THE EFFECT OF USING WRITING WORKSHOP TO IMPROVE THE SENTENCE STRUCTURE OF EFL students: (A CASE STUDY OF A LEBANESE PUBLIC SCHOOL)

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Abstract

Writing is a vital aspect of human existence that allows people to communicate their ideas, thoughts, feelings, and sensations (Mester, 2011). Since they lack specific writing skills relating to sentence construction, Homeen public school pupils in grades 7 and 8 find it difficult to write English essays. In order to enhance the writing abilities of pupils in grades 7 and 8 at Homeen Public School, the current study set out to investigate how effective the writing workshop approach is as an intervention. In addition to conducting a teacher interview and pre- and post-test on fundamental writing abilities, a quantitative and qualitative design was used to develop a validated teaching plan based on the writing workshop technique. Those who took part in this study were male and female 20 - 30 students non-randomly chosen in a Lebanese public school writing program workshop. The study findings revealed that the writing workshop was effective in improving their writing skills. Moreover, the student's writing scores in the post-test were improved compared to the pre-test conducted before the workshop. Further research is recommended on EFL at colleges and universities students.

Keywords: Sentence, Sentence Structure, Writing Workshop.

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* Introduction

Writing is a crucial skill for students to express their ideas and succeed academically and professionally (Salem, 2013). However, many students struggle with the writing skills necessary for graduation due to various factors (Defazio, 2012). Clear and persuasive writing enhances learning by aiding memory retention (Terada, 2021). Salem (2013) emphasizes that writing is fundamental for self-expression and idea development, and mastering writing is essential for effective communication.

Writing skills encompass grammar and sentence structure, helping students organize their thoughts (Muhsin, 2015). Common issues include sentence fragments and run-on sentences, which students often overlook, believing they communicate effectively (Hageman, 2003). This project aims to implement writing workshops that guide students in transitioning from spoken to academic English (Blumenthal, 2002; Hageman, 2003).

Educators must equip students with the necessary writing skills for both academic and entry-level job success (Salem, 2013). Writing workshops provide a collaborative environment for teaching grammar, style, and writing. These workshops consist of mini-lessons, writing stages, sharing work, and celebrating achievements (El Said, 2006).

1- Problem of Study: For many adults and university students, learning to write in English is a difficult and stressful task (Gardner & Mushin, 2015). The researcher has observed that many pupils in the Homeen public school still struggle with fundamental writing abilities. In order to enhance students' writing abilities, this will investigate the efficacy of using writing workshops as an intervention. When given a writing assignment, many pupils appear reluctant to put forth any effort. Writing is necessary at the university level for a variety of reasons,thus learners must be able to produce quality Basic English articles and papers. Due to their typical poor academic writing skills, many non-proficient students face a considerable risk of failing their classes. In order to help EFL students at Houmeen Public School improve their sentence structure, the present research examined the writing workshop method.

2- Purpose of Study: To participate effectively in classwork, students must be proficient writers, and employers expect them to demonstrate this basic skill when they enter the profession. Writing is

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essential for students' academic progress and future success, according to Salem (2013). The current research study focuses on the effectiveness of the Writing Workshop as a model for demonstrating English writing skills to students enrolled in Lebanese schools.

3- Hypothesis of Study: Depending on the conceptual research framework, both null and alternative hypotheses have been used.

H1: There is a statistical difference between students' writing proficiency levels before and after writing workshops are implemented.

Null H1: Students' writing proficiency levels before and after writing workshops are implemented do not differ statistically significantly.

4- Questions of the Study: This research aimed to answer the following questions

1- What is the efficacy of the writing workshop approachon EFL students' writing skills?

2- What are teachers' perspectives towards teaching and correcting sentence structure of public-school students' essays?

3- What are the learners' basic problems with sentence structure when writing their essays?

4- Does the writing workshop approach further develop the L2 English composition capability association' and 'language use') of upper-essential understudies in Houmeen public school?

5- Significance of Study: One of the four fundamental language abilities, along with speaking, listening, and reading, is interpreting written text (Graham, 2018). Graham continues by stating that writing is the most adaptable language skill since it enables students to develop original thoughts, record facts, build make-believe worlds, express feelings, amuse others, and determine the significance of events and circumstances (Graham, 2018). Therefore, enhancing writing abilities is a major issue in public schools. Students should be able to write coherently and develop their thoughts using appropriate written English norms.

This study could also be useful for aspiring teachers because it offers detailed instructions for teaching writing skills and could potentially be the first step in implementing writing workshops to improve students' functional writing abilities.

* **Literature Review**

1- Importance of Writing: Writing serves as a fundamental means of communication, allowing individuals

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to express thoughts and emotions and to solve problems (Mester, 2011; Defazio, 2011). It is particularly important in educational settings, where effective writing skills can enhance overall academic performance (Walsh, 2010). However, learning to write in a second language poses challenges, necessitating cognitive skills such as verbal proficiency and reasoning (Hanafi, 2014; Perkins & Smith, 2014). Researchers have identified significant barriers faced by EFL students, including linguistic, social, psychological, and educational factors.

2- Elements of weakness in EFL Writing: Many students struggle with writing due to various reasons, particularly the influence of their first language (L1). Common issues include syntactic deficiencies, insufficient understanding of writing's purpose, lack of practice, and a weak academic foundation in writing skills (Hmelo, 2004). These challenges complicate students' ability to express their ideas clearly and coherently.

3- Teaching Writing: Effective writing instruction involves guiding students through the writing process, emphasizing revision and feedback (Zamel, 1982). Teachers can engage students through quick writing exercises, fostering a positive classroom environment that is conducive to learning (Walk, 2008). The responsibility for improving writing skills lies with both students and educators, as writing is essential for academic success (Brown, 2000). Writing can take various forms, including procedural, descriptive, narrative, and recount texts. Each type serves distinct purposes and engages different writing skills, reinforcing the importance of versatility in writing instructions.

4- Traditional vs. Workshop approach: Traditional writing instruction is often teacher-centered, focusing on skills taught outside a writing context, and emphasizing grammar and predetermined prompts (Pollington et al., 2001). In contrast, the writing workshop model prioritizes student choice and engagement, allowing for collaboration and peer feedback (Atwell, 1987). Each approach has its merits, with research indicating that writing workshops can significantly enhance student motivation and writing quality (Mester, 2011).

5- Components of writing: Successful writing encompasses five main components: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics (Heaton, 1988). Each element contributes to effective

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communication, ensuring clarity and coherence in written expression.

6- Utilizong WH-Questions in writing Instructions: WH-Questions serve as a framework for teaching writing, enabling students to explore topics and develop their narratives (Lassa, 2014). This method encourages students to articulate personal experiences, enhancing their writing skills through structured inquiry.

7- The Writing Workshop Approach: The writing workshop fosters a collaborative environment where students can experiment with writing, receive constructive feedback, and engage in meaningful discussions about their work (Atwell, 1987; Mester, 2011). This approach nurtures creativity and confidence, empowering students to take ownership of their writing journey.

* Methodology

The present study employed the mixed method; using both qualitative and quantitative to gain more insights related to the current topic in; which the data was collected using qualitative methods initially, while some of the data was analyzed using quantitative methods; the process in which the data is collected and analyzed through numerical data (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018).

1- Participants and Setting: Twenty-five (n=25) students from a mixed-gender writing workshop in a Lebanese public school participated in this study. The population was chosen in a non-random manner (all students are in grades 7 and 8). The students' ages range from 13 to 16, and they were selected because their essays show weaknesses in language ability, including omission, subject-verb agreement, coherence, and several other syntactic and grammatical errors.

All of the student participants are enrolled in the EFL Language course, which meets twice a week. During each 90-minute session, students spend 45 minutes learning, practicing, and discussing written English examples and essays.

* Instruments

To explore the effectiveness of the writing workshop, a mixed-method approach was used: questionnaires, interviews with the instructors, a pre- and post-test, and a writing rubric.

Questionnaire: The researcher used an adapted questionnaire (Appendix A); the learners answered the questions on this questionnaire after attending the workshop. This questionnaire is adapted from English Language Teaching Vol. 5, March 2012. It

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consists of 7 items and is written in English. It is scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, to Strongly Disagree.

Interview: The researcher also conducted a Zoom meeting interview with the teachers, which took place after the workshop. It consists of 11 questions about writing workshops and asks teachers for their opinions on the workshop's effectiveness.

Pre-Test and Post-Test: Writing an argumentative essay about technology.

Writing Rubric: It combines grading standards for assignments. Norms for evaluation, definitions suitable for a certain degree of achievement, and a scoring method are typically included. Additionally, rubrics are displayed in table format, which teachers use to mark students' assignments.

2- The procedure: The investigation was conducted at the Houmeen public school during the second semester of the 2022–2023 school year. To assess their progress, the students took a pre-test prior to the writing workshop and a post-test following the workshop. The teachers were interviewed via Zoom meetings.

3- The Intervention Phases: The English language teachers who led the writing workshop had specialized certificates in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and BA degrees in education and literature. They had taught these classes for at least six years, but they had never used the writing workshop method. They therefore required basic preparation, which was accomplished through three 50-minute classes.

At that point, the teachers and the specialists collaborated to create writing sessions that aligned with the goals of the school's writing curriculum and the writing workshop approach. The educators were initially identified by a member of the research group during three sporadic workshop meetings. Each observation was reviewed by the observer and educators after it had taken place. Throughout the week, the consulting researcher also had frequent meetings with the instructors to discuss how each workshop session was organized and run.

* Results

The result provided crucial information about writing instruction and the value of computerized graphic organizers. It has been demonstrated that graphic organizers are effective tools for enhancing students' writing and highlighting issues they have encountered. Perceptions among teachers demonstrated their significance and

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the outcomes of their students. They had faith in their ability to use technology to inspire students and foster creativity. They did not, however, assert that students write differently than is expected of them. As a result, educators must change the way they teach. Following an analysis of the pre-test and post-test data as well as the two teachers' interviews, the research findings have been described. Additionally, the results of the current study were discussed. To determine the mean score and standard deviation, the pre-test and post-test results are first examined. To find out if students write better argumentative essays after using the Computer-Based Graphic Organizer in the post-test, the sum of their pre-test and post-test scores are displayed.

1- The Result of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores: The section presents the analysis of the questionnaire and interviews, as well as the pre- and post-test scores of two different students. Subsequently, the pre- and post-tests are analyzed based on the writing rubrics proposed for this study.

* Paired Sample t-test for both Grades 7 and 8

Writing achievement	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	P-Value	Decision
Before workshop	25	16.80	3.719	0.000	Significant
After workshop	25	23.16	3.400		

The t-test results indicate a significant difference in writing skills scores before and after the workshops, with a P-value of 0.000. The experimental group's mean score increased from 16.80 to 23.16. Thus, the workshops effectively enhanced the writing proficiency of EFL Grade 7 and 8 students.

2- Teachers' Perception Interview Analysis: The district implemented Writer's Workshop to enhance effective learning strategies, with Teacher A managing the workshop and Teacher B providing technical support. Both teachers noted positive student outcomes, including improved scores and favorable reactions from parents. They emphasized the importance of allowing students ample writing time and personalized assessments for success. Deterrents included prescriptive advice and neglecting student feedback. The collaboration between instructors and students was crucial for achieving ideal results. Significant score improvements were observed post-workshop. Both teachers hope for continued student growth and self-ownership in writing,

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highlighting the workshop's focus on individualized support.

Teacher A supervised the workshop, while Teacher B focused on instructing, emphasizing the importance of providing ample writing time. This individualized approach aimed to foster ownership of writing through expert guidance and peer collaboration. Teachers observed that improved learning strategies and effective management encouraged the implementation of these workshops, which contributed to better essay writing scores.

To enhance workshop outcomes, Teacher A recommended maximizing writing time and individual assessments, while Teacher B suggested streamlining the framework for serious writing development. Both emphasized feedback and self-assessment as crucial for improving writing skills.

Results showed that students became more competitive and skilled, with post-participation score improvements of 1.78 and 1.43 for the Grade 7 and Grade 8 groups, respectively. These findings align with socio-constructivism, highlighting that supportive environments and collaboration enhance students' writing skills.

3- Figures and Tables: The questionnaire included items assessing all the above relations and variables, consisting of eight questions. The structured questionnaire, based on a random sampling technique, was collected from 25 male and female students of the Lebanese Public School writing program workshop. The selected students were from Grades 7 and 8. A total of eight (8) questionnaire items were employed based on the Likert scale, such as 1 = Strongly Agree to 5 = Strongly Disagree. The following figures demonstrate the responses of students according to the scale.

1- Question 1. I gained the skill of expressing my ideas in a correct sequence

After the workshop intervention, just 28% of participants were unsure of whether the workshop had improved their ability to convey their views correctly, and 72% believed that they had.

Test	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Neutral	7	28.0%
Agree	6	24.0%
Strongly Agree	12	48.0%
Total	25	100.0%

2- Question 2. I had to look up new vocabulary to express myself effectively

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After the workshop intervention, about 92% of respondents claimed they did feel the need to search for new vocabulary to express themselves correctly, and 8% could not tell whether the intervention helped.

Test	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Neutral	2	8.0%
Agree	5	20.0%
Strongly Agree	18	72.0%
Total	25	100.0%

3- Question 3. I am concerned about my grammar equally with organizing my writing

76% of students still expressed worries about their grammar and writing organization after the workshop intervention, 16% were unsure, and 8% disagreed.

4- Question 4. I did editing to my essay on my own

48% of students modified their essays independently, 20% were unsure, and 12% disagreed.

5- Question 5. I could write quickly and effectively in English

76% of students responded that they could write fast and effectively, 12% disagreed, and 12% were unsure.

6- Question 6. I liked the workshop held for improving my writing skill

68% of respondents claimed improvement, 12% disagreed, and 20% were unsure.

7- Question 7. I could punctuate my own essay effectively

80% agreed they could punctuate well, 12% were unsure, and 8% disagreed.

8- Question 8. I could identify the basic types

80% said they could recognize basic categories, 12% could not, and 8% were unsure.

4- Discussion and Findings: The present study provided a clear explanation of using writing workshops to improve writing. The literature supports the use of workshops as a qualitative research method in education. After the workshop, most students expressed their ideas well, but they faced challenges with grammar and punctuation. They could identify sentence types but struggled with self-editing and writing essays quickly in English. Despite these challenges, students generally enjoyed the workshop experience.

The results indicated that students could not understand the question properly due to not being able to write the essay quickly; moreover, they were not self-regulators. Saddhono, Hasanudin, & Fitrianingsih (2019) stated that

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creative thinking is very important in solving the problems in the questions assigned by the instructors. Metacognitive skills are required to develop problem-solving strategies in various contexts to become self-regulating learners. Therefore, EFL teachers should apply strategies to help students understand essay questions properly.

Nejmaoui (2019) emphasized critical thinking and suggested balancing language and critical thinking to develop students' abilities. Teachers can incorporate this through Socratic questioning, self-assessment, argument mapping, and multi-drafting. The integration of writing and critical thinking allows L2 instructors to improve teaching materials and syllabus design.

Students were not able to assess their essays independently. Innovative approaches, such as the SSCS model (Search, Solve, Create, Share) via Schoology, enhance problem-solving, creativity, and feedback provision. Students can interact effectively anytime and receive timely guidance (Saddhono, Hasanudin, & Fitrianingsih, 2019).

Findings revealed difficulties in structuring and organizing essays. Group work, extensive reading, and mobile applications can improve overall accuracy, word choice, and sentence structure, as well as provide dynamic assessment and feedback (Azizi et al., 2020; Rad, 2021). Villavicencio & Argudo (2021) highlighted the importance of giving direct feedback and revising errors to improve writing skills.

* Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be said that graphic organizers are useful tools for helping students improve their writing skills. In conclusion, students can practice controlling the flow of their writing ideas by using graphic organizers. Social communities can be created through the use of graphic organizers. Many students work together to construct the organizers for their writing. The students support one another in creating their own graphic organizers in an attempt to ease the transition from idea generation to written expression. This deliberate action aims to comprehend the entire writing process. The idea that graphic organizers can create a social community for improved environmental conditions is similar to what Khalaji (2016) says. In conclusion, using graphic organizers is a great way to generate ideas for written assignments, which can help students produce better written work. Using graphic organizers in their work helps students write better in

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terms of discourser, sentence complexity, and sentence combination.

* Recommendations for Future Research

The researcher's purpose was to examine the impact of writing workshops on enhancing students' writing skills in argumentative essays, several recommendations emerge from the study's findings. A key issue is that students often struggle to understand essay questions and lack self-regulation. EFL teachers should promote creative and metacognitive thinking to help students tackle writing assignments effectively. Emphasizing critical thinking alongside language skills can improve cognitive abilities. Techniques such as Socratic questioning and self-assessment should be incorporated into teaching methods.

Additionally, many students do not assess their essays independently. Utilizing the SSCS model (Search, Solve, Create, Share) through learning management systems like Schoology can improve problem-solving skills and facilitate better interactions between students and teachers. Group work and extensive reading activities can also enhance students' writing structure and organization.

* Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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