing is a reflection of the writer life and experiences. In writing diaries students may encounter some challenges; including content, organization, vocabulary related to particular topic and mechanics (Anggraini, 2018).

- a) **Content:** content is related to topic on the story that writer will write about. Student's major problem is finding a topic and developing the ideas of this particular topic. Furthermore, students fail in organizing and structuring the relevant ideas related to the subject matter.
- b) **Organization:** organization is related to the structure of the text. Students when they write, they face a problem in organizing the ideas of the story in a way that make their story understandable and clear.
- c) **Vocabulary:** student's biggest challenge is finding the appropriate words related to the story. They fail in expressing their ideas, thoughts, and feelings due to lack of vocabulary and word choice.
- d) **Grammar:** is related to using the appropriate terms. Students another problem is using correct tense because of lack of grammar knowledge; moreover, students most of the times tackle difficulties in learning the basic rules and structure patterns. Students find grammar boring and complex so that they avoid writing.
- e) **Mechanics:** mechanics is what makes the story readable and understandable; it is the use of punctuation, spelling and capitalization (Anggraini, 2018).

Other problems that students may face in diary writing as suggested by (Erin, 2019) are:

- Students do not write daily and they may get bored easily.

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- Most people do not use diaries, because they believe that the time of pen and paper is gone. Instead they prefer to use social media.
- Keeping diary takes time and dedication so most people do not write daily.
- For some people, keeping diary make them feel unsecured, it may be terrifying to consider the risk of writing personal things down in a paper

2.7 Types of diaries

Diaries as a means for recording people's life experiences, daily routines, ideas and personal feelings can be used for several purposes. There are different types of diaries that people use to keep track on specific events.

2.7.1 Travel Diary

Travelogue or travel diaries are diaries, of travel experiences, they are used to record what people learn from their trips. Travel diaries give a space for people to keep their memories adventures and whenever they explore new places. In addition, travel diaries allow people to store and share their stories with others (Evans, 2019).

2.7.2 Reflective Diary

To keep track of your events and daily routines, it is a place for expressing one's emotions and ideas; moreover, reflective diaries are a place where a person self-reflects about what he/she has learned from a past memory, events, learning experiences or personal experiences ("WikiEducator", 2007).

2.7.3 Dream Diary

Dream diary is a space for pouring down the dreams daily and keeps track of them on a regular basis, reflects the secrets and personal information of people. furthermore, dream diary can help people in improving their memory by writing down their dreams daily; moreover, it is helpful from the aspect of people's mental

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health because it may determines some triggers for a person's emotions and feelings that she/he might not be aware of (Sangerma, 2020).

2.7.4 Personal Diaries

In this type of diaries, people write about their secrets anytime they want. It is a comprehensive diary in which people write freely about their interests, hobbies, feelings, predictions and private informations (Madden, 2022) .Additionally , personal diary is a useful means for students to manifest, process and generate their thoughts; moreover, students use diaries to plan and to keep track of their goals and achievements.

Conclusion

To conclude, in this chapter we defined diary from different perspectives and in a different aspects; moreover, we mentioned its types, benefits and the difficulties that students face in writing a diary. We presented the different types of journals and the we stated the difference between journals and diaries.

Diaries were not given much emphasis in the teaching and learning process; nevertheless, we cannot neglect their great impact on improving students' writing skills. Diary writing is an effective tool to motivate and enhance student's writing skills. More particularly it bears a crucial role in the improvement of the learning process.

The main focus in this chapter is using diaries as an alternative tool to motivate and encourage students to develop their writing abilities. This study investigates students' attitudes towards using diaries as a strategy to develop their writing skills.

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Introduction

The last two chapters presented an overall overview about the writing skill and the use of diaries as a tool to develop students' writing skills. This chapter is devoted to the practical part of this research; it focuses on the analysis of the collected data. The method that is used in this research is the descriptive method. For this purpose, a students' questionnaire was administered. The main aim of this questionnaire is to explore how first year EFL students in the English department at university of Biskra perceive the use of the free writing as a strategy to enhance their writing skills. The objective of this research work is to verify the hypothesis being mentioned at the beginning of this study.

3.1 Research Methodology

In this research work, we used the descriptive method that includes detailed analysis of the findings that permit to carry out our research work. This method aims to interpret the perspectives and views about the suggested strategy.

3.1.1. Population and Sampling

This study deals with first year EFL students in the English department of Mohamed Khider of Biskra University. In this research work a questionnaire was administered to 35 students.

3.1.2. Data Gathering Tools

In this study, we administered a questionnaire for 35 students of first year EFL students of the English department. The students' questionnaire is divided into three sections.

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3.2. Students' Questionnaire

The main objective of this research work is to explore the attitudes of first year English students toward the use of diaries as a tool to improve their writing skills. The questionnaire consists of closed questions and open-ended questions. In the closed questions, students had to tick her/his option, whereas, in the open-ended questions had to explain or justify their options.

3.2.1 The Aim and Administration of the Questionnaire

As mentioned before, the present research is conducted, on first year EFL English students, to investigate students' attitudes toward using diaries as a technique to improve their writing abilities and to overcome the difficulties they face in the writing process. This questionnaire was posted on Facebook groups as well as it was distributed on 35 learners.

3.2.2 Description of the Questionnaire

The students' questionnaire includes sixteen questions classified into three sections; moreover, the questionnaire consists of closed questions and open-ended questions.

Section One: General Information (From question 1 to question 2)

This section gives information about the students' aim behind choosing English (Q1), and students' gender (Q1).

Section Two: Students' Perceptions about the Writing Skills

(Q3) aims to find out what skill among the four skills is more difficult than the other skills ;(Q4) was about giving the frequency of how often students practice writing. Then, in (Q5) students are asked about how they find writing in English. In (Q6) students are required to give their opinions about their level in writing. Next, in (Q7) students were asked the kind of difficulties they face in writing. Moreover, (Q8) was about identifying what stage of the writing process students find more difficulties in. in (Q9) students were requested to state the reasons behind their

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writing difficulties. Later, (Q10) seeks informations about the main strategies students would use/ chose that could help them to improve their writing skills.

Section Three: Students' Attitudes towards Using Diaries

In (Q11) students are asked to give their opinions about the use of free writing tasks to improve the writing skills with a justification; (Q12) was about giving the frequency of how often teachers assign free writing tasks. In (Q13) students are asked to state to what extent they agree or disagree with using diaries to enhance EFL students' writing skills. Later, in (Q14) students are asked if paying attention to linguistic rules while writing diaries is important or not with a justification; in (Q15) students were requested to state whether they agree or disagree with using diaries to improve students' writing style, vocabulary, grammar and punctuation; this questions aims to figure out to what extent students agree with using diaries to stimulate students' creativity. Finally, (Q16) is about is about giving the frequency of how often students write diaries, if always or sometimes say why.

3.2.3 Results of the Questionnaire

This main aim of our questionnaire is to test the hypothesis mentioned at the beginning of our study. Through the finding of this questionnaire, we are going to know whether our hypothesis is confirmed or not.

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Item 1. Would you specify your gender please?

Table 3.1 Students' Gender Distribution

Option	Number	Percentage
Female	27	77%
Male	8	23%
Total	35	100%

As shown in the table above 77% of the students represent females, whereas only 23 % of students are males. This indicates that the great majority of first year students are females.

Item 2. Why did you choose to study English at university?

Table 3.2 Students' Reasons behind Choosing English at University

Option	Number	Percentage
a) Your job role requires it	1	3%
b) You need it for online purposes	4	11%
c) You need it for traveling purposes	2	6%
d) You need it because it is a global language	17	48%
e) More than one answer	10	29%
f) No answer	1	3%
Total	35	100%

The table above indicates that the majority, 48 % of students choose to study English because it is a global language, and 29% of them choose more than one option, while 11% of students choose it for online purposes; 3% of students their job requires learning English. This means that the vast majority of students learn English because it is a global language that they need in each domain.

Item 3. Which of the following language learning skills is more difficult and you would like to improve the most?

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Table 3.3 The Most Difficult Language Skill(S) For Students

Option	Number	Percentage
a) Reading	1	3%
b) Listening	7	20%
c) Speaking	9	26%
d) Writing	7	20%
e) More than one answer	11	31%
Total	35	100%

In this question, students are asked to identify which of the language skills that they face difficulties in and what skill they need to put more effort on. The great majority of students (31%) choose more than one language skill that they struggle in, and 26% of students have chosen speaking skill as the most difficult language learning skill; 20% of them find listening as the most challenging skill which they need to improve more, whereas 3% of students encounter problems in reading.

Item 4. How often do you practice writing?

Table 3.4 Students' Frequency of Practicing Writing

Option	Number	Percentage
a) Always	1	3%
b) Sometimes	25	71%
c) Rarely	8	23%
d) Never	1	3%
Total	35	100%

As mentioned in the table above, this question is about giving the frequency of how often students practice writing. As indicated by 71% of the students, they stated that they practice writing from time to time. 23% of them reported that they rarely write, while 3% of students always practice writing; moreover, the same percentage of students (3%) said that they never write. this findings clearly identifies that our students practice writing sometimes and they are aware of the importance of writing.

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Item 5. How do you find writing in English?

Table 3.5 Students' Perceptions about Writing in English

Option	Number	Percentage
a) Boring	7	20%
b) Exciting	28	80%
Total	35	100%

The table above shows that 80% of students find writing an exciting task while 20% of them find writing a boring task. Later in this question students are asked to justify their answers. Students find writing as an exciting task because they believe that writing provides them with a space to express themselves, feelings, personalities and perception moreover, our students think that writing constantly can enhance their writing style, vocabulary, grammar and other language aspects. However, some students find writing boring because they do not have a strong backup of vocabulary and ideas so that they avoid writing; moreover, they said that they do not feel motivated when they write. Thus, these results confirm that first year English students consider writing as an important, enjoyable skill; nevertheless, students face a numerous difficulties that prevent them from practicing writing.

Item 6. How do you evaluate your level in writing?

Table 3.6 Students' Evaluation of Their Level in Writing

Option	Number	Percentage
a) Poor - I definitely need some help	3	9%
b) Acceptable - but I know I could improve	14	40%
c) Good - I could improve with some advanced tips	17	48%
d) Excellent - I do not think I could improve much	0	0%
b+c	1	3%
Total	35	100%

The table above reported that 48% of students have a good level in writing and they believe that they could improve it with some tips. 40% of them claimed that they have acceptable level in writing, while 9% of students said that they have poor level so that they need some help.

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In addition, a small percentage of students (3%) said that their level in writing is between good and acceptable. This confirms that the level of the majority of students is in-between.

Item 7. What do you think is more difficult in writing?

Table 3.7 The Most Difficult Writing Aspects for First-Year EFL Students

Option	Number	Percentage
a) Word choice, spelling and punctuation	6	17%
b) Tenses and sentence structure	10	28%
c) Generating and organizing ideas	8	23%
d) Coherence and cohesion	2	6%
e) More than one answer	9	26%
Total	35	100%

According to finding in the table above, students of a rate of (28%) have difficulties in tenses and word structure; 26% of them stated that they face difficulties in all the aspects of writing including: word choice, tenses, coherence and finding ideas. In addition, 23% of students said that they have problems in generating and organizing ideas. 17% of them, which represent 6 students, indicated that they face challenges in word choice, spelling and punctuation. While, 6% of students struggle in making their writing coherent. Thus, these findings indicate that students have difficulties in the language rules and the mechanics of the writing process.

Item 8. Which stage(s) of the writing process do you find more difficult?

Table 3.8 The Most Difficult Writing Process Stage(S) For First-Year EFL Students

Option	Number	Percentage
a) Prewriting	9	26%
b) Outlining	2	6%
c) Drafting	5	14%
d) Revising	3	9%
e) Editing	5	14%
f) All of them	7	20%
g) More than one answer	4	11%
Total	35	100%

In the table above, students classified their difficulties in the stages of the writing process as follows: 26% in the prewriting stage, then 20% of students have difficulties in all stage, 14% of them in drafting and editing. 11% selected more than one option; 9% have problems in revising

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and 6% in outlining. This clearly confirms that the majority of students face problems in almost all stage of the writing process, especially in the prewriting stage where they struggle in selecting, organizing and brainstorming the informations.

Item 9. According to you, what are the reasons behind your writing difficulties?

Table 3.9 The Reasons behind First-Year EFL Students Writing Difficulties

Option	Number	Percentage
a) Lack of reading	6	17%
b) Students' negative attitude towards writing in English	1	3%
c) Students' Poor linguistic competence	1	3%
d) Lack of practice	9	26%
e) Insufficient guidance from the teacher	0	0%
f) The way writing is being taught and assessed	0	0%
g) All of them	3	9%
h) More than one answer	16	45%
Total	35	100%

In this question, students were asked to identify the reason(s) behind their writing difficulties and challenges. 45% of students have reported there is more than one reason behind the problems they face in writing including (lack of practice, lack of reading, lack of motivation and students' negative attitude). Nine students that is (26%) the lack of practice is the reason behind their writing difficulties. This means that students do not practice constantly writing in the classroom. Then, 17% of students indicated that the lack of reading is the source of their writing difficulties. In addition, 9% of them stated that all the reasons in the graph above are the source of their writing problems, whereas 3% of students said that poor linguistic competence is the reason; another 3% that students' negative attitudes toward writing is the reason. As a result, we can say that most of our students encounter difficulties due to the lack of exposure to reading material and the lack of practice.

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Item 10. According to you, which of the following teaching strategies can help you improve your writing skills?

Table 3.10 Teaching Strategies for Improving First-Year EFL Students' Writing Skills

Option	Number	Percentage
a) Writing by modelling	0	0%
b) Assigning free writing tasks	4	11%
c) Exposing students to different types of texts	2	6%
d) Assigning research projects	0	0%
e) Encouraging self and peer assessment	1	3%
f) Using different sources, forms and types of feedback	4	11%
g) All of them	12	34%
h) More than one answer	11	32%
i) No answer	1	3%
Total	35	100%

As the table illustrates, 34% of students which represent 12 students reported that all the mentioned strategies in the table above are helpful in improving their writing skills. 32% of the students' responses has shown that using more than one strategy is useful, while 11% of students said that assigning free writing tasks can improve their writing abilities; moreover, the same percentage of students claimed that using different sources, types and forms of feedback can be a useful strategy. 6% of them said that exposing learners to different types of text is helpful, whereas 3% state that encouraging self and peer assessment is a good strategy for enhancing students' writing skills. These findings show that students are interested in developing their writing skills through the use of different strategies. Thus, the implementations of those strategies in the classroom can be a very beneficial in motivating students to engage in the writing process.

Item 11. Do you think that assigning free writing tasks can help you improve your writing skills?

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Table 3.11 Students' Opinion about the Impact of Assigning Free Writing Task.

Option	Number	Percentage
a) Yes	35	100%
b) No	0	0%
Total	35	100%

The results in the table above illustrated that 100% of students believe that assigning free writing tasks can help them to develop their writing skills. Then, students were asked to give their justification. For some students, free writing tasks give them the freedom to write about any topic they want, using their own style and vocabulary. Others, the free writing provide them with a chance to explore the range of vocabulary, ideas and informations they have in mind. These findings have shown that students prefer to write freely without constraints; they find free writing an enjoyable way to express their ideas. Therefore, this confirms that giving students the freedom to write about anything they want should be taken into consideration.

Item 12. How often does your teacher assign free writing tasks?

Table 3.12 Extent of Assigning Free Writing Tasks in the Classroom

Option	Number	Percentage
a) Always	3	9%
b) Sometimes	18	51%
c) Rarely	12	34%
d) Never	2	6%
Total	35	100%

This question is about giving the frequency of how many times teachers assign free writing tasks. As indicated in the chart above, 51% of students stated that their teachers assign free writing tasks "sometimes", and 34% of them claimed that "rarely" when their teachers assign free writing activities, while 9% are always given free writing tasks; moreover, we can notice that small percentage of students 6% are "never" provided with free tasks from their teachers. From the existence results, we can notice that our students are given chance to practice their write freely which is a motivational strategy that allow students to write constantly.

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Item 13. To what extent do you agree or disagree that using writing diaries as a free-writing strategy can be useful for enhancing EFL students' writing skills?

Table 3.13 Students' Views about Using Diaries as a Strategy to Enhance Their Writing Skills

Option	Number	Percentage
a) Very useful	13	37%
b) Useful	20	57%
c) Not useful at all	1	3%
d) No answer	1	3%
Total	35	100%

The table above has shown the students' views towards using diaries as a strategy to develop their writing skills. 57% of students find that writing dairies can be a helpful technique to enhance their writing abilities, and 37% of them agreed that using this strategy is very helpful. However, 3% of students do not find writing diaries a useful tool to improve their writing skills. This indicates that the vast majority of students support the idea of using dairies as a way to help students in developing their writing skills. Therefore, this strategy should be implemented in the learning process.

Item 14. Do you think that paying attention to linguistic rules when writing a diary is important?

Table 3.14 Students' Opinions about the Importance of Paying Attention to Linguistic Rules When Writing Diaries.

Option	Number	Percentage
a) Yes	26	74%
b) No	9	26%
Total	35	100%

As illustrated in the table above, the majority of students (74%) said "yes", while 26% of them stated that paying attention to linguistic rules when writing a diary is not important. Thus, these findings shows that some students prefer to write without being constrained to language

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rules and writing mechanics, while some of them believe that being aware of the rules is crucial in order to produce a well organized, coherent and comprehensive piece of writing.

Item 15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Table 3.15 Students' Opinions about the Effectiveness of Writing Diaries

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Writing diaries improves students' writing style.	12/31 39%	18/31 51%	0/31 0%	0/31 0%
It increases one's vocabulary size.	16/31 52%	11/31 35%	4/31 13%	0/31 0%
It helps in developing grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc.	10/31 32%	18/31 58%	3/31 10%	0/31 0%
It engages students to write constantly.	12/31 39%	15/31 48%	4/31 13%	0/31 0%
It helps students to generate and express their ideas.	13/31 42%	16/31 52%	2/31 6%	0/31 0%
It offers students with the opportunity to practice writing without pressure.	13/31 42%	12/31 39%	5/31 16%	1/31 3%

This question presents the students' points of views about the effectiveness of using dairies to improve their writing skills.

- Writing diaries improves students' writing style:

As shown in the table above, 51% of students reported that they consider writing diaries helpful in improving their writing style, and 39% of them strongly agree with this.

This strengthens the idea of implementing this strategy in the teaching/learning process as well as exposing students to the free writing.

- It increases one's vocabulary:

As illustrated in the graph above, students were asked about their opinions of using diaries as a means to increase their vocabulary. 52% said that they strongly agree with that, 35% of them agree with this idea. However, 13% strongly disagree. Thus, the results confirm that writing diaries is a very beneficial strategy that help students to develop and rich their vocabulary.

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- It helps in developing grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc:

58% of students stated that they agree with using writing diaries to enhance their writing mechanics, 32% of them support this idea strongly, while a small percentage of students(13%) disagree. This means that students can improve their writing mechanics and language rules, which are considered as the most difficult aspect that students face while writing, through the use of the free writing.

- It engages students to write:

48% of students reported that they agree with that wiring diaries is helpful in motivating students to practice writing; 39% of them are strongly agree with that. However, 13% of students disagree.

- It offers students with the opportunity to practice writing without pressure:

As shown in the table, 42% of students strongly agree that writing freely offers students with a chance to practice their writing without pressure; 39% agree with that. On the other hand, 16% of them disagree; moreover,3% strongly disagree. The present results illustrate the free writing provides students with a space to practice writing without constraints so that they feel motivated to develop their level in writing.

Item 16. How often do you pick-up a journal and write diaries?

Table 3.16 The Frequency of Picking-Up a Journal and Start Writing Diaries by First-Year EFL Students

Option	Number	Percentage
a) Always	1	3%
b) Sometimes	14	40%
c) Rarely	12	34%
d) Never	5	14%
e) No answer	3	9%
Total	35	100%

The table revealed that 40% of students write dairies sometimes and 34% of them rarely do.14% never picked-up a journal to write; however, a few percentages (3%) always write diaries.

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If always or sometimes

Table 3.16.1 Students Reasons behind Writing Diaries

Option	Number	Percentage
a) To make notes and observations	2	13%
b) To write short stories	2	13%
c) To express personal feelings	3	21%
d) To record past events	0	0%
e) To plan for the new day	0	0%
f) More than one answer	8	53%
Total	15	100%

The table above presents the reasons behind writing diaries. 53% of students choose more than one reason behind writing diaries, while 21% of them stated that they write diaries to express personal feelings. Moreover, 13% noted that the purpose behind writing diaries is to make notes and observations; the same percentage claimed the reason is to write short stories. These findings confirm that students find journaling writings an enjoyable and useful task that boosts them to practice writing constantly without worrying about language rules and writing mechanics.

3.2.4. Discussion of the Results

The analysis of the several questions in the questionnaire provides us with significant information that helped in answering the important questions of this research and supported the strategy of using diaries as a tool to develop students' writing skills. The findings of this questionnaire indicate that the majority of students have chosen to study English because it is an international language; moreover, it helps them to interact with others easily. Students consider writing as one of the difficult language learning skills; nevertheless, they stated that they do not practice writing constantly in order to improve it. This reveals that EFL students of first year encounter challenges in the writing process; it is clearly illustrated in the students' answer when they are asked about the difficulties they face while writing. Most of the students reported that they have difficulties in tenses, sentence structure, word choice and spelling. In addition to that,

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students revealed the main reasons behind their writing difficulties; they stated that the lack of practice and the lack of reading is the core of the problems they face in writing. Later, students agreed that assigning free writing tasks can be a helpful tool to overcome their problems in writing and to develop their writing abilities. According to some of the students' justification, free writing tasks provides them with a space to write freely without worrying about the rules; moreover, it allow them to express their ideas, perceptions and opinions. Nearly, most of our students said that their teachers assign free writing tasks in the classroom form time to time; this confirms that this strategy is useful in encouraging students to write. then, students indicated that using writing dairies as a free writing strategy is very beneficial in improving the learners to improve the language rules; using dairies can motivate students to engage to write without getting bored. Therefore, it can be deduced that using writing dairies as a free writing technique are beneficial in developing students' writing skills.

This questionnaire provided us with an opportunity to investigate students' attitudes toward using dairies as a tool to develop their writing skills. Moreover, the results obtained from the students' questionnaire were significant in answering the research questions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have used a questionnaire for students to gather data; moreover, it is analyzed using the qualitative analysis. The analysis of the students' questionnaire revealed that first year EFL students have numerous difficulties in writing; they consider it the most complex skill. Students encounter problems in writing from many aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and coherence. Thus, the results of this questionnaire strengthen using dairies as a free writing strategy to develop students' writing skills. Additionally, students have shown their satisfaction with this strategy; they find it a helpful tool to enhance overcome their writing difficulties because it motivates them to engage in writing, moreover, it provides them a space to practice writing without pressure. The findings collected from the students' questionnaire confirm

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the hypothesis and successfully answered the research questions that are stated at the beginning of the dissertation.

General conclusion

To conclude, our research work attempted to investigate EFL students' attitudes towards using diaries as a free writing strategy to develop their writing skills, and to explore the difficulties that first year students of Biskra University face in writing. Therefore, the aim of the current research is to attempt to answer the research questions as well as to confirm the research hypothesis.

This study is divided into three chapters, the first two chapters are devoted to the theoretical background and the third chapter is devoted to our field work. Chapter one presented an overall view about the writing process; it sheds light on the different elements of writing, its importance, and its approaches. Also, it discussed the difficulties that students face in writing as well as the reasons behind those difficulties. While, chapter two was devoted to a general overview about journaling, types of journals. Then, we talked about writing diaries as a free writing task, its advantages, differences between journals and diaries and the problems with diary writing.

The third chapter presented our practical part of this study in which we attempted to analyze and discuss the data gathered through the students' questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to 35 first year EFL students at Biskra University. As a result of the analysis, interpretation of the collected data and the discussion of the findings, we find that students have positive attitudes toward using diaries as a tool to improve their writing skills.

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Recommendations

Through the results obtained from this research work, we recommend some suggestions to draw the attentions of our pupils, teachers and syllabus designer.

1. Pupils should be aware of the importance of writing and they should practice writing constantly in order to enhance their writing skills.
2. Pupils should determine their level in writing and which aspect in writing they face difficulties in.
3. Teachers should expose their students to motivational writing activities so that they can ameliorate this skill easily.
4. Teachers should be aware of the different factors and problems that affect the students' willingness to writing.
5. Teachers should provide their students with the necessary writing rules and instructions to follow when they write.
6. Teachers should use a variety of writing tasks in order to keep students motivated.
7. Syllabus designer should give more attention for writing

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Appendices

Appendix 1 : students' Questionnaire

Questionnaire to Students

Dear student,

I would be so grateful if you could answer the following questionnaire, which is a part of my Master dissertation entitled 'EFL students attitude towards writing diaries as a tool to develop their writing skills'. Your contribution will be of great help for the the accomplishment of my work. Please tick the appropriate box(es) or make complete statements whenever necessary. Be sure that your responses will be anonymous and will be used for research purposes only.

Thank you for your time, effort and collaboration

Section One: Personnel Information

Q1. Would you specify your sex please

a) Female

b) Male

Q2. Why did you choose to study English at university because?

a) Your job role requires it

b) You need it for online purposes

c) You need it for traveling purposes

d) You need it because it is a global language

If others, please specify

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Section Two: Students' Perceptions about the Writing Skills.

Q3. Which of the following language learning skills is more difficult and you would like to improve the most?

- a) Reading
- b) Listening
- c) Speaking
- d) Writing

Q4. How often do you practice writing?

- a) Always
- b) Sometimes
- c) Rarely
- d) Never

Q5. How do you find writing in English?

- a) Boring
- b) Exciting

Justify your answer, please:

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Q6. How do you evaluate your level in writing?

- a) Poor - I definitely need some help
- b) Acceptable - but I know I could improve
- c) Good - I could improve with some advanced tips
- d) Excellent - I do not think I could improve much

Q7. What do you think is more difficult in writing?

- a) Word choice, spelling and punctuation
- b) Tenses and sentence structure
- c) Generating and organising ideas
- d) Coherence and cohesion

Q8. Which stage(s) of the writing process do you find more difficult?

- a) Pre-writing
- b) Outlining

- c) Drafting
- d) Revising
- e) Editing
- f) All of them

Q9. According to you, what are the reasons behind your writing difficulties?

- a) Lack of reading
- b) Students' negative attitude towards writing in English
- c) Students' Poor linguistic competence
- d) Lack of practice
- e) Insufficient guidance from the teacher
- f) The way writing is being taught and assessed
- g) All of them

Others, please specify:

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Q10. According to you, which of the following teaching strategies can help you improve your writing skills?

- a) Writing by modelling
- b) Assigning free writing tasks
- c) Exposing students to different types of texts
- d) Assigning research projects
- e) Encouraging self and peer assessment
- f) Using different sources, forms and types of feedback
- g) All of them

Others, please specify:

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Section Three: Students' Attitudes towards Writing Diaries.

Q11. Do you think that assigning free writing tasks can help you improve your writing skills ?

- a) Yes
- b) No

b) Justify your answer, please:

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Q12. How often does your teacher assign free writing tasks?

- a) Always
- b) Sometimes
- c) Rarely
- d) Never

Q13. To what extent do you agree or disagree that using writing diaries as a free writing strategy can be useful for enhancing EFL students' writing skills?

- a) Very useful
- b) Useful
- c) Not useful at all

Q14. Do you think that paying attention to linguistic rules when writing a diary is important ?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Justify your answer, please:

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Q15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Writing diaries improves students' writing style.				
It increases one's vocabulary size.				
It helps in developing grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc.				
It engages students to write constantly.				
It helps students to generate and express their ideas.				
It offers students with the opportunity to practice writing without pressure.				
It stimulates students' creativity. And their desire for more reading.				

Q16. How often do you pick-up a journal and write diaries?

- a) Always b) Sometime c) Rarely d) Never

If always or sometimes, do you write them:

- a) To make notes and observations
 b) To write short stories
 c) To express personal feelings
 d) To record past events
 e) To plan for the new day

If others, please specify:

.....

ملخص الاطروحة

الهدف من هذه الاطروحة الاكاديمية هو استكشاف وجهة نظر و مواقف طلبة اللغة الانجليزية سنة الاولى بجامعة بسكرة تجاه كتابة اليوميات كأداة لتطوير مهارات و اسلوب كتاباتهم. حاول هذا البحث التحقيق في الصعوبات التي يواجهها طلاب السنة الأولى عند الكتابة. توصلت الأبحاث الحالية إلى العديد من الاستراتيجيات التي تهدف إلى تحسين اسلوب التعبير الكتابي في اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية. تتمثل إحدى الاستراتيجيات الأكثر أهمية في استخدام اليوميات كأسلوب كتابة لتعزيز مهارات الكتابة لدى الطلاب معالجة الصعوبات التي يواجهونها في الكتابة. لقد قمنا بالتركيز على هذه الأداة لأن معظم طلبة السنة الاولى يفضلون استعمال استراتيجية تمكنهم من الكتابة بحرية بدون أي قيود في الكتابة. استخدمت هذه الدراسة المنهج الوصفي لجمع البيانات و ايضا تم إجراء استبيان لطلاب السنة الأولى تم اختيارهم عشوائياً لملء الاستبيان. افترضت النتائج التي تم الحصول عليها من الاستبيان أن استخدام اليوميات سيطور مهارات الكتابة لدى طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية و سوف يساهم في الحد و التغلب على مختلف الصعوبات التي يواجهونها في الكتابة. بعبارة أخرى ، كشفت النتائج أن كتابة اليوميات ستحسن مهارات الكتابة لدى طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية و مساعدة الطلاب على انجاز تعبير كتابي ناجح وفق المقاييس النحوية و الاملائية للغة الانجليزية .