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**Department of English**

***Assessing the Writing Production Difficulties :***  
***The Case of Second-Year EFL Students at the University of***  
***Tlemcen***

*Dissertation submitted to the Department of English as a partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master in Didactics and  
Assessment in English Language Education*

**Presented by**  
Ms Meryem KOURICHI

**Supervised by**  
Dr. Taoufik DJENNANE

**BOARD OF EXAMINERS**

Dr. Abderrahmane BASSOU	Chairman
Dr. Taoufik DJENNANE	Supervisor
Mr. Youcef MESSAOUDI	Examiner

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# Dedication

*I dedicate this work to:*

*my beloved grandmother- may she rest in peace;*

*my mother and father who have always been a constant source of inspiration.*

*Without their love and support, this research would not have been made possible;*

*my little angel and naughty sister Zeyneb;*

*all my family members and dear friends.*

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*Last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to the informants, being teachers or students, who helped me a great deal in the conduct of the field work.*

## **Abstract**

The purpose of the current study was to identify the major problems that the students in an EFL context face when writing and when being assessed. To reach this end, an exploratory case study of second year EFL students of English was undertaken in the Department of English at Tlemcen University, Algeria. The study relied on two research instruments: a questionnaire administered to the students and a semi-structured interview conducted with teachers. The data were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. The results revealed that there are several factors leading to writing difficulties like lack of reading, practice and motivation. The results also showed that the teachers use different types of tests to assess their students' writing performance. At the end of the research work, a number of recommendations are put forward as remedial suggestions for the teachers and the learners for better teaching/learning and assessment of the writing skill.

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## **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

**BA:** Bachelor of Arts

**CALL:** Computer Assisted Language Learning

**CBA:** Competency-Based Approach

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**ELT:** English Language Teaching

**ESL:** English as a Second Language

**ICT:** Information and Communications Technology

**LMD:** License, Master, Doctorate

**L2:** The Second Language

**OECD:** Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

**TEFL:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language

## General Introduction

In our globalised world, English has become the dominant language of communication throughout the globe. Teaching and learning the English language - the global language- has become a must to fulfil the necessary needs of the international communication. In Algeria, English is taught as a foreign language in the three levels of the educational system starting from the first year of the middle school which lasts four years until the third year of the secondary school, moving to the tertiary level.

English has no established departments in most universities of Algeria. Teaching this language focuses on the four skills in addition to phonetics, grammar, linguistics, literature, civilization, etc.

Because writing is an essential language skill (besides listening, speaking and reading), and because the assessment process is an essential part of the teaching/learning operation, the aim of this research work is to spot the difficulties that hinder the students when they write and when they are assessed. Accordingly, this research work is conducted to answer the following questions:

1-What are the factors leading to difficulties in the writing production?

2-How do the language teachers evaluate and assess their students' performance in the writing skill?

3-How should teachers enhance their students' achievement in the writing production?

We hypothesise what ensues:

1. Lack of reading, practice and motivation are the major factors which lead to difficulties in writing in the target language.

2. Teachers evaluate and assess their students' performance using different types of tests like formative and summative tests.

3. Creating positive attitudes towards writing will have a positive impact on students who will be motivated to engage in writing.

To test the validity of these hypotheses, an exploratory case study of the second-year EFL students is undertaken. The study builds on two research instruments to data collection, namely a questionnaire designed for the students and a semi-structured interview for the teachers.

As for the organisation, this research work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter gives a theoretical overview of the writing skill. Furthermore, it mentions some of the basic literature about the assessment in general and the assessment of writing in particular.

The second chapter gives a description of the methodology considerations followed in the conduct of the field work. It thus indicates the study setting, the design, the population and research instruments. This chapter is also a space for data analysis and discussion of the research findings. It is here that the hypotheses will be confirmed or rejected.

The third chapter focuses on providing both the teachers and the students with suggestions that are thought to facilitate the teaching/learning and the assessment of writing. These suggestions draw on previous works of leading authorities in teaching and assessing writing.

## **CHAPTER ONE      Theoretical Background of the Study**

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### 1.2 Section One: A Brief Overview on the Writing Skill

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##### 1.3.3.2 Analytic Scoring

#### 1.3.4 Assessment of Writing

#### 1.3.5 The Advantages of Assessment

### 1.4 Conclusion

## **1.1 Introduction**

The present chapter is divided into two sections. The first one is devoted to provide a brief overview of writing, one of the four fundamental language skills. It includes a definition of the concept, the importance of such a skill, the process of writing and then the common difficulties encountered while producing a piece of written composition. The second section exposes a discussion of the assessment process. Here, focus is on assessment of writing as it is the cornerstone of our research. This section covers types, characteristics, and advantages of writing assessment.

## **1.2 Section One: A Brief Overview on the Writing Skill**

The writing skill is a kind of communication that allows writers to express their feeling and desires through meaningful, correct texts. Written discourse should be well constructed to be intelligible to receivers. In this vein, Harmer (2001) observes that “in order for communication to be successful we have to structure our discourse in such a way that it will be understood by our listeners or readers” (2001:246). As mentioned here, writing is a method of expressing language in a visible format.

### **1.2.1 What is Writing?**

Writing is an important productive language skill which is basic for the teaching/learning process. In fact, there exist no single definition of writing; different writers have postulated different definitions. Daniels and Bright (1996:03), for instance, observe that writing is “a system of more or less permanent marks used to represent an utterance in such a way that it can be recovered more or less exactly without the intervention of the utterer”. Coulmas (1999:560) identifies writing as “a set of visible or tactile signs used to represent units of language in a systematic way, with the purpose of recording messages which can be retrieved by everyone who knows the language in question and the rules by virtue of which its units are

encoded in the writing system”. This means that the writing system of the language is governed by a set of rules which facilitate the process of writing and the recording of speech using observable symbols. Fischer (2001) argues that writing should fulfil certain criteria to be a ‘complete writing system’, as indicated below:

- Its purpose is communication.
- It should consist of graphic marks.
- Its marks must be conventionally related to articulate speech to achieve communication.

For Fischer (2001), the writing system must use standard figures to accomplish the mission of communication. These figures are conventional to create words, clauses, sentences and texts.

It is obvious that the previous definitions see writing as a collection of graphic representation neglecting its cognitive side. It is an assemblage of utterances that transmit the content of the message with its meaning (Brooks, 1964). The written production is more than the collection of graphic symbols but it holds a message and a meaning behind the letters. In addition, the writing ability is interpreted from a social perspective. As pointed out by Hamp-Lyons and Kroll (1997:08), writing is “an act that takes place within a context, that accomplishes a particular purpose, and that is appropriately shaped for its intended audience”. Thus, the main purpose of writing is to succeed in communication.

Additionally, we can say that writing in a second or foreign language requires the ability to manipulate structures, vocabulary and their conventional representations (Lado, 1961). Writing is non-instinctive; it is rather a learned skill which necessitates much practice to master. Consequently, writing is a very complicated process that demands both physical and mental efforts on the part of the EFL learner. In the field of language learning/teaching, and with reference to English as a Foreign Language (hereafter (EFL), language teachers argue that writing is the most complicated element in their classroom. About this matter, Walters (1983) views that the writing skill is the final and probably the hardest skill



students learn if they ever do. With this in mind, one can say that the most problem of the EFL learners when writing is to correctly respect grammar rules, spelling, punctuation, coherence and cohesion.

### 1.2.2 The Process of Writing

Writing is one of the popular ways of communication, and to write successfully, one has to exercise the five steps of the writing process which are identified by experts as: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publication. Thus, the composer writes, reviews, rectifies, and then writes again (Emig, 1971). The writing skill is seen as a difficult skill to learn and master and therefore, hence to teach. According to Grabe and Kaplan (1996:06), the writing is “a set of skills which must be practised and learned through practice”. The Written production should be trained many times over. Clifford (1991) examines the issue of processing writing. For him, writing is the sequences or the three stages involved in the process which are summarized in the following points:

- generating the message, the topics, content
- organising the ideas; how they are arranged.
- finding the language and writing conversation, grammar, vocabulary and punctuation

These stages of the writing process are graphically represented in the following diagram:

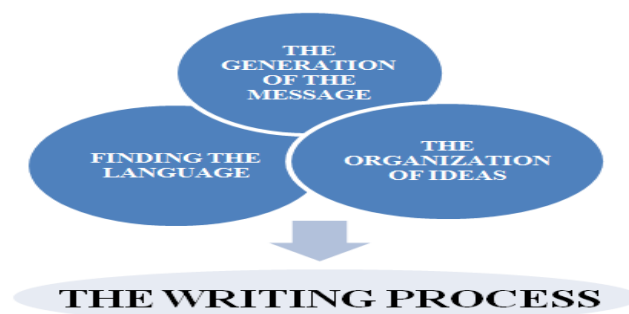


Figure 1.1 The Elements of the Writing Process (Clifford, 1991:41)

This means that the composer of the piece of writing can detect thoughts and arrange them while lettering. These capacities of the writer in the writing process immediately guide him to transmit the message completely to the reader. In addition, the learner must know the several parts of the language (grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, coherence and cohesion), i.e., the graphic symbols of language, its grammatical framework, the suitable vocabulary linked to the topic at hand. Also, the writing process needs the connection at both levels of ideas, sentences and paragraphs, i.e., coherence and cohesion which are described by Bublitz (1999) as the output of textual connectivity according to a static text-based descriptive approach, and the cooperation of the speaker/writer and hearer/reader, respectively.

### 1.2.3 The Stages of the Writing Process

As mentioned earlier, the writing process consists of stages which are followed by writers to produce a written composition. We can represent the process of writing in a schematic form sketched in Figure 1.2 as shown below:

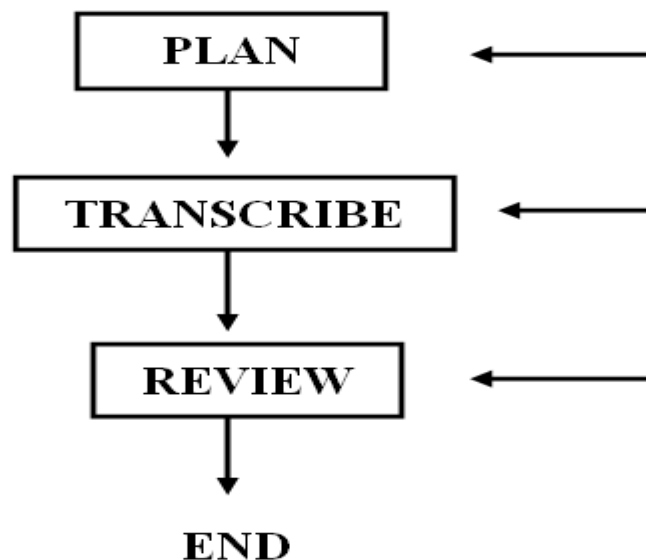


Figure1.2 A Model of the Writing Process (Nold, 1981:68)

The diagram in figure 1.2 with its recursive arrows on the right shows that planning, transcribing and reviewing (pre-writing, writing and rewriting) are not one-time processes (Nold, 1981). Each time they write new texts with different planning, transcribing, and reviewing in nonuniform styles. Correspondingly, Perl (1979) admits that structuring does not take place in a direct linear pattern. For Perl, the immediate moving back and forth during the writing process is obvious. At particular stages of the process, the composer might do the prewriting, writing and rewriting, while having a glance at the backwards and the forward with recognising what is written during the process (Emig, 1971).

Like Perl's explanation, Harmer's clarification (2004) sees the process of writing as three major stages of formulating: pre-writing, writing and rewriting. Yet, other scholars (e.g. Tribble, 1996; Hedge, 1988) see the writing process as a five-fold process: pre-writing, the drafting, reviewing, editing, and publishing. Figure 1.3, put forward by Tribble (1996:39), summarizes these five stages, as shown below:

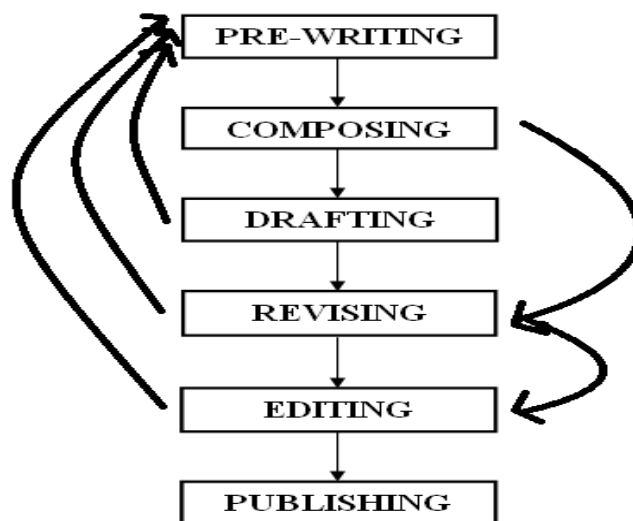


Figure1.3 The Process of the Writing Skill (Tribble, 1996:39)

The following sub-sections will provide a more detailed overview on each stage.

### 1.2.3.1 The Prewriting Stage

The process of writing is like taking a trip. Thus, a good organisation and a great readiness will make your voyage smoother, give you energy, and ensure the completion of your journey. As your writing process should be a successful odyssey, too.

The beginning of your journey is the prewriting stage, i.e., the introductory assignment for your piece of writing. The process of prewriting is to decide what you are going to write about and to plan the process of composition. Therefore, you are going to choose the topic of interest after brainstorming<sup>1</sup> and prompt thoughts, research and group data, set objectives, and improve the style and the outline (Bouyakoub, 2012). Johnson (2008) states that students can generate ideas in the brainstorming process either cooperatively or individually. This phase requires the design of thoughts on papers by using graphically organised outline. Students are allowed to make mistakes, to write quickly and easily (Bae, 2011).

### 1.3.1.2 The Drafting Stage

The second stage in your journey is drafting (also called the free-writing phase) in which you write whatever comes to your mind about the planned and organised topic without stopping. Free-writing helps you practising fluency rather than accuracy, i.e., you do not need to worry about the correct grammar and spelling (Brown, 2001). To say it another way, you just keep writing. For this reason, White and Arndt (1991:99) confirm that “the writer passes from the *writer-based* to the *reader-based* writing in which the concern of the reader should now begin to assume more significance”. Consequently, students must interpret their ideas about the topic of interest using words. As stated by Hedge (1988:89), the writer “puts together the pieces of the text by developing ideas through sentences and paragraphs within an overall structure”.

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<sup>1</sup> Brainstorming is a way of gathering ideas about your topic. This means that to ponder and set up a list of thoughts of what you actually need and organize ideas firstly before writing (Longman Dictionary, 1984).

In this stage, the learner should determine the writing genre that must be used (narrative, expository, descriptive and persuasive)<sup>2</sup>, the thesis statement<sup>3</sup>, the objective of your writing and its arguments. After this step, the assignment of the learner will be effortless.

### **1.3.1.3 The Revision Stage**

Your journey now needs some reviewing and changing of the big picture. In the same fashion, the learner/writer must adjust the already existed piece of writing by reading it and modifying statements, adding information, rearranging sections, removing ideas, and replacing examples with others that suit your context. White and Arndt (ibid: 137) observe that this phase is to “enrich the repertoire of linguistic resources which are the essential tools of writing”. All that helps students check their style and create new thoughts in their piece of writing. Thus, it is important to correct the drafting phase for the purpose of expressing differently its segments. With this in mind, we can say that the drafting and revising stages are of great importance to both the writer and the reader while producing and reading the written products. To put it differently, as White and Arndt (1991) view, the teacher is the medium of correction, i.e., he provides the learners with useful pieces of advice, remarks and comments to improve their drafts by revising their own texts, as stated below:

Teacher presentations of standard patterns of organisation or discussions on how to support an argument certainly have their place [...] showing students where their own arguments are weak or where their logic breaks down appears to be a more effective approach. (White and Arndt, 1991:137)

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<sup>2</sup> These are types of writing or modes of writing. There are different categories of writing as each mode has a specific purpose. There are four basic modes which include descriptive, narrative, expository and persuasive writing.

<sup>3</sup> Thesis statement, or the hook, attracts the readers' attention to what comes next. It is at the end of the introduction paragraph of an essay. It clarifies the background information of the topic (the general idea) and states the subdivisions of the plan of your paper.

### **1.3.1.4 The Editing Stage**

Your journey is about to finish. The editing phase is the last step of your drafting. In this stage, the learner has to make improvements to the structure and form rather than the content. Harmer (2004:5) asserts that in the editing phase the composer revises his writing from general to particular; this means to focus on the broad meaning then, to concentrate on the accuracy of syntax, spelling and grammar. Furthermore, the writer needs to check up spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. Moreover, the wording (words choice), adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and the sentence structure should be accurate and suitable. He might need to explain something more clearly, or add more details, and change even the organisation of his work so that his text becomes more logical.

At this step, the learner writes his final product in proper papers for submitting it to his teacher for evaluation. The students can exchange their written productions with their classmates and peer-evaluate or self-correct them by using some tips and strategies of correction.

### **1.3.1.5 The Publishing Stage**

The publishing or presentation phase is the last step in your trip when you decide to depart from your sojourn in the beautiful host hotel, where you have spent your vacation. The students need to construct their final copies of the assignment in the appropriate layout. They must add references, make sure that the quotations are right, and add some details in the bibliography if needed. During this step, the writer arranges his work to be spread, shared with the audience and to be responded to. In other words, to be evaluated by his teacher(s) (in the teaching/learning process). Here, it is time to correct the first rough as “nothing ever rolls off the pen or the keyboard perfectly the first time” (Oxford, 1990:71)

On the whole, the following diagram summarizes all that have been said about the steps followed by the competent writers while writing their works, displayed in figure1.4

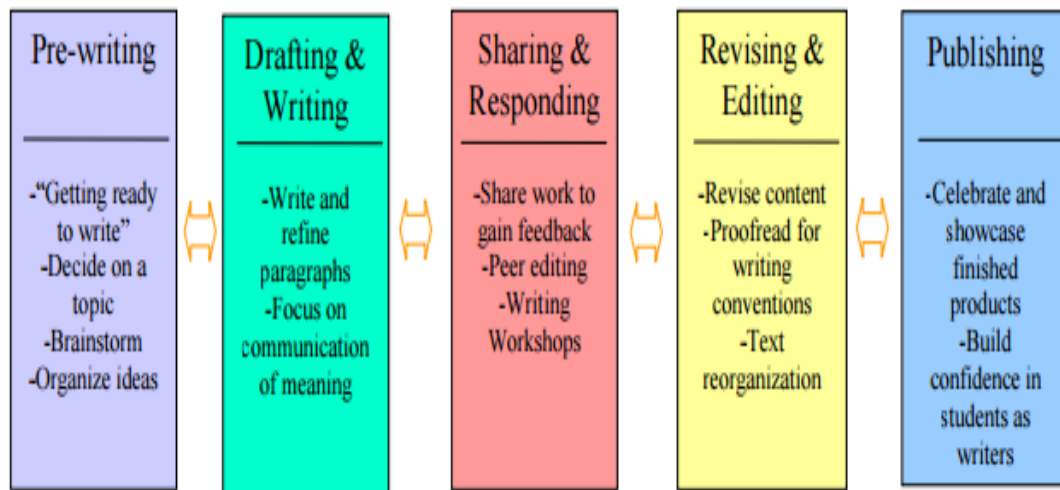


Figure 1.4 The Writing Process (based upon research by Graves, 1983, 1991; Tompkins and Hoskisson, 1995; and Poindexter and Oliver, 1999, stated in Kamehameha Schools, 2007:2)

### 1.4 The Common Difficulties of the Writing Skill

As we have previously seen, the written production can be sometimes difficult to achieve due to its complication and the requirement of both cognitive and physical efforts. Thus, many EFL learners fail in producing a correct piece of writing which leads to negative outcomes. In this vein, Kroll (1990) admits that the difficulty is not only in generating thoughts but also in combining sentences in a coherent way:

For English as a second language, (ESL) students, it seems fair to say that writing is particularly difficult. ESL students must learn to create written products that demonstrate mastery over contextually appropriate formats for rhetorical presentation of ideas as well as mastery in all areas of language[...] It is partially the multiplicity of skills involved which contributes to the overall difficulty of writing (Kroll,1990:140)

Correspondingly, students/writers face various kinds of difficulties while they compose a written task, including grammar, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, coherence and cohesion. In the first place, the knowledge of grammar is a crucial

element in writing correctly. Also, both teachers and learners must recognise the basic rules and norms of grammar to get the message across. Additionally, the students can produce meaningful, organised and well-structured statements when they are aware of the different grammatical patterns. Hamp-Lyons et al. (1997) list some deficiencies that the learners face in grammar include:

- Confusing between clause, phrase and sentence;
- producing a correct sentence;
- using the right conjunctions and connectors;
- using verb tenses

Secondly, the lack of vocabulary is of great importance when writing. Vocabulary is believed to be the core of words that constructs a language. Ourghi (2002:77) says that “writing is primarily conveying meaning and sending a message by selecting relevant lexical items and putting them in a written form”. EFL learners have insufficient knowledge of vocabulary because of the lack of reading, lack of participation during the speaking sessions and the shortage of using dictionaries. The learners have problems in expressing their ideas with the adequate words since they have a limited vocabulary.

Thirdly, we have spelling and punctuation errors that many learners encounter in writing. The spelling mistakes can be caused by the fact that many words are uttered the same but are written differently with different meanings. Moreover, the students lack correct connection between sounds of words and their spelling. To demonstrate, we can mention words like *there*, *their*, and *they're* (Medwell et al. 1998).

Moreover, punctuation errors are of considerable importance in writing. As mentioned by Moore et al. (2010:110), “punctuation marks are like traffic signals. They guide readers; they tell readers when to go and when to stop and when to turn and in what direction”.



The final point is coherence and cohesion which help also the link between sentences in a correct way. Many EFL learners face difficulties in writing coherently; they focus more on language rather than meaning (Dontcheva-Navratilova and Povolà, 2009). Therefore, they should know both the coherence and cohesion patterns in order to produce and write appropriate, systematic and accurate passages.

The following figure, put forward by Raimes (1983), explains and summarises in a graphic way the learners' difficulties in communicating their ideas in a coherent way in addition to the problems of content, organisation, grammar, syntax, mechanics, word choice, audience and the purpose of the writing process:

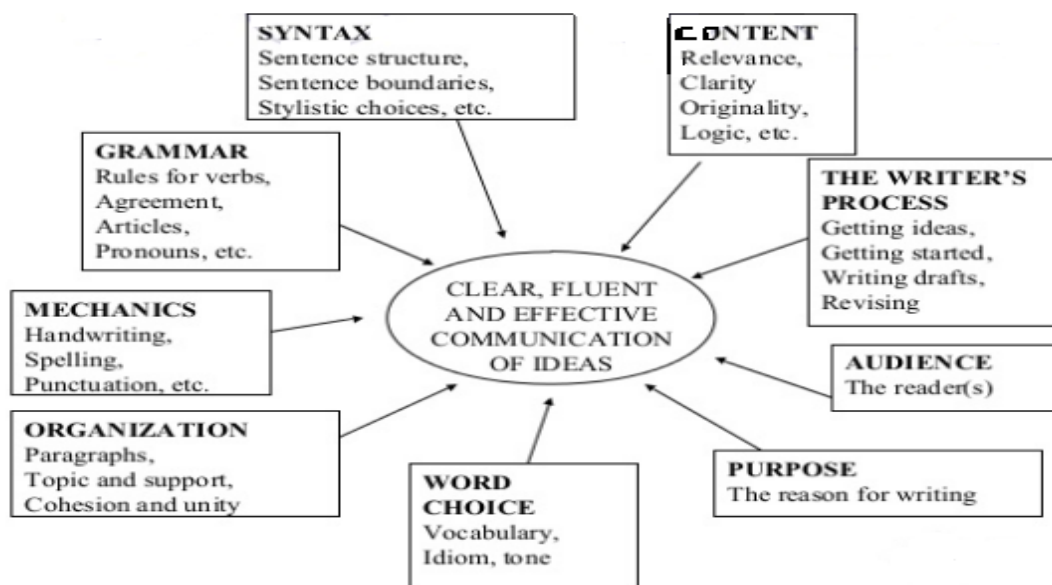


Figure 1.5 Producing a Piece of Writing (Raimes, 1983:6)

### 1.5 The Importance of Writing

One can admit that the production of writing is difficult. But we cannot deny the pleasure of this written difficulty. All pleasure is the liaison with the whole world, depth and richness of your ideas that are transmitted to the readers through writing. It is what keeps ties between people across nations and through time. It has

several functions in our lives and it reflects learning in a life long term (Bosco, 2007).

Learning a foreign language requires learning to write it. It plays an important role in the teaching/learning process of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) due to the fact that it conveys social connections via discourse and other means. Accordingly, Hyland (2003:69) claims that “writing is one of the main ways that we create a coherent social reality through engaging with others”. In sum, writing is about our lives; its importance relies upon its power, and as mentioned by Mc Arthur et al. (2008:1) “the power of writing is so strong that writing about one’s feelings and experiences can be beneficial psychologically and physiologically because it can reduce depression, lower blood pressure, and boost the immune system”.

### **1.3 Section Two: An Overview on the Process of Assessment, Testing and Evaluation**

In the next section of the review of the literature, the researcher will shed light on the procedures of evaluation, assessment and testing. He will identify each of these operations in the teaching/testing process to make them clearer to the reader of this humble work. All in all, these three complete each other in both grading students and evaluating the teaching programs.

#### **1.3.1 Assessment, Testing and Evaluation**

These three terms - Assessment, testing and evaluation - are sometimes used interchangeably to mean the same thing. Although there is a slight difference between them they still are diverse (Angelo, 1995). In the first place, when the teacher is assessing his students, he attempts to know how well his students perform or carry out a particular assignment. In addition, the assessment procedure differs from the testing and evaluation procedures in its purpose behind gathering data. Thus, the collected data are utilised for the aim of improving students learning and

development. In different words, the gathered information is used to check how much students are progressing in their learning (Angelo, Ibid)

Differently, testing is another measuring procedure, and “it refers to the process of administering a test to measure one or more concepts usually under standardised conditions” (Braun and Kanjee, 2006:9). Then, testing is a series of questions that are administered to students for the purpose of “analyzing the learners level and their degree of success in learning” (Zidane, 2010:6). Consequently, one can say that testing is differentiated from assessment in the sense that it is one device of assessment, while assessment incorporates, in addition to testing, other methods mainly the interview, questionnaire, etc. (Ibid)

However, evaluation is another term which is used in the field of language assessment. It means making a judgment about the program, curriculum, textbook and the teaching approach, i.e., it goes beyond students achievement and language assessment to consider all aspects of teaching and learning and to look at how educational decisions can be made by the results of alternatives forms of assessment (Jabbarifar, 2009:2)

To sum up, testing is an assessment tool to measure the students’ ability. While assessment is the design of classroom techniques and methods that provide information on how learners respond to particular teaching approaches. Evaluation is a summative result used for judging and appraising. It happens through quizzes, exams, papers or tests. All in all, testing is used as an assessment instrument to serve the learning while evaluation is used to assess it (Covacevich, 2014).

Table 1.1 The Main Differences between Assessment and Evaluation (Angelo and Cross, 1993:427)

<b>Dimension of Difference</b>	<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<b>Content:</b> timing, primary purpose	<i>Formative:</i> ongoing, to improve learning	<i>Summative:</i> final, to gauge quality
<b>Orientation:</b> focus of measurement	<i>Process-oriented:</i> how learning is going	<i>Product-oriented:</i> what's been learned
<b>Findings:</b> uses thereof	<i>Diagnostic:</i> identify areas for improvement	<i>Judgmental:</i> arrive at an overall grade/score

### 1.3.2 Assessment

In this study work, we are more interested in the writing assessment. For this reason, the next titles will focus more on the assessment process of the writing skill, its types and its characteristics. In addition to this, the researcher will clarify the scoring procedures and elucidate the advantages of the assessment process.

#### 1.3.2.1 Definition of Assessment

Assessment as a term has received much scholarly attention in the recent years, and it has been studied by many scholars especially in the educational systems, not least the teaching of English as a foreign language (T.E.F.L). Yet, it is an enduring activity in the classroom at all levels in order to judge the learners' performances (Abedi, 2010). In defining assessment, Angelo (1995:7) has this to say:

Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving students' learning. It involves making expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analysing and interpreting evidence to determine how well performances matches those expectations and

standards and using the resulting information to document, explain and improve performances.

In the above definition, assessment is a procedure to collect various types of information which is going to be analysed by the teacher in order to make interpretations about learners' performances or knowledge for educational decision with the aim of developing the process of teaching/learning. However, the teacher who does not carry out assessment in his class cannot recognize the students' understanding, how much they grasp from his instructions and how these instructions are appropriate to students' styles of learning, their abilities and their levels, and to what extent the course meets the learners' needs in order to decide what to do (Covacevich, 2014).

### **1.3.2.2 Types of Assessment**

Shortly, assessment incorporates several components and among the widely recognized types in the literature we mention: diagnostic, formative and summative. These three components can be seen as types of assessment in addition to other kinds which occur in several times, at different levels, in various forms to fulfil multiple purposes.

#### **1.3.2.2.1 Diagnostic Assessment**

As its name implies, it is the process of diagnosing learners' strengths and weaknesses in the beginning of the course, not least the foreign language lesson (Murphy, 2009). Thus, it facilitates the teachers' task to plan instructions, meet the learners' needs and helps them arrange classroom activities suitable for their students' levels. As raised by Jean-Jacques Rousseau who calls for the pre-instruction assessment activities, “[t]eachers, make it your first task to know your students better, for you surely do not know them”. (Jean Jacques in Ellis, 2001:67). One can say that this type of assessment is used by teachers as an educational

strategy to define the learning objectives and the course instructions. It is the basic way that leads to another type of assessment which is the continuous formative assessment (OECD, 2001).

#### **1.3.2.2.2 Formative Assessment**

Formative assessment is an ongoing, continuous and dynamic process which takes place during the teaching/learning situation (Angelo and Cross, 1993). It should be carried out in ways that help learners make a real progress in their learning. Therefore, the information gathered from the formative assessment is used by the teachers and the learners to adjust their work and make it more effective (Black, 1995). In this kind of assessment, the teachers do not give a conclusive mark or grade to their learners' work, but they give them feedback about progress in their learning (Irons, 2008:7).

Formative assessment is an assessment for learning that supplements both teachers and students with information about their achievement, points of strong or weaken (Cohen et al. 2004:329). Sadler (1989:7) confirms that:

In the assessment for learning the learners' task is to close the gap between the present state of understanding and learning goals. Self-assessment is essential if the learner is to do this. The teacher's role is to communicate appropriate goals and promote self-assessment as pupils work towards the goals. Feedback in the classroom should operate from teacher to pupils from pupil to teacher.

In all these definitions concerning the formative assessment, teachers should encourage their students to assess themselves for effective assessment for learning. Also, feedback should be bidirectional between teachers and learners.

### **1.3.2.2.3 Summative Assessment**

Summative assessment is another type of assessment which is referred to as assessment of learning. It gives evidence of what learners got at the end of a specific term of learning. So, the summative assessment is used by teachers as a tool to measure the students' achievement in learning at the end of a unit, test and/or examination in order to get a diploma or an occupation. As defined by OECD (1968-2008:1), "summative assessments are used to measure what students have learnt at the end of a unit, to promote students, to ensure that they have met the required standards on the way to earning certification for school completion or to enter certain occupations".

As stated by Miller (2002:7), summative assessment can be used for different purposes:

- To allow progress to further study
- To pass or fail a student
- To rank students

In short, the summative assessment is powerful evidence that displays the learners' progress by the end of a period of instruction in order to make clear judgments about them and where they are successful and where they are not on any subject matter (A. Jones, 2005).

### **1.3.2.3 The Characteristics of Assessment**

A good assessment process in EFL classrooms should possess a set of characteristics in order to provide learners with fair and reasonable opportunities to display their learning in a variety of ways. Experts in the field argue that an examination should fulfil some qualities like validity, reliability, practicality and bias in order to form policies that support high-quality of students' assessment.

### **1.3.2.3.1 Reliability**

Reliability in the ELT literature refers to the stable results of the assessment process, i.e. it means that –approximately- the same results are obtained by the learners when assessed several times (Nunan, 1992). In other words, as pointed out by Brown (2004:20), “If you give the same test to the same students or matched students on two different occasions, the test should yield similar results”.

### **1.3.2.3.2 Validity**

Gronlund and Linn (1990) state that “validity refers to the extent to which an examination task evaluates what is supposed to evaluate” (p.120). Then for this to happen, the examination tasks should be on the same line with the learning objectives.

### **1.3.2.3.3 Practicality**

The literature simply defines practicality as the degree to which a test or an assessment instrument can be put into practice. Identically, it is highly recommended that some practical considerations are to be taken into account when designing and administrating a test. These considerations closely relate to financial means, time constraints, scoring, ease of administration and interpretation (Brown, 2004:19).

### **1.3.2.3.4 Bias**

It refers to the aspects of the task or test that systematically affect the entire or the majority of learners. For instance, to treat students on the basis of their religion, gender and ethnicity is a type of bias (Longman Dictionary, 1984). Gipps and Murphy (1994:77) confirm that:



Any evaluation process is an interaction between certain questions, items and/or procedures, and the pupil being examined. There are many ways in which this interaction may operate defectively, so producing bias or flaws in the results.

In brief, the assessment processes should not build on subjectivity or bias; the examination tasks need to be objective and having the status of equity.

### **1.3.3 Types of Scoring**

When scoring the learners' written composition in the EFL situation, which is our main concern in this research work, teachers opt for different approaches. Among these widely used approaches are analytic and holistic scorings.

#### **1.3.3.1 Holistic Scoring**

In this approach, teachers read the entire compositions of the students quickly without paying attention to the specific abilities, and then they give a single mark for each product. Its advantages lie in the fact that it is helpful when the teachers have many writings to correct in the sense that it does not require too much time. Also, the teachers focus on their students' strengths in writing. Holistic scoring, however, has disadvantages as it does not guide and help students to progress in their writing ability as it gives no details about their weaknesses in writing. In this vein, Brown (2004:243) declares that "it provides little washback into the writer's further stages of learning".

#### **1.3.3.2 Analytic Scoring**

In this approach to scoring, teachers analyse the students' written compositions with paying attention to several aspects such as grammar, cohesion, spelling and vocabulary. These aspects are marked separately and the discrete marks are gathered to get a final mark for the students' written products. It is beneficial in the fact that it helps students recognise their weaknesses in writing to

better their performance. However, it yields some drawbacks like time constraint (Brown, 2004:246).

### **1.3.4 Assessment of Writing**

Assessment or testing is a cornerstone in the teaching/learning processes especially in the T.E.F.L., not least the evaluation of the writing skill. For this purpose, Fredericksen (1984) confirms that:

Efficient tests tend to drive out less efficient tests, leaving many important abilities untested and untaught. An important task of educators and psychologists is to develop instruments to better reflect the whole domain of educational goals and find ways to use them in improving the educational process (p. 201)

Forthwith, Frederickson highlights the importance of testing or assessment in holding the great influence of what is being taught. The main goal of testing writing is to measure a student's ability to write in the target language. The writing tests should be authentic, communicative and contains integrative information in writing. As for the assessment of writing, two types exist:

**Indirect assessment:** basically, as stated by Coomber (2010), “the indirect assessment of writing measures correct usage in sentence level constructions and focuses on spelling, grammar, punctuation via objective formats such as multiple choice questions” (p.91). The indirect assessment is concerned with measuring accuracy rather than fluency. For this reason, it was used in the scientific period of testing, over years. In other words, the product approach was adopted to teaching writing and summative assessment was used to evaluate the students' written products. As we have seen, the focus was on producing grammatically correct pieces of writing neglecting the content and self-expression (S.Chelli and W.Khouni, 2013).

**Direct assessment:** this approach of assessing the writing skill measures the student's ability to communicate through the written form of discourse, and based on the production of written texts. This sort of assessment is used nowadays with the advent of Competency Based Approach or C.B.A which focuses on the process of writing than the content (Harris et al. 1995). The students are required to organise their ideas in suitable content and use appropriate grammar, vocabulary, syntax, etc. With this in mind, direct assessment integrates all elements of writing. Moreover, the continuous assessment activities take place in this kind of assessment of the writing production such as portfolio assessment<sup>4</sup>, peer assessment and self-assessment (Coomber, 2010).

First, a portfolio is defined as “a collection of texts the writer has produced over a defined period of time” (Hamp-Lyons, 1991:2). This assessment helps the teachers diagnose their learners' weaknesses in writing to make them initiate remedial work for improving the written production of the students.

Peer assessment is helpful for the students to exchange their pieces of writing and to give each other feedbacks in order to know their strengths and what still needs to be developed in their writings. Among its advantages is that it facilitates the process of assessment, and makes them involved in the writing task so as to be autonomous and active in classroom.

Self-assessment is another instrument of assessing the writing skill in which students evaluate their own works. This activity is carried out with the help of the teacher and peers to make it more beneficial (Bond, 1995:15). Also, it develops the students' critical thinking when they recognise their mistakes and find the suitable solutions for better pieces of writing and makes the class learners-centered (Taylor et al. 2013).

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<sup>4</sup> Portfolio Assessment is one of the procedures of the alternative assessment which is used in contrast with the traditional testing procedures. It has become the most generic term currently used in the assessment literature, in which a variety of labels are used to refer to ways of assessing learner's achievement without the use of tests. The most frequent one is portfolio assessment which became popular in the mid-1980s (Dikli, 2003).

### **1.3.5 The Advantages of Assessment**

Assessment is a pedagogical instrument that aims at serving to teach. It is a familiar part of classroom instruction and plays significant roles in the learning process. Actually, the learners' achievement can be the important part of all educational activities while teacher professional development has a relationship with learners' assessment that can be used as a tool to measure the teaching methods and approaches and helps them to make judgments and decisions about instruction (Jabbarifar, 2009)

Furthermore, assessment is a technique which gives information about what the students know or acquire during or after the course of instruction. It discusses and collects from different sources data to aid the teachers to meet the learners' needs and accomplishments. In addition, assessment serves the learning by providing opportunities to gain information about learners' abilities. In brief, assessment in education has different forms and strategies which help both teachers and learners achieve successfully the educational goals and objectives.

### **1.4 Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with several clarifications of the terms related to writing and assessment. From the review of the literature, an overview of the writing skill, the importance and the stages of the writing process together with the common difficulties of the writing production were discussed. Equally important, we had an outlook on the differences between assessment, testing and evaluation. Then, we highlighted the assessment process, its types, characteristics and the scoring approaches in writing. At the end of the chapter, the advantages of assessment and the assessment of the writing skill were discussed.

In the next chapter, we will examine the situation under investigation, i.e. the situation in the Algerian educational system, especially at the tertiary level. The gathered data will also be analysed and discussed and the hypotheses will either be confirmed or rejected.

## **CHAPTER TWO      Data Analysis and Discussion**

### 2.1 Introduction

### 2.2 The ELT Situation Analysis

#### 2.2.1 English Language Teaching (ELT) in Algeria

#### 2.2.2 An Overview about the Department of English at Tlemce University

#### 2.2.3 Teaching and Assessment of Writing in the site of Research

### 2.3 Research Methodology: Design and Methods

#### 2.3.1 The Target Population

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#### 2.3.3 Research Instruments

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### 2.4 Data Analysis and Discussion

#### 2.4.1 The Learners' Questionnaire Results

#### 2.4.2 The Teachers' Interview Results

### 2.5 The Discussion

### 2.6 Conclusion

## **2.1 Introduction**

The present research work aims at investigating the problems of assessing the students' written composition in English. This chapter begins with a brief description of the education situation of English in Algeria. Then, it provides methodology considerations that had been adopted in the realization of the field work. Two data collection instruments were used, and the data gathered are analysed qualitatively and quantitatively as it will be sketched in the coming sections.

## **2.2 The ELT Situation Analysis**

In this section, we shed light on the situation analysis of the field work. In other words, we will describe the study setting to our readers, moving from what is general to what is our concern in this work.

### **2.2.1 English Language Teaching (ELT) in Algeria**

In fact, Algeria is identified as a multilingual speech community due to historical and social reasons. Arabic has always been considered the official language of the state since independence in 1962. Berber has also been recognised as a co-official language alongside with Arabic since the last constitutional amendment in 2016 though it was declared national language in 2002 (Djennane, 2016). In the Algerian sociolinguistic context, the term “second language” refers to the French language. Undeniably, the roots of the deep-widespread use of French in Algeria is attributed to the long-term French colonialism to the country. The French colonial authority had a severe control of education, government, business and the intellectual life for 132 years. It is the language of access to science, technology and international business (Beastead et al., 2013)

As far as English is concerned, it is referred to as a 'foreign language'. Like other countries worldwide, Algeria recognizes the value of English internationally, politically, economically and also academically. Therefore, English takes part in the school curriculum. English is initially introduced in the first year of the middle school as a compulsory subject (a four-year stage). Here, the pupils have English sessions three times a week. They sit for two tests and one exam each trimester.

In the Secondary school, English is also taught as a mandatory course for all majors (scientific, technological and literary). At this stage, the goal of English teaching is to consolidate the learners' language capacities and skills.

As far as the tertiary level (the university) is concerned, most specialties incorporate the teaching of English as a subject along other content subjects. English is in fact encouraged at all levels, be it graduate or post-graduate.

### **2.2.2 An Overview about the Department of English at Tlemce University**

The Department of English at Tlemcen University is one of the biggest department in the faculty of Letters and Languages, besides Arabic and French. It is now one of the most attractive destinations for Baccalaureate laureates as it continuously counts increasing numbers of novel students. Like other institutions of higher education throughout the country, it now offers education within the LMD system (Licence, Master, Doctorate). It ensures training for undergraduate and post-graduate levels as well.

English teaching in such department is based on teaching different modules, including grammar, oral production, written production, discourse comprehension, linguistics, phonetics, civilisation, educational psychology, research methodology, literature, etc. The department offers a licence degree (equivalent of a BA) after having successfully finished three years. It is at the Master's level that students have the option to choose a specialty, generally linguistics or literature and civilization.

### **2.2.3 Teaching and Assessment of Writing in the site of Research**

In the graduate studies during the first three years of the License Degree, the writing expression is taught as a module for first, second and third year students. In the first year, students learn basic concepts, like types of sentences. Then they are trained to write short paragraphs. In the second year, students are introduced to different types of essays such as narrative, descriptive, argumentative and the like. They are therefore trained to compose different essays. During the third year, students are taught academic writing in order to make them write appropriate research papers which obey academic standards. They are trained to write abstracts, general introductions, bibliography and so forth.

Teachers opt for different techniques in their teaching of the unit of writing. Concerning the assessment of the writing skill, it is used to encourage learning, to provide teachers and students alike with information which give hints about the progress and development, and also to identify the learners' difficulties in writing. Since all the other modules, except oral production, are based on writing, when it comes to testing writing is given a high priority. This is reflected in its coefficient which varies between 4 and 5 depending on the undergraduate level.

The writing performance is assessed on the basis of tests during the period of instructions (during the semester). In addition, one exam for writing is programmed every semester (two exams a year). Exam questions include either direct questions from the courses, or synthesis questions through which students are required to compose essays. As it is a productive skill, writing is not an easy task to fulfill even in the first language. The situation must be more difficult in a foreign; this is to be tackled in our research work.

### **2.3 Research Methodology: Design and Methods**

In order to attain our aim in this research, to get useful data about the students' writing performance and the problems they are facing when they are assessed to demonstrate their writing ability and more precisely to validate our



formulated hypotheses, we need to rely on a method. As mentioned by Cohen et al. (2005:44), methods are a “range of approaches used in educational research to gather data which are to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction”. For this reason, the researcher in this work chose second year EFL students at the department of English (Tlemcen University) as a source for data. This research work is a case study. As it is defined by Yin (1994:13), “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used”. The reason behind this choice is to investigate in depth the factors leading to the students’ difficulties in the writing skill, give a deep assimilation of the ways teachers assess the students writing performance and the effect of this assessment on their writing production.

### **2.3.1 The Target Population**

The target population is “the entire aggregation of cases that meet a specified set of criteria” (Polit, 2001:233). Accordingly, to get the essential data related to the problems of assessing the writing production, the researcher has selected the second year students with their teachers at the Department of English, Tlemcen University.

### **2.3.2 The Sample Population**

Polit et al. (2001:234), for example, explain that “sampling involves selecting a group of people, events, behaviors or other elements with which to conduct a study. When elements are persons, they are known as subjects and the subjects are selected from the delineated target population in a way that the individuals in the sample represent as nearly as possible the entire population. This decision has a major impact on the meaning and generalisability of findings”. Thus, the sample was randomly selected and the number of the students was 39 informants of second year. Their ages vary between 18 and 23.

As far as teachers are concerned, the study covered 6 teachers of written expression in the department of English at Tlemcen University. Such teachers are specialized in TEFL; they are all permanent teachers. Their professional experience varies from five years to twenty-two years.

### **2.3.3 Research Instruments**

We have followed an exploratory case study in this research so as to examine the factors leading to difficulties in the writing production, and how teachers assess students' performance in the writing skill. Thus, as mentioned by Dornyei (2011), any investigation is based on the instruments used for collecting data. The researcher may rely on a set of instruments to fulfil the need of a multimethod approach that demands multiple sources for data. This is to probe the validity and reliability of the results, explore the problem from different labels, and confirm or reject his hypotheses (Cohen, et al. 2007). In this study, two research tools were used for the process of data collection as explained in the next subsections.

#### **2.3.3.1 The Students' Questionnaire**

The questionnaire contains a set of written questions used to collect two types of data: facts and opinions. Our questionnaire is made up of 3 types of questions: closed-ended, multiple-choice and open-ended questions. First, the closed-ended question requires answers with yes or no. Second, the multiple-choice questions involve a set of responses or alternatives and the respondents are required to select one answer or more. In fact, the close-ended and the multiple-choice questions provide quantitative data. The open-ended questions provide qualitative data, and as such they require longer time to answer and to analyze.

Before administering the questionnaire to the students, it was necessary to pilot the instrument. This was done with five students who were excluded from the sample population for validity reasons. On the basis of the pilot study, some of the questions were reformulated.

The aim of the questionnaire was to seek information about the students' difficulties in the writing production, and the problems they are facing when they are assessed in the writing module. The questionnaire counts twenty questions: six closed-ended questions, eleven multiple-choice questions, and three open-ended questions. Such questions are grouped in two sections, as explained below:

The questionnaire constitutes of two parts. While the first part is concerned with the writing skill, the second part deals with the assessment process.

✓ Section One: (questions 1 to 7) is concerned with the writing skill. It seeks information about the students' beliefs, motivation and opinions about the module of writing, the importance of the written production in their learning process, and the steps they follow when they are writing. It also highlights the difficulties which the students face when they are producing their pieces of writing and the factors behind these obstacles whilst writing.

✓ Section Two: (questions 8 to 20) is concerned with how students are assessed. Such questions ask problems like frequency of tests and evaluation in a term, the types of assessment and the activities the teachers use in their writing sessions, the correction types they use. Here we also probe whether teachers mark their students' writing or not, the area the teachers are more concerned with while correcting their students' papers and whether they give written feedbacks or not. In addition to this, the students were asked, for example, about how they want to be assessed, and their feelings when they are assessed (see Appendix A).

### **2.3.3.2 The Teachers' Interview**

The interview refers to a conversation based on oral questions and answers between the researcher and the informants. It is a tool used by the researcher to gather information and points of views about the subject matter. Richards (2001:61), for example, observes that "interviews allow for a more in-depth exploration of issues than is possible with a questionnaire, though they take longer to administer and are only feasible for smaller groups". So to speak, the interview is

helpful when collecting data as each question is dealt with in isolation, and the researcher is sure that no question will be left without answer (Cohen, et al. 2007).

There are three types of the interview: structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. The structured interview takes the form of an oral questionnaire. It requires all the respondents to answer the same questions which are prepared in advance. The semi-structured interview involves an outline of the topic that will be discussed, i.e., the interviewer orders a set of questions to ask them to the participants but he can add more information or questions in order to have detailed information. The unstructured interview takes the form of a general discussion without any previous preparation of questions since the researcher just explains the topic to the informant who has to provide the researcher with his opinions and beliefs about the topic (Cohen, et al. 2007).

In this research work, the researcher chose the semi-structured interview in order to highlight the teachers' problems when assessing their learners. It covered 6 teachers of the writing module. It contains three sections, as explained below:

- ✓ Section One: (questions 1 to 3) is about the teacher's background, including the title, the field of specialism, and teaching experience.
- ✓ Section Two: (questions 4 to 8) is about writing as a subject of instruction in the department under investigation, including the method used by the teacher, his objectives while teaching writing, his students' difficulties in the writing composition, the reasons behind such difficulties.
- ✓ Section Three: (questions 9 to 17) is related to the assessment practices. This covers, for example, how often they assess their students in a term, the types and the activities of the assessment process, whether they mark or not their students' writing compositions, and the type of scoring procedure they use. Equally important, some of the questions attempt to gain information about the problems while assessing the students and the reasons behind these problems (see Appendix B).

## **2.4 Data Analysis and Discussion**

This section will report, analyse and discuss the data that have been collected from both the learners' questionnaire and the teachers' interview. Qualitative data analysis is based on formulating textual information provided in the form of texts. The quantitative data analysis relies on statistics in order to enable the researcher to provide evidence and understand the results through numerical data. The analysed data are often presented in tables and figures. Obviously, one can say that the qualitative analysis completes the quantitative data analysis to have a fruitful research work, as confirmed by Dornyei (2007:45) who argues that "we gain a better understanding of complex phenomena by converting numeric trends from qualitative data and specific details from qualitative data. Words can be used to add meaning to numbers and numbers can be used to add precision to words".

### **2.4.1 The Learners' Questionnaire Results**

This section revolves around the data analysis of the learners' questionnaire results. Each item of the questionnaire will be dealt with separately.

**Question One:** Do you like writing?

The results of the first question revealed that the majority of the respondents (32 informant) opted for the 'yes' option. This is to the exclusion of three informants who expressed their dislike to writing. Four (4) students did not answer the question. This might be interpreted that writing is an enjoyable subject of instruction.

**Question Two:** Do you think that written production is important in improving your English?

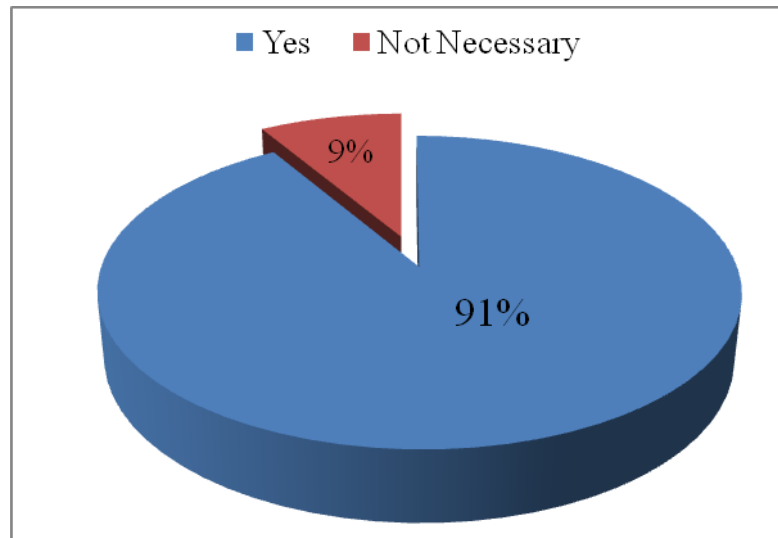


Figure 2.1 The Importance of Written Production for Students

Here, Figure 2.1 shows the results for such a question. We clearly notice that the majority of the informants (34) agreed that writing is essential in improving their English. Only five (5) students disagreed with this question.

**Question Three:** How often do you follow these steps (the stages of the writing process)?

The results for each step in the writing process are graphically presented in figure 2.2.

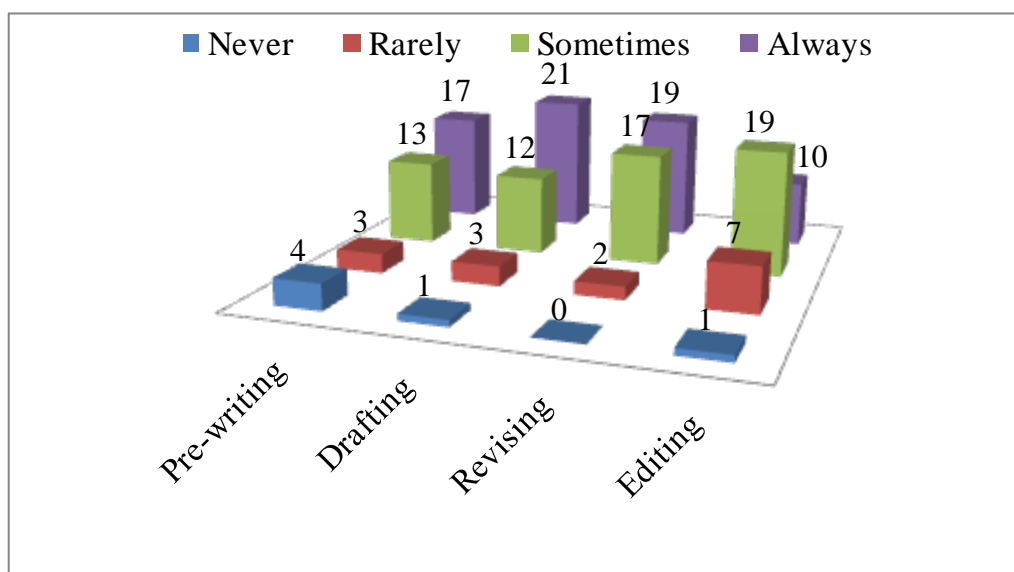


Figure 2.2 The Students' Steps of the Writing Process

As for the pre-writing stage, 17 informants answered that they ‘always’ go through this stage, while 13 informants only ‘sometime’ consider pre-writing. As far as drafting is concerned, most informants (21) declare that they ‘always’ go through such a stage, 12 others sometimes consider drafting and only 1 informant never regard drafting. Revising seems to be a necessary stage that most students consider while producing a written piece. As for editing, 7 students opted for rarely; the remaining informants consider such a stage.

When interpreting the results of this question, the results indicate that the students largely follow the stages of the writing process because they have learned; they also know the importance of such stages in achieving a good writing structure. On the contrary, some of the respondents focus on some of them and neglect the others, maybe because they are not aware of the importance of each step.

**Question Four:** Do you find difficulties when writing in English?

Figure 2.3 below displays the results obtained for the fourth question. The findings elucidated that the majority of the learners (23) said that they do “not always” face difficulties when writing. However, fourteen (14) learners admitted that they have difficulties.

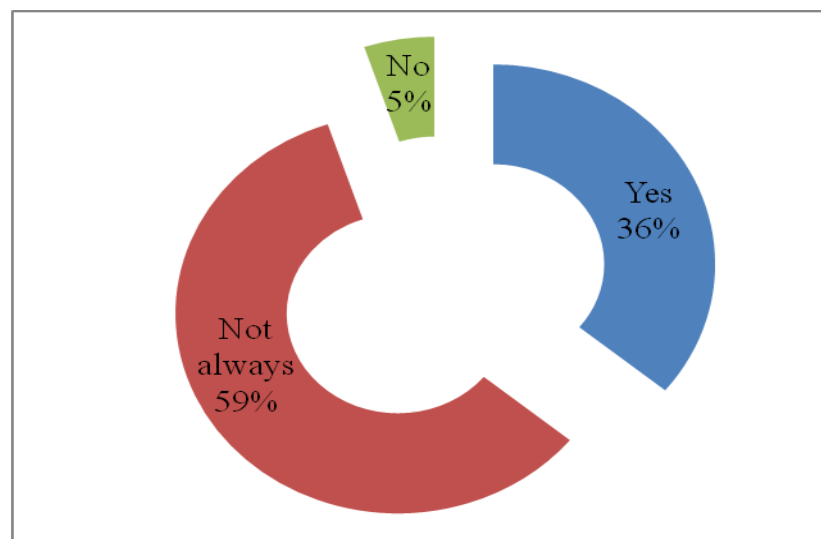


Figure 2.3 Learners' Difficulties in Writing

**Question Five:** If yes, what kind of problems?

Figure 2.4 tells that most students (19) have problems with punctuation. Those who argued that they have no problem with punctuation form no other than a minority (4 students). As for grammar difficulties, most students (22) reported that they always, or at least sometimes, face such problems. The same fact extends to spelling and vocabulary. From Figure 2.4, one can conclude that cohesion and coherence remain the most challenging for the students with a clear majority (27 informants) complaining at these levels.

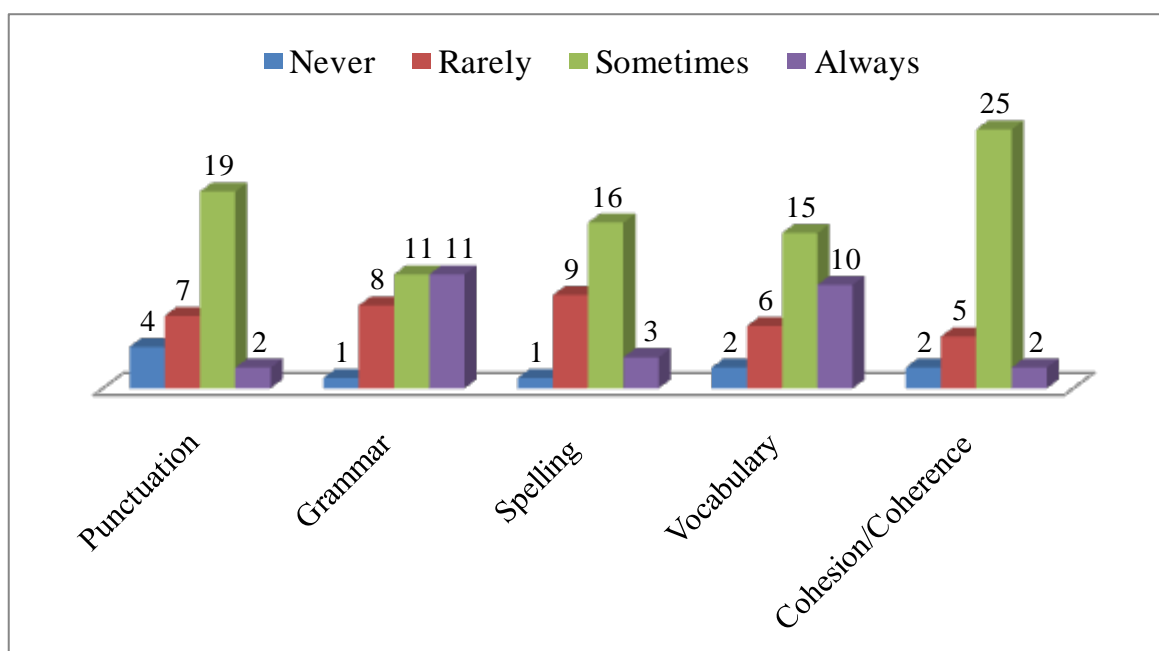


Figure 2.4 Kinds of Writing Difficulties

Evidently, the learners face problems in punctuation, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, coherence and cohesion. This translates that the participants do not fully master the target language (English).



**Question Six:** Indicate the reasons behind your weaknesses in writing

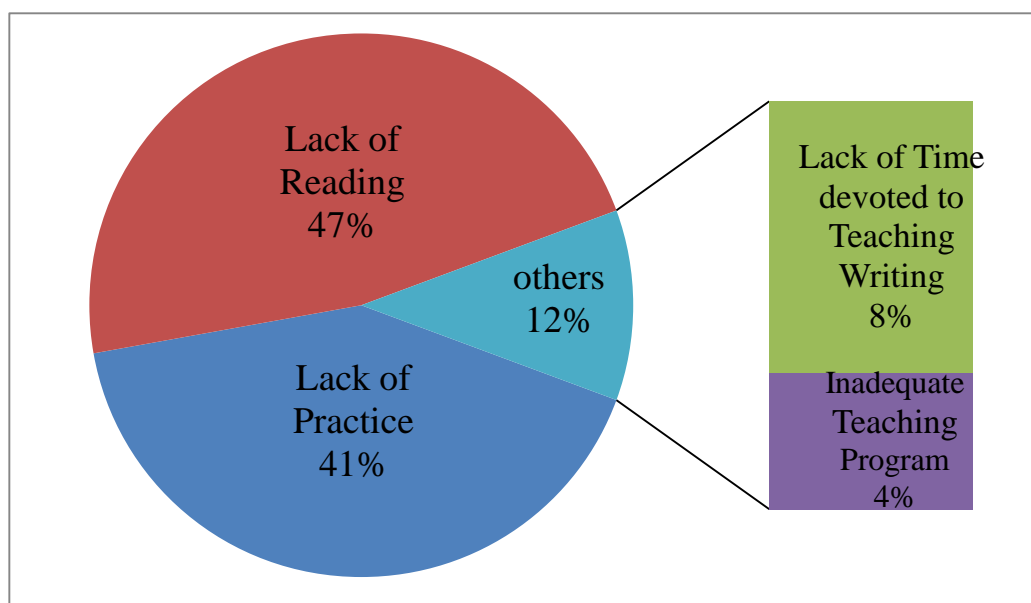


Figure 2.5 The Factors behind Writing Difficulties

The results exposed that the majority of the informants agree with all the factors behind poor achievement in writing. Many students (25) attributed incompetence in writing to lack of reading. They also view that lack of practice is also a chief reason which leads to low performance in writing. Some students (6) add some other reasons like lack of time devoted to teaching writing and inadequate teaching programs.

**Question Seven:** What do you suggest in order to improve your writing in English?

Having asked the students about their wishes for themselves and their teachers to better their writing, they replied first as they are a source of the writing difficulties, that they should read regularly to widen their vocabulary, and fix their spelling and grammar problems. They also reported that they should practice, either by writing or also listening to native speakers and watch movies. Their wishes for their teachers/administration were articulated about the time allocated to writing in an indication that writing should be among the top priorities which require more time within a week. Moreover, the teachers should simplify lessons and make them more enjoyable, give more activities and assignments to the students. Furthermore,

the students added that teachers must allow them to use dictionaries and give exercises which need checking in the dictionaries in order to improve vocabulary items. Finally, teachers should build good rapport with their students and accept their mistakes.

## Section Two: Assessment and Testing Practices

This section deals with the evaluation procedures of the writing expression module. This means that we asked students about their teachers' practices for the assessment operation of their writing ability. Below, we consider the students responses to the different items.

**Question Eight:** How many tests do you have in a term?

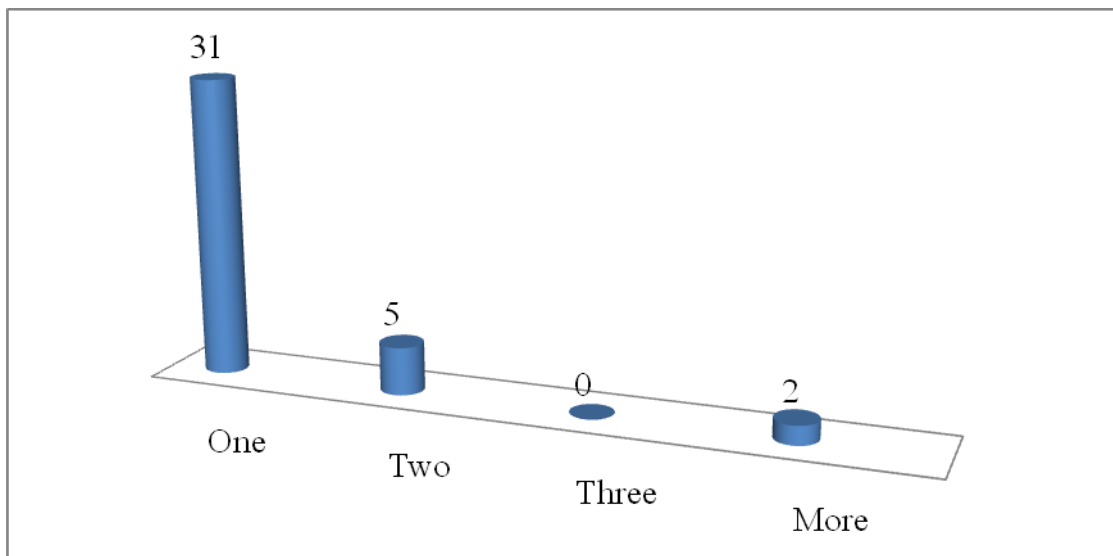


Figure 2.6 The Number of Tests per Term

The majority of the subjects (31) declared that they had one test per term; five (5) students said that they had two tests in a term, and only two (2) learners stated that they had more than one test per term. This is due to the fact that each teacher apparently follows a different assessment process.

\*Is the number of test in a term sufficient?

When asked whether they find the number of tests in a term sufficient or not, most students opted for the option 'yes', 17 others chose the option 'no'. The results are displayed in table 2.1:

Table 2.1 Students' opinions towards the Number of tests per Term

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Students' absolute Frequency</b>	21	17	38
<b>Relative Frequency</b>	55.26%	44.73%	100%

**Question Nine:** Do you think the given tests reflect your competency?

Table 2.2 The Student's Attitudes towards the Potential of Tests to reflect the Writing Ability

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Students' absolute Frequency</b>	26	12	38
<b>Relative Frequency</b>	68.42%	31.57%	100%

From the above mentioned table, we notice that the vast majority of students agree that the tests mirror their true competence in writing. However, 12 students observe that the authentic capacities in writing cannot be faithfully captured in a test. They build their answers on a number of reasons especially that tests may require them to write about topics which they are not familiar with and they do not have background information about them. They also argue that they might have great ideas but they fall short to express themselves due to lexical gaps in the target language. Some of them said that they may not be in the perfect mood on the day of the test.

**Question Ten:** How does your teacher assess your writing?

The results for such a question are graphically represented in figure 2.7:

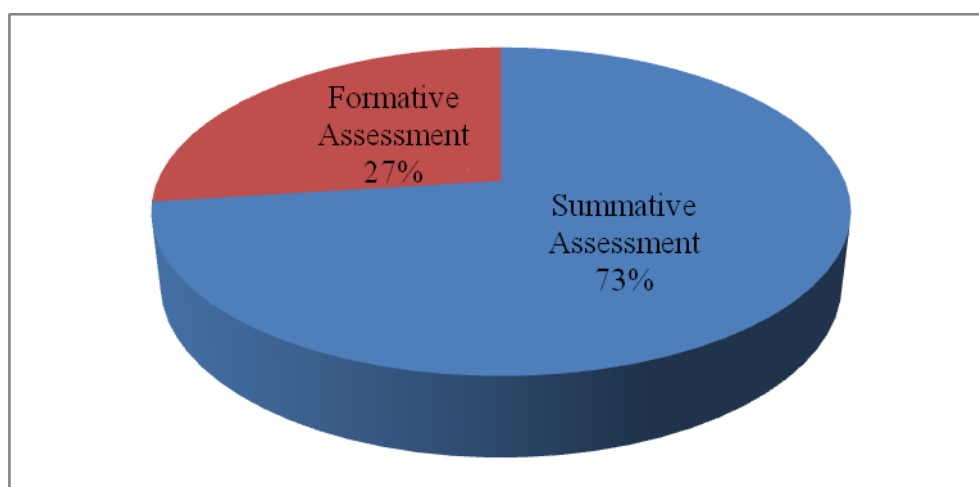


Figure 2.7 The Students' Views about Types of Assessment

It is clear that the widely used assessment technique falls in favour of summative assessment with a percentage of 73%. Other informants (27%) reported that they are assessed formatively. This implies that teachers have different assessment techniques either with one test at the end of the semester or continuous assessment during the whole semester.

**Question Eleven:** What does your teacher use to assess your writing ability?

Answers were varied. Some students (24) argued that teachers use the 'free-writing activities' like paragraphs and essays. Fourteen (14) students selected 'guided writing activities' like fill in the gaps. Some other students (12) said that their teachers used the 'portfolios' as a method of classroom assessment which is a collection of written works over a period of time done by the students to be evaluated by the teacher. To put it differently, the assessment techniques vary from one teacher to the other, from controlled to free activities to portfolios. The results are summarized in the following figure:

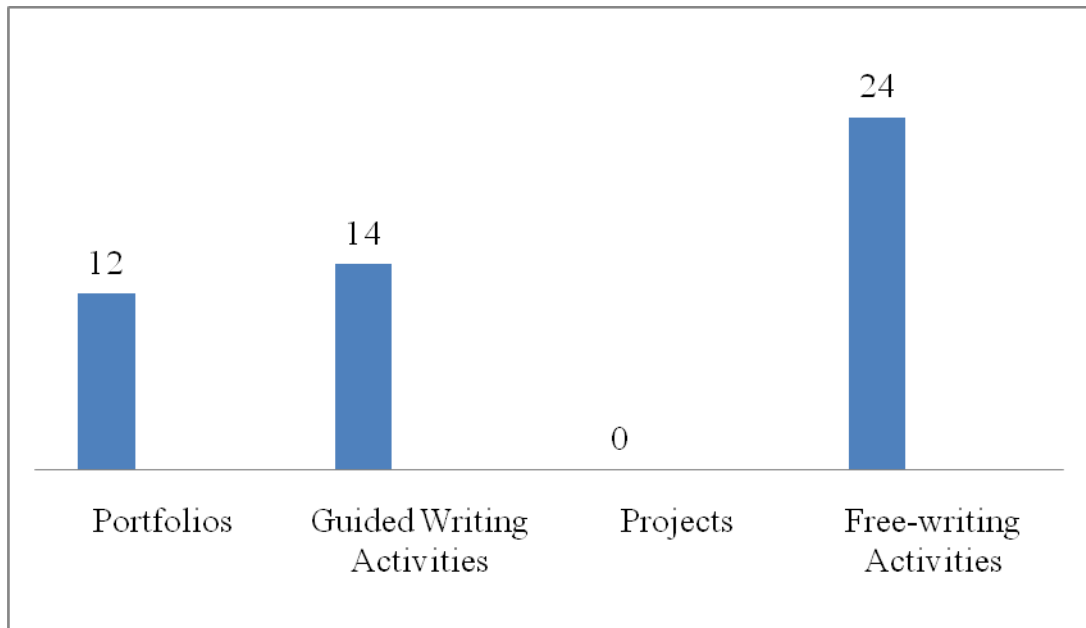


Figure 2.8 The Techniques used to assess the Students' Writing Performance

**Question Twelve:** Does your teacher mark your writing?

The greater number of the respondents (18+18 = 36) agreed that their teachers either “always” or “sometimes” mark their writing. Only one (1) student negated this, as shown below:

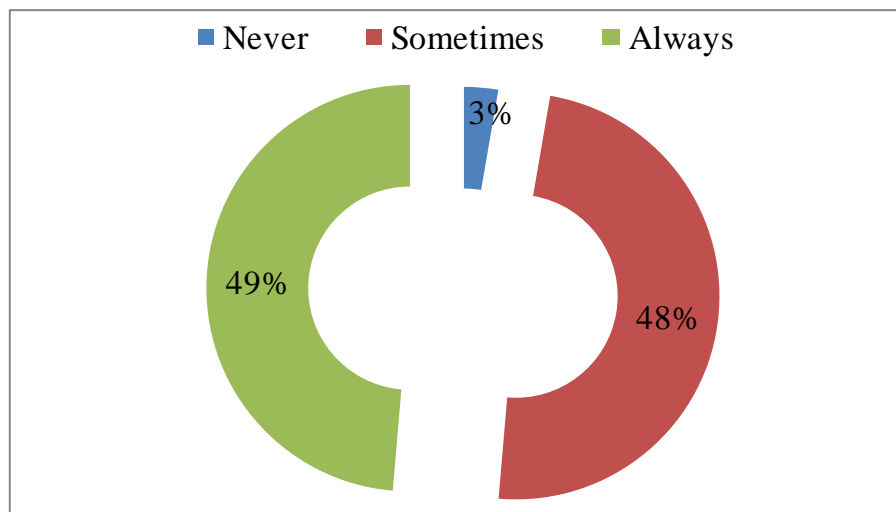


Figure 2.9 The Students' View about the Grading of their Written Productions

**Question Thirteen:** What type of correction procedures does your teacher use?

Twenty-eight (28) of the subjects concurred that their teachers use the ‘analytic correction procedure’ when evaluating their pieces of writing, and only six (6) students said that their teachers employ ‘holistic correction’. This implies that most teachers prefer to specify and give detailed marks for each element of writing: vocabulary, spelling, grammar, cohesion, etc. This is to help the students realise their mistakes hoping to correct them in future production. The results are exposed on figure 2.10, sketched below:

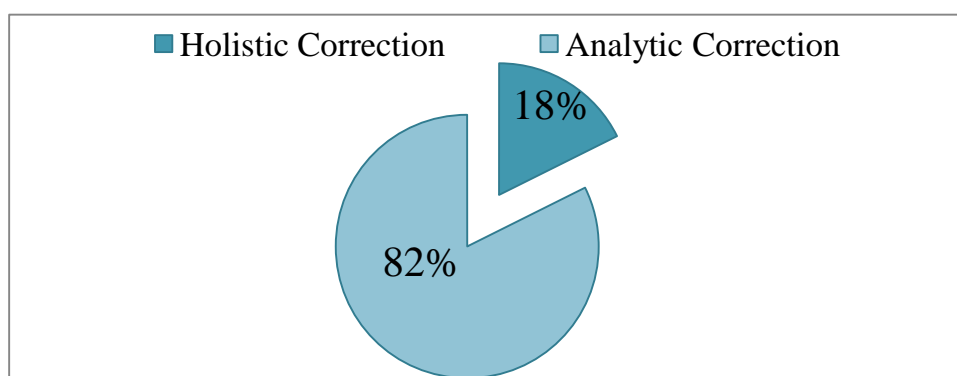


Figure 2.10 The Correction Procedures

**Question Fourteen:** teacher’s area of interest while correcting

The results of this question revealed that the greatest number of the informants (31) answered that their teachers give equal importance to the ‘form’ and the ‘content’ when they correct pieces of writing. Both aspects are carefully treated as they define the students’ strengths and weaknesses in writing. Table2.3 summarizes the results:

Table 2. 3 The Focus of the Teachers when Correcting the Writing Production

	<b>Only Form</b>	<b>Only Content</b>	<b>Form &amp; Content</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Students’ absolute Frequency</b>	4	3	31	38
<b>Relative Frequency</b>	10.52%	7.89%	81.57%	100%

**Question Fifteen:** How frequently does your teacher provide you with written feedbacks?

It is clear that the question aims to know whether the teacher provide the learners with written feedbacks or not. The findings revealed that thirty-three (33) of the students revealed that teachers very frequently give feedback. No more than two students who negated this aspect. This indicates that teachers are careful about guiding their learners to improve their writing. The results for such a question are exposed on table 2.4:

Table 2.4 Providing Students with Written Comments

	<b>Always</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Students' absolute Frequency</b>	12	21	2	35
<b>Relative Frequency</b>	34.28 %	60 %	5.71 %	100 %

**Question Sixteen:** How do you want to be assessed?

Answers to this question were varied. Some learners preferred tests/exams and home work. Some others favoured continuous classroom activities, and still some others desire projects.

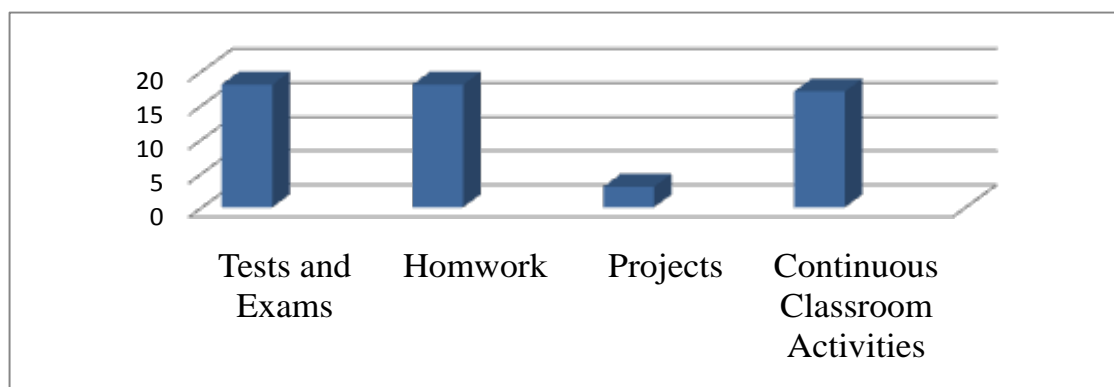


Figure 2.11 The Students' Preferences of the Assessment Instruments

**Question Seventeen:** Do you feel at ease when you are tested?

The majority of the respondents (31) reported that they do not always feel at ease when in tests. The results are displayed in the following figure:

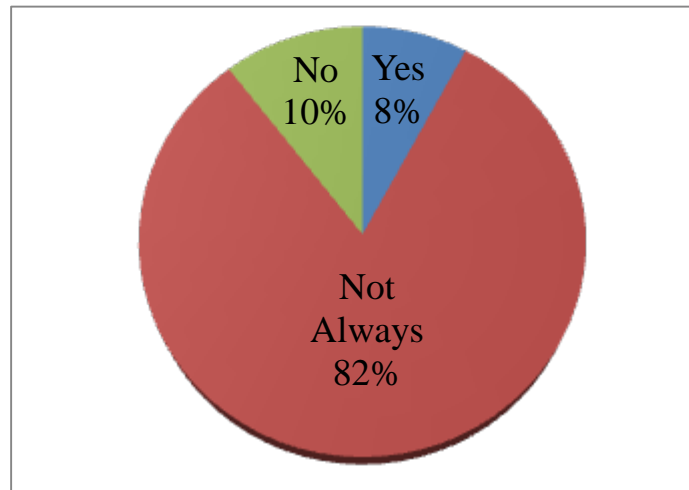


Figure 2.12 The Impact of Assessment

**Question Eighteen and Nineteen:** Do you face any problems when you are assessed?

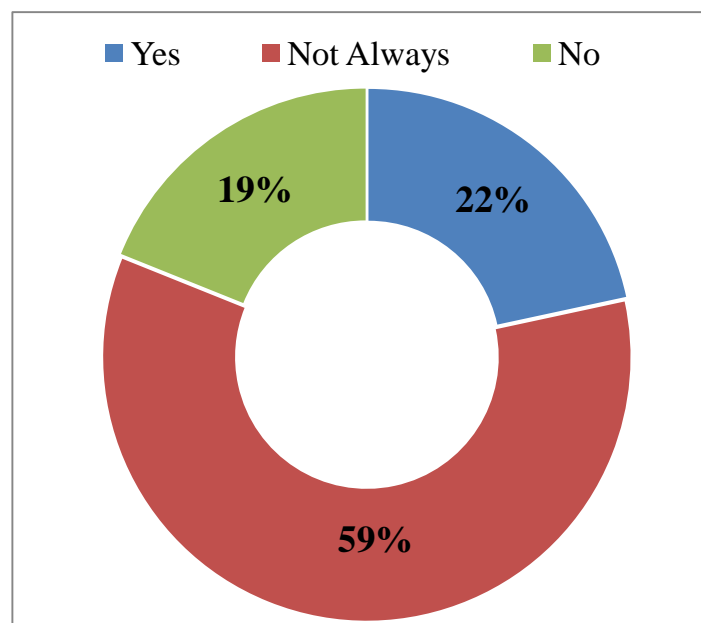


Figure 2. 13 The Students' Problems in Exams



Only eight (8) subjects admitted that they encounter problems when being assessed. Most students (22) argued that even if they face problems that is not always the case. Seven learners reported that face no obstacles while being assessed.

When required to list these problems, all the students put the blame on reasons which are psychological, not least anxiety, worry and being afraid from making mistakes. According to them, such psychological aspects seriously hinder them to find ideas or retrieve the required vocabulary. Therefore, these barriers should be taken into consideration by all teachers so as to achieve better learning outcomes. In fact, learners have to be psychologically well-prepared for evaluation and examination.

**Question Twenty:** What do you suggest to your teacher as new techniques to use for assessing you in the written production and to overcome your obstacles while you are tested?

Only 17 informants answered this question. The suggestions varied from one student to the other. We summarize them as follows:

- ✓ teachers should give them more time for practice either at home or in the classroom .
- ✓ Concerning the ordinary assessment instruments (tests and exams), they suggested that teachers should add more time for the tests/exams so as to allow them work at ease
- ✓ Teachers have to avoid complicated questions in the exams.
- ✓ Teachers should interact with them by using innovative techniques which are more fun and enjoyable like games to make them love writing
- ✓ Teachers have to focus more on the content rather than on the form
- ✓ Collaborative work and group assessment must be encouraged.
- ✓ Each student must be individually evaluated.

## 2.4.2 The Teachers' Interview Results

This part is about the teachers' interview results. To remind the reader, this semi-structured interview was carried out with 6 teachers of the writing expression module in the department of English at Tlemcen University. The interview is divided into three sections, and the results of each section were considered with reference to each individual question.

### Section One: Teacher's Profile

Teachers were required to give information about the degree they hold, their field of expertise and their teaching experience. The results are shown on table 2.5:

Table 2.5 The Teachers' Profile

<b>Number of Teachers</b>	<b>The Degree</b>	<b>The Field of Study</b>	<b>The Experience</b>
2	Doctorate	TEFL & Applied Linguistics	12 to 22 years
4	Magister		5 to 14 years

### Section Two: Writing Teaching in the Department under Investigation

As for the first question, which revolves about the method adopted for teaching writing, the answers were different. Some teachers revealed that there is no specific method to teach writing; they argued that they use 'systematic' or 'eclectic' method. Other teachers specified the method arguing that they make use of a mixed teaching process-product approach to teaching writing, i.e., they pay attention to the process of writing (writing stages: brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing) and the product which is the writing composition itself and correcting the grammar, spelling, punctuation mistakes of this products. There was a general agreement among the teachers that the method of teaching largely depends on several elements like the level, year, kind of course performed, and the group.

As far as the second question (objectives of teaching writing) is concerned, all the interviewees agreed that their main goal is to help their learners write correct English. This is divided into several objectives passing from a good command of constructing clauses, phrases, sentences in both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years to develop their writing competence, to writing paragraphs then finally essays in order to build their own writing style in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year. In an advanced level, i.e., the master's level, writing revolves around dissertations and academic papers. In brief, we can say that the writing expression teachers raise the awareness of their students to achieve a good performance in the writing skill.

Then the interviewees were required to provide the major weaknesses characterizing their students. Teachers reported that their students' face problems in the form (grammar, spelling, vocabulary and punctuation) as well as the content. Also, learners confuse between the French and the English items, and the effect of the native language on producing the foreign language between Arabic and English. In a word, they fall in negative transfer. Moreover, most of them have a poor style. Teachers attributed such deficiencies to lack of reading and practice. Some teachers added that their learners show a de-motivation to learn writing. Some others went beyond and explained that among the major reasons is that writing is learned as a separate module not integrated with other modules.

When required to precise the stage(s) in which the students face the greatest difficulties in writing, most teachers went along with the answer stating that it is at the "pre-writing" stage that students face their greatest difficulties because it is not adequately undertaken by the students. They added that even in the "while-writing" stage they encounter problems when they produce their drafts, and also in the "post-writing" phase when it comes to organize and edit their drafts to handle them properly to their teachers. One teacher argued that learners do not follow these steps complaining that even some teachers do not follow such steps. This can explain the fact that we have lack of training of the writing process on the part of both the teachers and students in our department, so that the learners are not aware of these stages. They are able to brainstorm but unable to organize their ideas in a correct

piece of writing. Likewise, teachers need to check the learners' drafts one-by-one, group-by-group. However, the time constraint as well as the huge number of students in the group are real barriers facing the teacher. Some additional factors lead to these difficulties like the psychological variables (stress, fear, anxiety) when they begin writing.

Last but not least, the teachers explained how they help their students to overcome their difficulties in writing. The teachers suggested to read and practice since reading is the backbone of writing as it helps them memorise words with their spelling. Equally important, teachers must define each student's problems by conducting needs analysis at the beginning of the year, and then check each one individually. Finally, they should raise their students' awareness of their mistakes by explaining these mistakes to avoid them in the future.

### **Section Three: Assessment Practices**

The teachers were asked about the frequency of assessment. The majority of the interviewees (4) declared that they used their assessment instruments very often, i.e., very regularly they assess their students, whereas the rest of them (two teachers) said that their assessment practices are used only in tests and exams. Evaluations is made two times in a semester (one test and one exam)

Also, all the teachers argued that they use the formative assessment in the classroom (controlled or free-writing activities) or at least oral test to assess the learners' performance of the writing courses during the sessions. However, they use summative assessment (exams and tests) to evaluate them in the whole term. In the formative assessment, teachers check students' writing, correct their mistakes, and make them conduct group correction and peer assessment. Then, the teachers take some products as models after collaboratively correcting on the blackboard.

In terms of frequency of marking the students' writing compositions, we obtained a variety of answers. Some interviewees revealed that they rarely or sometimes mark their students; some others replied that they mark students three

times in a term. Still others claimed that they do not give marks but their marking only relies on giving symbols to encourage students believing that marks make students stressed and anxious.

Related to the type of scoring procedures, the interview demonstrated that teachers use both the 'holistic' and 'analytic' procedures for the correction process. Here again, each teacher differs from the other in that some teachers (2) prefer the analytic type, i.e., to give a detailed mark for each element in the piece of writing (introduction, indent, spelling, punctuation, etc), whereas others (3) favour both the analytic and holistic types of correction depending on the assignment, using holistic procedure with free-writing activities and reserving the analytic type to controlled activities. One interviewee was found to prefer the holistic type solely.

In terms of area of focus while correcting written compositions, the majority of the teachers (4) agreed that both the content and the form are of equal importance. Yet, two (2) interviewees said that the form is essential for beginners and the content for the advanced learners, i.e., they are more concerned with the content the more the students advance in their studies.

As for the following question, all the interviewees but one argued that they always give written feedbacks. They do so to make their learners understand what kind of mistakes they have made.

It was necessary to elicit data on the teachers' problems when they are correcting their students. Therefore, the results disclosed that half of the teachers (3) admitted that they are facing serious problems. The high number of students in the group is among the top problems which make the teachers unable to check every student individually. The time constraint is also of prime importance as it is extremely difficult to deliver a lecture then correct individual assignments. Other problems relate to plagiarism as many students prefer to copy essays from the internet when they are asked to prepare a home work. This leads us to say that some of these problems are administrative (group size, lecture time, etc) while others are basically related to the students.

As a concluding question, the teachers provided a number of suggestions. First of all, concerning the assessment procedures, they proposed that they should vary their assessment tools like using individual, peer, group work assignments so that to overcome the problem of the overcrowded classroom; doing activities from time to time in the spoken mode is another alternative option. Then, according to them, the use of the formative assessment is the best way to follow the students' progress in writing. Concerning the writing module, they recommend their students to practice more and to learn how to use technology. They also put forward that organising workshops where students can practice writing with their teachers individually can be of great usefulness; this is unlike the courses which are addressed to the whole group. Creating online platforms in which students can write and share with their classmates might also be a key proposal. Among the recommendations is that specialized teachers must be in charge of the module of writing.

## **2.5 The Discussion**

Here we provide a discussion of the main results. We are going to explore the pre-mentioned hypotheses in relation to the main findings of this research work. As a result, in this section, the researcher can prove or refute his suggested hypotheses for the problem of this research work which highlighted the writing assessment difficulties. In the start of this research work, it was hypothesised that there are several factors which lead to difficulties in the written production such as lack of practice, need for reading in addition to demotivation, etc.

The data obtained through the two research instruments (questionnaire and interview) revealed that the factors which result in deficiencies in grammar, spelling, vocabulary, etc mainly due to lack of reading and practice. This verity was reinforced by the teachers' responses to the different interview questions. Indeed, the teachers confirmed that their students do not read nor do they practice writing. They also added that they have low motivation to attend the writing courses.

Obviously, the students and their teachers alike share the responsibility of these deficiencies in the writing expression module. On the one hand, the learners do not read or practice to foster their writing style, accumulate vocabulary items, learn grammar structures, and know rules of cohesion and coherence. On the other, teachers are responsible for these difficulties in writing since they do not encourage their students to practice through using innovative techniques to teach the writing module. Also, they do not select adequate teaching programmes, as we have seen in the questionnaire answers; their programmes are full of theory without much time to practice. For instance, the stages of the writing process are not well exercised in the classroom. Another problem relates to the time allocated to the module of writing which is not really enough to teach and practise simultaneously. In fact, the results validate the first hypothesis.

Concerning the second hypothesis, we suggested that the written expression teachers evaluate their students' performance in this subject of instruction using different types of tests like formative and summative tests. The results showed that the students are assessed building on different types of assessment. Teachers offer their students assignments as homework for further practice. Also, teachers use several types of activities which are used to practice writing in the classroom, like free-writing activities in which they compose paragraphs and essays. In addition, teachers opt for the guided-writing activities, like fill in the gaps in which the students practice the language features like vocabulary and spelling. Teachers also assess their students' performance through the use of portfolios.

The students are not only evaluated in the classroom but also at the end of the term. The teachers asserted that they vary their assessment tools for better results using both formative assessment (the continuous form of evaluation) and the summative assessment (at the end of a unit of learning) to assess the students' overall progress. In the formative assessment, teachers pass through rows to check the students' trials in writing, correct their mistakes, and make them conduct group correction and peer assessment. Then, the teachers take some products as models after collaboratively correcting.

In the final analysis, the assessment techniques vary from one teacher to the other, from controlled to free activities to portfolios in order to have different assessment results for each group. Thus, they all share the same goal which is the collection of the students' information for the purpose of improving the students' performance in the writing expression. These results confirm the second hypothesis.

Regarding the third hypothesis which stipulates that creating a positive attitude may have a positive impact on students' motivation which may lead to increasing their attendance and engagement in the writing module. The data collected from the students' questionnaire stated that the students suggest innovative techniques of teaching to attract them in the courses of writing to increase both their attention and attendance. In a motivating atmosphere, the students will be more interested in the module. When they are motivated, they will recognize the importance of writing which plays a major role in the teaching/learning process of English as a foreign language (EFL). This will make them build a good rapport with their teachers for better learning outcomes. While interviewing them, the teachers insisted on creating a motivating learning atmosphere. They added that creating online platforms and workshops at the level of the department may increase their students' awareness towards the importance of writing. Equally important, teachers must define each student's problem by making needs analysis at the beginning of the year, and then check each one individually. Finally, they should raise their students' awareness of their mistakes and encourage them to use dictionaries whenever they need them. Again, our findings approve the third hypothesis.



## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter emphasised on providing data about the study setting, the research design and the results. The main results were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. When relating the findings to the research hypotheses, all the proposed hypotheses were confirmed.

In this chapter, the discussion of the main findings showed that the teachers are required to enhance their students' achievement in writing production. They must find solutions to apply them in their writing lectures. These solutions are the remedial work for better teaching/learning outcomes in the writing module.

Moreover, a number of suggestions and solutions put forward by the teachers and their learners were mentioned. Based on these suggestions, the following chapter will be devoted to propose some recommendations in the field of writing assessment.

## **CHAPTER THREE      Recommendations and Future Implications**

### 3.1 Introduction

### 3.2 Some Contributions of the Dissertation to the Teaching and Testing of Writing

#### 3.2.1 Good Readers are Good Writers

##### 3.2.1.1 Selecting Texts

#### 3.2.2 Some Innovative Techniques to teach the Writing Skill

##### 3.2.2.1 Pictures

##### 3.2.2.2 Games

##### 3.2.2.3 Dictation

##### 3.2.2.4 The Internet

#### 3.2.3 Time devoted to the Written Expression Module

#### 3.2.4 Increasing the Students' Motivation to write

#### 3.2.5 Correction

#### 3.2.6 Teachers' Feedback

#### 3.2.7 Formative Assessment

#### 3.2.8 Alternative Assessment

#### 3.2.9 Assessment and Motivation

### 3.3 Conclusion

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter is designed to give a number of propositions and recommendation aiming at promoting both the teaching and the assessment procedures of the written skill. In the first place, it highlights the need for reading and the selection of reading material. Then, it clarifies the different innovative techniques to teach the writing skill such as the use of games, pictures, dictation and internet. Also, it identifies the problem of time devoted to the written expression module. Above all, the chapter also underlies the principles of the assessment process.

### **3.2 Some Contributions of the Dissertation to the Teaching and Testing of Writing**

The findings in this research work can help the future practices in the teaching/testing of the writing skill in the Department of English at Tlemcen University; other universities may also benefit from our findings and suggestions. The informants, being teachers or learners, provided us with very useful suggestions and recommendations for the processes of both the teaching/learning and the assessment procedures of writing in an EFL context. These suggestions can be summarised in the following lines.

#### **3.2.1 Good Readers are Good Writers**

As we have seen in the analysis and the discussion of the results, the informants spotlighted the importance of reading to develop writing. To put it differently, teachers always motivate their students to read so as to accumulate more vocabulary, memorize the spelling, control grammar, and also know how to use punctuation marks. Not only the form of language is supposed to be developed through reading but also the content is also very likely to develop. Reading can help the students achieve good writing style by memorising expressions and language structures to employ them when they practice. In sum, reading is essential for

attaining good working knowledge and practice of writing (Nabokov, 2008). The reader must also know how to rephrase, take notes and summarize. Therefore, as mentioned by Nabokov (2008), the good reader is a good writer.

### **3.2.1.1 Selecting Texts**

There are several types of reading which may vary in terms of purpose, level and length. For instance, the extensive and the intensive reading are the main kinds (Brown, 2001). About this, Hafiz and Tudor (1989:5) argue that “in intensive reading activities, learners are, in the main, exposed to relatively short texts which are used either to exemplify specific aspects of the lexical, syntactic, or discoursal system of L2 or to provide the bases for the targeted reading strategy practice. The goal of extensive reading, on the other hand, is to “flood” learners with large quantities of L2 input with few or possibly no specific tasks to perform on this material”.

In other words, the teachers can help their students in reinforcing the written skill by giving them intensive reading activities during the writing sessions. On the other hand, students can use the extensive reading on their own to improve their writing skill, broaden their vocabulary and their grammar mastery in what they choose from the reading materials that they prefer (Hafiz and Tudor, 1989).

Moreover, selecting these texts is an important task for the teachers to achieve better reading/writing results for their students. Equally, the simplifications of texts as well as the use of authentic texts are of great value when utilising them in the written activities for test and non-test purposes (Smith, 188). The following table sums up the factors which should be considered in texts selection:

Table 3.1 Factors to consider when selecting Texts for Students (Denton et al., 2007:38)

<b>Student-Related</b>	<b>Text-Related</b>
<p><b>Word-recognition ability:</b> How accurately does the student read the words in the text?</p>	<p><b>Text format:</b> How much print is on the page? How complex are the sentences?</p>
<p><b>Fluency:</b> Can the student read the text fluently enough to understand and remember what is being read and to enjoy reading?</p>	<p><b>Vocabulary:</b> Are there difficult vocabulary words that will make comprehension difficult? Is it necessary to understand the challenging words in order to comprehend the text? If so, can difficult words be taught?</p>
<p><b>Comprehension strategies:</b> Is the student a strategic reader? Does the student monitor and self-correct errors? Does he or she stop and form connections to the text?</p>	<p><b>Genre:</b> What type of material is it? Is it narrative or expository? If it is expository, is it well organised, with clearly presented ideas in coherent paragraphs?</p>
<p><b>Interest and motivation:</b> What is the student interested in? What topics will keep his or her attention? Can you give the student a choice of reading material?</p>	<p><b>Content and concepts:</b> What is the topic of the text? Is the subject matter accessible to the students? If the students do not have sufficient background knowledge to relate to the text, can ideas be taught to make it easier for students at access the text?</p>
<p><b>Background and vocabulary knowledge:</b> What background knowledge does the student bring to the text?</p>	<p><b>Illustrations/Graphics:</b> Do the graphics support the text? What is the quality of the graphics?</p>

### **3.2.2 Some Innovative Techniques to teach the Writing Skill**

The language teachers use different ways to teach the language skills. However, the effective EFL teachers should apply a set of innovative techniques to help their students learn in a funny atmosphere easily and he/she will make sure that his/her techniques best suit his/her learners' level (Anburaj, 2014). Here we list some techniques that might be of a great help in the teaching of writing:

#### **3.2.2.1 Pictures**

Pictures are used as a helpful strategy to teach and learn a productive skill. Pictures support the teaching of the oral and written expressions via using photographs, drawings and maps to tell a story, or start a dialogue, and to brainstorm the general idea, imagine the situation, then, write a paragraph or an essay (Patel, 2008). Moreover, the teachers can use the pictures technique to display several words with incorrect spelling to their students, and then the teachers ask the learners to write the words which they memorise with the correct spelling (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Similarly, the pictures can be used by the teachers to encourage the group/peer work in which the learners are required to open debates to identify and share the information of each copy they get with the other members (Raimes, 1983).

#### **3.2.2.2 Games**

In addition to pictures, games are very useful when it comes to teaching the language production (Anburaj, 2014). In fact, the use of games in the written sessions makes the students more active and engaged during the lectures not like in the traditional classes where learning writing was much more passive and only listening to the teacher's instructions (Sugar, 1998). As an illustration of these games, we have the crossword, puzzles, information gap grids and city maps (Sigurgeirsson, 1995) in which students can have the reason to write and have fun at

the same time. Through playing games, students acquire, practice and develop vocabulary, spelling, etc, and they can learn also how to gain social skills. All in all, they are going to build up the necessary knowledge for the written expression module (Ibid).

### **3.2.2.3 Dictation**

Dictation is another method in teaching writing. The teachers can dictate short passages to their students who are required to write what they heard correctly; later on, they correct together with their peers and their teacher (Wickham, 2013).

### **3.2.2.4 The Internet**

The Internet becomes a necessity in our globalised world. It is also used in the educational field to teach English online in or outside the classrooms. The Internet applications and activities enable the learners to ameliorate their written skill and make them stay in touch with their classmates, teachers and the native speakers as well (Vaughan, 1998). Thus, the use of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is a must in our nowadays schools. As claimed by Beatty, “a definition of CALL that accommodates its changing nature is any process in which a learner uses a computer and, as a result, improves his or her language” (in Graham and Perin, 2007:36). In a word, using technological materials for the learning purposes aids learners to increase their capacities of thinking, searching, solving problems and their writing skills (Anburg, 2014)

### **3.2.3 Time devoted to the Written Expression Module**

The time allocated to the writing module is in fact an important hindrance. Three sessions of one hour and a half a week are not enough to practice and evaluate the written skill of all the students, especially when the group counts high numbers of learners. This conclusion builds on the findings of our research. The

point with lack of practice time is that the students may adopt a negative attitude towards this module with low motivation to write (Tooley, 2009)

### **3.2.4 Increasing the Students' Motivation to write**

Teachers are required to boost their learners' motivation in order to do their writing tasks (Hyland, 2002). Hence, they should detect methods to increase motivation in the classroom. Motivation, as put by Brown (1994:152), is “probably the most frequently used catch all term for explaining the success or failure of virtually any complex task”. Instructors and teachers raise their students' motivation using a set of techniques including positive reinforcement (Williams and Burden, 1997). Additionally, the teachers should create a good rapport with their students and mention to them regularly the importance of the writing skill (Bruning and Horn, 2000). Consequently, when doing so, it can help building up a relaxing atmosphere while learning which boosts their creativity and behavioural desires to write even if they do not fully master the language.

### **3.2.5 Correction**

When correcting the learners' written compositions in exams or even in the classroom activities, teachers are required to use selective correction to improve students' writing. This means to avoid the overuse of the red pen everywhere in the students' papers. Focus must be on the selective aspects in the correction such as grammar, spelling, etc and the students must know about these aspects (Truscott, 1996). Additionally, students have to discuss the selective correction with their teacher to be aware of their mistakes on the specific area of the language features (vocabulary, grammar, spelling, etc) to be able to rectify them by their own (Ibid). The teacher may use several techniques to correct; for instance, he might use the marks or symbols on the margin which are agreed upon already, or by giving an oral explanation of the language production features to be focused on when writing (Harmer, 2004). The used symbols are suggested by Harmer (2007:110-111) in the following table:



Table 3.2 The Correction Symbols (Harmer, 2007a:110-111)

Symbol	Meaning	Example Error
<b>S</b>	A spelling error	The answer is <u>obvius</u> .
<b>WO</b>	A mistake in word order	I like <u>very much</u> it.
<b>G</b>	A grammar mistake	I am going to buy some furnitures.
<b>T</b>	Wrong verb tense	I <u>have seen</u> him yesterday.
<b>C</b>	Concord mistake (e.g. subject and verb agreement)	People <u>is</u> angry.
<b>^</b>	Something has been left out.	He told ^ that he was sorry.
<b>WW</b>	Wrong word	I am interested <u>on</u> jazz music.
<b>{ }</b>	Something is not necessary.	He was not {too} strong enough.
<b>?M</b>	The meaning is unclear.	That is a <u>very excited</u> photograph.
<b>P</b>	A punctuation mistake	Do you like London.
<b>F/I</b>	Too formal or informal	<u>Hi</u> Mr Franklin, Thank you for your letter...

Moreover, the instructors can identify to their students the marking scale which helps them recognise and reflect upon their difficulties. After the correction, the students reformulate what they have produced by comparing their copies with the models provided by the teachers to remedy their weaknesses in writing. To sum up, correction is an essential step in any learning process, not least writing (Smith, 2003)

### 3.2.6 Teachers' Feedback

As confirmed by Raimes (1981:410), the teachers should devote time “for selecting topics, generating ideas, writing drafts and revisions and providing feedback” in order to help their students in the learning process of writing. Indeed, providing students with positive feedbacks helps them have eagerness to write more. Likewise, the written feedback comments must be encouraging and formative

given for each student to identify his/her weaknesses and strengths in the written skills. Arndt (1993:91-92) adds that “if teachers of writing see their major goal as helping their students become proficient writers they must provide for motive feedback which helps students review their work productively [...]; and they need to reduce students’ anxiety or apprehension about writing”. Through providing learners with constructive comments and feedbacks, they can be aware of the nature of their errors and mistakes to correct them later on with their peers or their teacher (Frey, et al. 2013). The students must learn to redraft their written compositions after the correction in order to develop further ideas and refine the faults they produce on their pieces of writing. Equally important, the students should know the positive points in their written productions not only their weaknesses to make the learners improve after they receive the positive comments and they will be more motivated to learn and produce written compositions (Gorlewski, 2008)

### **3.2.7 Formative Assessment**

According to our data, the majority of our informants highlighted the importance of formative assessment. Good use of formative assessment in the classroom is a helpful tool to develop the learners’ written skill (Stiggins, 2002). Furthermore, formative assessment can help the students to practice more for perfect written compositions, reduce the assessment anxiety through the frequent testing during the sessions, and to foster learning by evaluating students’ written productions each time (Martinez, et al., 1992). In the implementation of formative assessment, teachers are required to establish a relaxing atmosphere by using some strategies (Douglas, et al. 2008). These strategies can be the use of self-assessment and peer-assessment which are an essential component of formative assessment (Black, et al. 1998), to use summative tests for formative purposes to prepare the students for exams through doing a lot of writing activities in the class.

### **3.2.8 Alternative Assessment**

Using portfolios is a beneficial recent way of assessment unlike the traditional procedures of evaluation of writing (Dikli, 2003). Thus, we can say that the use of portfolios helps the teachers know more about their students' level, progress and development in writing as it provides the learners themselves with clues about their achievement in producing their written works (Nezakatgoo, 2010). Furthermore, portfolios' assessment raises the students' motivation and attention towards learning and producing writing through making them engaged in the selection and the discussion of the topics tackled in their portfolios (Angel Monsalve, 2014). This can give them the sense of responsibility, autonomy and self-reliance in their learning (Ibid)

### **3.2.9 Assessment and Motivation**

The assessment process in the classroom should be a part of the flow of motive to boost the learners to progress more in their writing. This can be achieved by using different strategies and techniques to make the evaluation of writing adequately (Murphy, 1999). Teachers are required to use the appropriate exercises and activities which attract the students' attention and raise the feeling of competition among them by providing them with information about their writing capacities (Earl, 2003)

As we have seen in the chapter two, it was confirmed that motivation, attendance and engagement of the students are interrelated in the teaching/learning process of the written expression module. Simply, we can say that when the teachers are able to create a relaxing and motivating atmosphere in the classroom they can in turn promote the assessment operation of the writing skill. To put it another way, teachers have the role of stimulating their students using a variety of strategies to teach the writing courses. Having a motivated student is a key to achieve good writing composition.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have come up with some suggestions and proposals which centralise the idea of the development of both the evaluation and the teaching process of the writing skill through the use of different ways. These ways differ from the teaching process to the assessment procedures, and they are about strengthening the writing abilities of the EFL learners. Besides, there are the need for reading to achieve good writing style; the careful selection of the reading texts is a priority. Devoting enough time to teaching/practicing writing is another top concern. Last but not least, the teachers are required to increase the students' motivation both when writing and while they are assessed.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The objective of the present research work was to uncover the major factors leading to difficulties in the assessment of writing which may, in turn, cause poor achievement in writing expression. This drove the investigator to look for the reasons causing difficulties in writing. The question was also about how teachers evaluate their students' performance in writing.

Subsequently, the researcher drew up the proposed hypotheses. First, she hypothesised that there are several factors which lead to difficulties in the writing like lack of practice and lack of reading. In the second place, she has assumed that the teachers evaluate and assess their students' performance using different types of tests. Last, it was supposed that creating positive attitudes is a way to push the learners to actively engage in writing.

In order to fulfil this purpose, an exploratory case study was undertaken with teachers and second year students in the Department of English at Tlemcen University. The data was analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. Also, they were discussed in relation to the pre-mentioned hypotheses in order to confirm or reject them.

This work was divided into three chapters. It begins with a review of the related literature about writing and the assessment procedures. The second chapter goes around the methodological approach that was adopted in the conduct of the field work. It is also in this chapter that we provided the analysis and discussion of the research findings. In the third chapter, a number of recommendations are put forward with the aim of improving the teaching/learning and the assessment of the writing module in the site under investigation.

The results that were reached confirmed the three proposed hypotheses. First, the teachers and the students alike assured that the major factors responsible for weak writing production among the second year learners basically relate to the lack of reading, practice and motivation. In the second position, the results confirmed

that the teachers use several types of tests to evaluate their students in the writing module. Indeed, they use writing activities in the classroom, tests and exams using both formative assessment and summative assessment to evaluate the overall progress of the students at the end of the semester.

It was noticed that the teachers are required to use some pedagogical and innovative techniques to teach writing so as to create a positive attitude towards the writing module, foster the students' motivation and boost their inspiration to write adequately. Also, some teachers need to consider their assessment procedure, its characteristics, and feedbacks as well.

In fact, it is necessary to mention that this study has some limitations. For example, generalisability of the findings is quite problematic in the sense that the research work only considered one group of second-year students. In fact, homogeneity of the groups was not taken into account. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised on the whole population. Also, data collection was no easy task in that some teachers did not cooperate to conduct interviews. Many students did not fill the whole questionnaire; many items were kept unanswered.

The problems of the assessment of writing of the second year EFL learners (or learners at other levels) in the location under examination is still a questionable issue which can be based on some other standards. In fact, there are other issues which need investigation in future research, such as the use of ICT in teaching and assessing the writing skill, the effective teacher/tester of the writing performance, etc.

In essence, it is worth mentioning that the researcher handled this study as she believes in the great value and importance of the writing skill for the undergraduate students. Also, she wants to portray the difficulties of teaching and assessing the written compositions. It is hoped that the proposed suggestions will meet both the students' needs and the teachers' expectations for fruitful learning outcomes and successful teaching practices.

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# **APPENDICES**



Dear student, this questionnaire is a space for you to express your opinions and beliefs about the difficulties facing you in writing and in the assessment of the writing production module. Thus, you are kindly requested to tick where appropriate and make comments when necessary

### Section One: Writing Composition

1-Do you like writing?

Yes

No

Not decided

2-Do you think that writing production is important in improving your English?

Yes

No

Not necessary

3-How often do you follow these steps (the stages of the writing process)?

a) Pre-writing    Never     Rarely     Sometimes     Always

b) Drafting    Never     Rarely     Sometimes     Always

c) Revising    Never     Rarely     Sometimes     Always

d) Editing    Never     Rarely     Sometimes     Always

4-Do you find difficulties when writing in English?

Yes

Not always

No

5-If yes, do you face problems of:

a) Punctuation    Never     Rarely     Sometimes     Always

b) Grammar    Never     Rarely     Sometimes     Always

c) Spelling    Never     Rarely     Sometimes     Always

d) Vocabulary    Never     Rarely     Sometimes     Always

e) Cohesion (when your sentences are connected /Coherence: when your ideas are logically linked).

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Always

f) Other problems.....

.....

6-Your weaknesses in writing are due to:

a) Lack of practice

b) Lack of reading

c) Lack of time devoted to teaching writing

d) Inadequate teaching program (not good enough)

e) Others (specify, please) .....

.....

.....

7- What do you suggest in order to improve your writing in English? (Your wishes for both yourself and your teacher).

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Section Two: Assessment (Evaluation) and Testing Practices**

8-How many tests do you have in a term (semester)?

1

2

3

More

-Is the number of tests in a term sufficient (enough)?

Yes

No

9-Do you think the given tests reflect your competency?

Yes

No

-If no, why? .....

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10-How does your teacher assess your writing?

a) A test at the end of the semester (Summative assessment)

b) Continuous testing during the semester (Formative assessment)

11-What does your teacher use to assess your writing ability

a) Portfolios (Collection of your written works over a period of time to be evaluated by the teacher)

b) Guided writing activities (fill in the gap, recording exercises, open dialogues)

c) Projects

d) Free-writing activities (writing essays, paragraphs of different types...)

e) Others (specify) .....

.....

12-Does your teacher mark your writing?

Never

Sometimes

Always

13-What type of correction procedures does your teacher use?

a) Holistic correction (the teacher gives you single or one mark of your writing)

b) Analytic correction (the teacher gives you detailed marks for each element of writing: vocabulary, grammar, etc)

14-When your teacher corrects your writing; is he interested more in:

a) The form

b) The content

c) The form and content

15-How frequently does your teacher provide you with written feedbacks (written remarks)?

Always

Sometimes

Never

16-How do you want to be assessed (evaluated)?

a) Tests and exams

b) Homework

c) Projects

d) Continuous classroom activities

e) Others, please specify

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.....

17-Do you feel at ease when you are tested?

Yes

Not always

No

18-Do you face any problems when you are assessed (evaluated)?

Yes

Not always

No

19-If yes, what are these problems?

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20-What do you suggest to your teacher as new techniques to use for assessing you in written production and to overcome your obstacles while you are tested?

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Thank you for your collaboration.

**The Interview Guide**

**I) Profile:**

- 1- Degree
- 2- Field of study
- 3- Have you ever taught writing?

\*For how many years?

**II) The Writing Module:**

- 1- Method adopted in teaching writing
- 2- The objectives of teaching writing
- 3- The major mistakes students in their writings

\*Why do you think learners face such difficulties?

4- At what stage students face the greatest difficulties in writing (the stages of the writing process)?

\*Why do you think your learners face such difficulties?

5- How do you help your students to overcome their difficulties?

**III) Assessment Practices:**

- 1- How often do you assess your students in a term?
- 2- How do you assess your students in the module of writing (their performance in the classroom, and in the whole term)?
- 3- How often do you mark your students' writing compositions?
- 4- What type of scoring procedures do you use?

5- When correcting, are you interested in the content or in the form?

6- Do you provide them with written feedbacks?

7- Do you face any problems while assessing the students' written compositions?

\* What are these problems, and why do you face such problems?

9- What do you suggest as new techniques of assessment to overcome the difficulties and to enhance the students' achievement in writing?