

Improving Essay Writing through ICT and Task- Based Approach: A Strategy That Works- The case of 2nd Year EFL students at Jijel University in Algeria

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Abstract:

In their learning process, EFL learners try very hard to acquire the necessary language skills so as to be able to communicate effectively in the target language. Being amongst EFL cornerstones of the English language, writing helps EFL students with the opportunity to communicate their ideas on papers. As far as Algerian EFL students are concerned, they suffer in their writing process- essay writing in particular, and they, most of the times, fail in their writing performances because of some crucial factors. The present paper analyzes the different factors which affect Algerian EFL learners in their essay writing process. Also, it proposes a helpful strategy for improving essay writing through the integration of ICT means and Task- Based Approach. The aforementioned strategy was conducted as an action research with second year EFL students at the English department of

Jijel University during the second semester of 2013- 2014 academic year. The results showed an improvement in students' writing skills after conducting the said strategy.

Key words: Essay writing, EFL learners, ICT Tools, Task- Based Learning Approach.

الملخص :

يحاول طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية جاهدين أثناء عملية تعلمهم لها اكتساب المهارات اللغوية اللازمة للتواصل الفعال كتابة وحديثا ، وباعتبار المهارات الكتابية من بين أهم المهارات و الأعمدة التي تركز عليها اللغة ، لكونها تساعد الطلاب في التواصل بأفكارهم عن طريق المقالات ، فإن الطلبة الجزائريين الدارسون للغة الإنجليزية يعانون في أداءهم الكتابي- كتابة المقالات الدراسية . معاناة واضحة ، ويفشلون فشلا كبيرا في هذا الجانب بسبب بعض العوامل المؤثرة الذاتية والموضوعية .

يتناول المقال عن طريق التحليل مختلف العوامل التي تؤثر بالسلب على أداء متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية أثناء كتابة المقالات العلمية ، و تقترح استراتيجية مفيدة لتحسين الكتابة عن طريق استخدام "طريقة المهام" و " وسائل تكنولوجيا المعلومات" معا. بعد أن تم العمل بها مع طلاب السنة الثانية في قسم اللغة الإنكليزية بجامعة جيجل خلال النصف

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الثاني من العام الدراسي 2013 – 2014 ، و أظهرت نتائجها تحسنا في
أداء الطلاب في كتابة المقالات الدراسية.

Introduction:

Learning a language is primarily the most important pillar in the learning process. In order to achieve a complete competence in foreign language learning, EFL students have to acquire the four basic skills; namely, speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Since it is a productive skill, writing is one of the pillars and basic skills of English language that involves the ability to communicate ideas clearly and use grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation correctly (Zhang and Chen, 1989, p. 34).

According to Bello (1997), writing has an important role that promotes language acquisition; for learners use words, sentences, and other elements of both language and writing in order to communicate their ideas clearly and effectively, and to master the grammar rules and vocabulary they learn in class (p. 7).

Also, Elbow (1973) believed that writing is an important skill to master in EFL learning. It is not seen as a means communication where students express themselves, but also a pre- requisite step which leads to the mastery of other parts of language (p. 26).

Generally, the purpose of teaching writing is to help EFL students in their learning, career, and their daily communication. Writing is seen as a psychological need because it provides learners with such

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opportunities so as to make progress in their learning process (Takroui, 2002). Within this context, Elbow (1973) believed that “Man has primitive needs to write. ... Children want to write, in fact need to write, before they want to read”. Also, writing makes language learning more effective and authentic through a variety of activities both inside / and outside classroom (p. 28). Among the most important aspects that writing has is that it makes students more relaxed and confident with new language acquired; for it allows them to work at their pace. Besides, it helps them to make changes and revision so as to perform on the spot that is associated, for instance, with speaking (Mahmoud, 2000, p. 13).

Writing has two important roles in schools; first, it is considered as a skill which requires the mastery of basic sub- skills and processes; such as, handwriting, spelling, rich vocabulary, mastery of the conventions of punctuation, capitalization, word usage, grammar, and the use of strategies; planning, evaluating, revising, and editing texts. All these criteria are necessary for the production of coherently organized essays which contain well developed and pertinent ideas, supporting examples, and appropriate details. Second, writing is a means by which students extend and deepen their knowledge; it is a tool for learning subject matter (Graham & Perin, 2007, p. 15).

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Since writing is important in EFL, French and Rhoder (1992) stated that writing is regarded as the main area in the curriculum that is associated with creativity; for through writing, EFL students are asked to perform most of the tasks. Therefore, in many world academic institutions, academic writing programs, which are compulsory for students, offer introductory and advanced classes in rhetoric and composition (p. 238). Academic writing is that type writing which is done by scholars (students or academics) for other scholars to read. It can take many forms: journal articles, textbooks, dissertations, group project reports, etc. Although students are increasingly being asked to write different types of academic texts, the essay remains the most popular type of assignment.

The style of writing EFL students are expected to use should be purely academic. It is part of their academic learning process to learn how to write in the more formal style. It demonstrates discipline and thoughtfulness, and is important to communicate ideas clearly. So, improving EFL learners' essay writing is considered amongst the most important skills which EFL learners need to develop throughout their study periods.

Hence, there were many approaches and strategies that were used and implemented in teaching the basic skills of English language; such

as writing. The most noticeable strategy is Task- Based Approach, which mostly calls attention to the cognitive processes entailed by tasks.

The present study addresses to the following questions:

- What are the real factors that contribute to students' failure in their essay writing?
- How can both ICT and Task- Based Approach be used effectively in EFL classes to improve students' essay writing?
- What is the influence of Task- Based Approach on EFL students' class performance?
- To what extent are students satisfied with pre-task lessons and with task activities?

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the possible effects of using Task- Based Approach together with ICT in teaching essay writing to EFL students the University of Mohammed Seddik Benyahia in Jijel, Algeria.

1. The Role of ICTs in EFL:

Obviously, when using ICTs support is brought to both EFL teaching and learning in many ways. Firstly, the teaching materials can be easily adapted to the learner's needs and responses. Secondly, ICT offers full access to the various authentic materials. Lastly, and most importantly, they combine basic skills (text and images, audio and video clip...etc).

Also, when using ICT, lectures become more interesting in the fact that they boost learners' engagement. Besides, ICT enables learners to focus on one specific aspect of the lesson (pronunciation, vocabulary, etc...) (Fitzpatrick and Davies, 2003).

According to O'Brien and Hegelheimer (2007), integrating ICT tools into foreign EFL teaching and learning brings the following advantages:

 **Ability to control presentation:** ICTs combine visual with listening materials, text with graphics and pictures;

 **Novelty and creativity:** A teacher can use various materials for each lecture; whereas teaching with textbooks;

 **Feedback:** Computers provide students with corrective feedback through error correction;

 **Adaptability:** Computer software can be used by teachers to suit their students' needs and language knowledge. Unlike books, which are produced in a single format and need to be taught irrespectively of students' problems, computers' software are more learner- friendly (p. 165);

 **Using the target language:** ICT provides EFL learners with the opportunity to use the language in meaningful ways and authentic contexts.

 **Cooperation and Collaboration:** ICT offer opportunities for cooperation and collaboration between EFL students.

 **Using effective tools for tutoring:** A third major benefit of the use of ICT is the opportunity that ICT tools give to language teachers so that they can tutor their learners more effectively. So, with the help of ICT tools and the constantly growing number of available educational resources, EFL teachers are able to give individual and personalized guidance to the learners (Schwienhorst, p. 28).

2. Task- Based Approach and EFL Learning:

For decades, the various traditional methods of EFL teaching have relied on grammar texts as basic tools for organizing a syllabus. However, with the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), teaching methodologies have changed. In EFL learning, the development of communicative skills is ranked as a priority and placed at the forefront. This, in fact, has raised various questions on how to organize a syllabus. Some proponents (Breen 1987; Long 1985; Nunan 1989; Prabhu 1987) suggest using tasks as central units that form the basis of daily and long- term lesson plans. This approach to syllabus design is commonly known as Task-Based Approach.

The employment of communicative tasks is based on different theories of language learning and acquisition which state that language use is the driving force for language development (Long 1989; Prabhu 1987).

Norris et al. (1998), as advocates of such theories, suggested that:

The best way to learn and teach a language is through social interactions. [...] they allow students to work toward a clear goal, share information and opinions, negotiate meaning, get the interlocutor's help in comprehending input, and receive feedback on their language production. In the process, learners not only use their interlanguage, but also modify it, which in turn promotes acquisition" (p. 31).

In other words, it is not the text that one reads, or the grammar one studies, but the tasks that are presented provide learners a purpose to use the grammar in a meaningful context. This gives task design and its use a pivotal role in shaping the language learning process.

3. Definition of Task- Based Approach:

If EFL learners engage in real context in which they use the language both inside and outside classrooms, they will learn English

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language effectively. To do so, they should rely on class discussions, games, activities, and designed tasks. Through these activities, EFL learners practice English language by themselves and they are accordingly evaluated by their peers and their teachers (Willis & Willis, as cited in Martin East, 2012, p. 105).

In global context, Task- Based Approach to language teaching has become a dominant approach to language teaching. The idea of making EFL learners acquire English through Task-Based strategies was developed in India by Prabhu in the 1980s. His approach emerged as a reaction to the traditional form of English as a foreign language used and the type of communicative language teaching which was practiced in India (Jean & Hahn, 2004; Waguey &, Hufanam, 2013). Prabhu's project, in India, is mostly calling attention to the cognitive processes entailed by tasks (Prabhu, 1987, p.9).

Various definitions of tasks exist, and many of them focus on different aspects of what constitutes a task. Among the most widely quoted definitions for "task" is provided by Long (1985) who referred to the term as:

A piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus examples of tasks include [. . .] filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, making an airline

reservation, borrowing a library book, taking a driving test, typing a letter, [. . .], making a hotel reservation, writing a check, finding a street destination and helping someone across the road. In other words, by “task” is meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between (p. 89).

Another well- known definition was provided by Nunan (1989) who considered a task as:

Any classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form (p. 10).

Skehan (1998) summarized the parameters for a task activity as follows: “(a) meaning is primary, (b) learners are not given other people’s meanings to regurgitate, (c) there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities, (d) task completion has a priority, and (e), the assessment of tasks is done in terms of outcome” (p. 147).

In contrast, Candlin's (1987) emphasized on the learners' learning preferences and his social and problem- solving orientation which leads him to the notion of a task which is: "one of a set of differentiated,

sequenceable, problem-posing activities involving learners and teachers in some joint selection from a range of varied cognitive and communicative procedures applied to existing and new knowledge in the collective exploration and pursuance of foreseen or emergent goals within a social milieu" (p. 10).

Candlin (1987); however, offers pedagogic criteria for judging the quality of what he called "good" language learning tasks. She claimed that good tasks should:

-  Provide attention to meaning, purpose, negotiation;
-  Draw objectives from the learners' communicative needs;
-  Involve language use in solving the task;
-  Allow for co- evaluation by learner and teacher of the task's performance;
-  Promote a critical awareness about data and the processes of language learning (pp. 9- 10).

According to Nunan (1989), Task-Based Approach is a way of which teaching syllabi are designed; they should consist of different communicative tasks, so that learners can interact in the target language. Based on Nunan's notion, task- based teaching has pedagogically strengthened the following principles and practices:

-  A needs-based approach to content selection;

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 An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language;

 The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation;

 The provision of opportunities for learners to focus not only on language but also on the learning process itself;

 An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning;

 The linking of classroom language learning with language use outside the classroom (p.10).

Ellis (2003), in his attempted to define the term, created a set of essential criteria for language learning tasks. These are as follows:

 Being a working plan;

 Focusing on meaning;

 Using a real-world processes for language;

 Focusing on the four language skills;

 Engaging in cognitive processes;

 Having a clearly defined communicative outcome. (pp. 9–10)

All these definitions emphasize on the real-world, or target tasks. In fact, these are hundreds of things we do, using language, in everyday life: from writing a poem, to confirming an airline reservation, to

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exchanging personal information with a new acquaintance. This criterion supports the notion that conveying a meaning is the essence of language use. In order to create learning opportunities in the classroom, we must transform these real-world tasks into pedagogical tasks; for the students' motivation rises through assigned tasks.

So, using tasks in teaching is a popular method, and the implications of using these tasks in a classroom context are observable. Taking into account the positive results that the use of tasks may bring about in the EFL classroom, it can be said that using a variety of tasks in class gives positive results.

Although there are divergent views among the advocates of task-based language teaching in relation to the core principles of Task-Based Approach, Swan (2005) emphasized that there is a general agreement among them on the characteristics listed below:

 Instructed language learning should mainly contain natural or naturalistic language use, and the activities are related to meaning rather than language;

 Instruction should support learner-centeredness rather than teacher-centeredness;

 Because it is totally naturalistic, learning does not normally give rise to target-like accuracy, engagement is essential to

promote the internalization of formal linguistic elements while keeping the perceived benefits of a natural approach;

☞ This can be realized best by offering opportunities for focus on the form, which will attract students' attention to linguistic components as they emerge incidentally in lessons whose main focus is on meaning or communication;

☞ Communicative tasks are especially suitable devices for such an approach;

☞ More formal pre- or post-task language study may be beneficial. This may make contribution to internalization by leading or maximizing familiarity with formal characteristics during communication;

☞ Traditional approaches are unproductive and unsuitable, particularly where they require passive formal instruction and practice isolated from communicative work. (pp. 398- 9)

4. The Role of Task- Based Approach in EFL:

Task-based approach is a teaching approach that employs tasks as its main pedagogical tools to structure language teaching. Its proponents put forward the idea that task-based approach is the clear enhancement of linguistic competence. They admit that activities for real communication are prominent in language learning. Besides, they

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stressed that utilizing language to perform meaningful tasks can enhance language learning. Also, they emphasized that the language, which is meaningful to learners, can pave the way for the learning process (Willis, 1996, p. 58).

Task-based approach is a powerful and advancing learning method. It promotes learning language knowledge and training skills in the process of performing tasks. Teachers are both instructors and guides. Similarly, learners are both receivers and main agents. It is via Task-Based activities that learners will master how to make full use of their own communicative abilities to shift from L1 to the target language. It presents an opportunity for them to learn cooperatively and activates their abilities to employ and deal with the target language in a professional way (Lin, 2009).

Larsen-Freeman (2000) stated that:

Since language learners make an effort to perform a task, they have rich opportunity to interact with their peers. It is this interaction that is assumed to ease language acquisition in that learners are to try to comprehend each other and to present their own meaning. As a language teacher who teaches English as a foreign language to Turkish EFL learners, I

employ task-based approach to provide learners with a natural context for language use, present a fruitful input of target language for learners, increase their ability to communicate effectively, and to maximize their motivation to the lesson. (pp. 153- 4)

Teaching Writing in Algerian Context:

In the academic year 2004-2005, Algeria has agreed to the rules and principles of the Bologna Process by adopting the L. M. D. principles (License, Master, and Doctorat). The philosophy of teaching under the new architecture stipulated that more space is given to the learners' output and mobility. Continuous education and training became a tremendous imperative for all successful learning using Information and Communication Technology. As far as the English section is concerned, the L. M. D. system began to be first implemented in the academic year 2007- 2008; the year when the English department was officially opened.

The English language teaching tradition has been subject to great changes throughout the twentieth century and so far. In Algeria, the ministry of higher education seeks to improve the teaching/learning of English as a foreign language through L. M. D. system. Accordingly, a new architecture has been designed for the teaching process of English

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which has taken into account reorganizing the subjects taught into units, and also introduced some new subjects. To achieve the objectives, the decision-makers, the syllabus designers, and EFL teachers have divided the subjects of English language teaching into the following:

Table 1: English “Licence” curriculum modules within the L. M. D. system (Bouabdallah, 2012, pp. 86- 7).

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Year	Module	Teaching time per week
First	Grammar	6hs
	Writing	3hs
	Oral production	3hs
	Discourse comprehension	3hs
	Phonetics	3hs
	Linguistics	1h30
	Information and communication technologies (ICT)	1h30
	Research Methodology	1h30
	Literary studies	1h30
Second	General Culture	1h30
	Grammar	6hs
	Writing	3hs
	Oral production	3hs
	Discourse comprehension	3hs
	Phonetics	3hs
	Linguistics	1h30
	Anglo- American civilization	1h30
	Information and communication technologies (ICT)	1h30
Third Language studies	Research Methodology	1h30
	Linguistics theories	3hs
	Phonology	3hs
	Academic writing	3hs
	Psycho-pedagogy	3hs
	Socio-linguistics	3hs
	Language didactics	3hs
	Research methodology	3hs
	Project work /TPR (teaching practice).	3hs
Third literature & civilization	Literature theories	3hs
	Comparative literature	3hs
	Academic writing	3hs
	American civilization	3hs
	American literature	3hs
	British civilization	3hs
	British Literature	3hs
	Research Methodology	3hs

Despite the fact that the new architecture of English studies within the L. M. D. framework is designed to boost Algerian EFL learners in their learning and help improve the teaching process, Algerian English students still lack foreign language competence. This is due to (1) lack of adequate responsive educational/ or pedagogical programmes that have been suggested before. The ‘Licence’ degree curriculum dates back to the 1980s and no substantial changes have been brought about, and (2) teachers lack qualified ELT professionalism despite new ELT methodologies and approaches. The teaching is often done hastily with no suitable teaching material or adequately trained instructors (Bouhadiba as cited in Bouabdallah, 2012, p. 88).

5. Factors influencing Algerian EFL Learners in Essay Writing:

In the English departments of the in Algerian universities, English is used as a medium of instruction for all subjects. Many new students to university arrive with serious frustrations and deficiencies in English. In spite of their seven years or more of pre-university English learning, they appear to have difficulties in both oral and written skills (Bouabdallah, 2012, p. 92).

As far as writing is concerned, it is attributed the fourth position in foreign language teaching/ learning. Writing, as a skill, has been

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neglected for many years, mainly after the adoption of the communicative approach to language teaching, which claimed the supremacy of the spoken word over the written one. A renewed concern to writing emerged due to examination requirements and the necessity of being able to read and write in English (Bouhadiba as cited in Bouabdallah, 2012, p. 92).

Since writing is the most complex and difficult skill, it requires a lot of practice and training to master. Difficulties in producing good pieces of writing can be related different factors: learners' education, self-confidence, and demotivation to write. Harmer (2007) argued that the most notable difficulty in writing lies not only in generating and organizing ideas, but also in translating them into readable text (p. 18).

In EFL class, teachers usually report students' inability to construct appropriate and good pieces of writing. Also, when EFL students practice writing- whether in class or in exams, they seem to be unaware of the basics of writing; such as, the conventions and mechanics of writing, grammar, and vocabulary. As a result, their compositions are just a list of ideas which lack cohesion and coherence.

Accordingly, I have also noticed, during my teaching sessions and my intervention with teachers and students, that there are other problems/ or obstacles that share in students' failure to practice essay

writing correctly and produce appropriate and good pieces of their writing. These can be cited as follows:

5.1. Teachers as a Source of Demotivation:

In the light of students' preferences, learners often prefer to study with certain teachers rather than others; for they learn and understand quickly with some, while they get bored with others. As a matter of fact, no teacher teaches in the same way under the same conditions. .i.e. each teacher has his own methodology. However, teachers can be a source of demotivation if they:

-  Do not enhance learning;
-  Do not incite learners to write confidently;
-  Do not encourage them to write inside/ and outside classrooms;
-  Do not use appropriate methodology in teaching writing;

Accordingly, the teachers' main task is to motivate the students. EFL students are found in dilemma, especially they lose words, when dealing with creative writing, and it here where the teachers should intervene effectively to help the students to have ideas and enhance them with the value of the task. In addition to provoking, and enhancing EFL students, the teachers' role is also of supportive manner,

which is of helping students to overcome difficulties when they engage in writing (Harmer, 2007, pp. 41- 2).

5.2. Lack of Teacher's Corrective Feedback and Reinforcement:

When teachers intervene by motivating, supporting, suggesting reacting, responding, correcting, advising and students, they are, in fact, providing feedback so as to reinforce EFL students to improve their writing skills.

As far as writing is concerned, feedback can be in the form of correcting mistakes of students' writing compositions on syntax, grammar, content, and mechanics. So, when teachers intervene with their students' writing, they help students to edit and produce a new and more appropriate draft. Accordingly, the teacher's main task is not to judge what is wrong and right, but to put into questions, suggest modifications, and indicate where the student should improve his writing, either in the content, or in the way of expression. So, feedback in this way helps to improve the students' level.

As a matter of fact, our EFL students practice writing only in exams to get good grades, and not for the purpose of appreciating the writing process. Accordingly, they believe that writing is only useful to bring good grades. However, it is worth to mention that in addition to giving

marks, teachers should write comments at the end of a piece of writing which will reinforce them to work hard to reach a certain level in writing. i. e. teachers should use comments which praise, motivate, and encourage their students. Otherwise, students will despise writing because of the frustration they feel when they see only negative marks. Also, teachers, sometimes, cannot write comments, even short ones, especially when teaching in large- size classes. In this context, teachers can neither teach the writing skill perfectly, nor evaluate their students. So, teachers should be aware of the fact that their students understand their problems committed in writing and then rewrite their pieces of writing again correctly since it is the main aim of that correction (Harmer, p. 84).

5.3. Lack of Motivation on EFL Students' to Write:

The ability to write well is not a naturally acquired; it is usually learned through practice and experience. This means taking time over writing and doing a lot of reading are absolutely essential part so as to improve writing. In fact, learners fail to appreciate the writing skill. It is commonly believed that motivation is an essential factor to which leads to success and achievement in the learning process.

Accordingly, Harmer (2006) pointed out this element when stated that:

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People involved in language teaching often say that students who really want to learn will succeed whatever circumstances in which they study. They succeed despite using methods which experts consider unsatisfactory. In the phase of such a phenomenon, it seems reasonable to suggest that the motivation that students bring to class is the biggest simple factor affecting their success. (as cited in Ghodbane, p. 76)

Thus, motivation is a strong factor which is associated with achievement, and, accordingly, learners' motivation makes the process easier and pleasant. In other words, motivation makes writing pleasant and enjoyable. According to Boscolo and Hidi (2008), EFL teachers always inquire about two facts: students' demotivation to write, and how to increase their motivation to write (p. 7).

In this context, Harmer (2006) believed that there are many hidden factors which demotivate students improve their writing. Amongst these factors, the fear of failure: being afraid of not achieving one's goals or value in the context of competence or efficacy. Our EFL students are afraid of making serious mistakes. So, they become haunted by failure (as cited in Ghodbane, p. 77).

Our EFL students also suffer from anxiety which is related to fear of failure. It causes negative attitudes and hinders students from doing their best. In addition, it causes self-doubt and hesitation which makes students less confident about their writing level. According to Harmer (2006), writing anxieties are very dangerous since they cause negative attitudes on students towards their writing. Furthermore, he believed that students are afraid of writing because of: (1) the lack of practice, (2) having nothing to say in English, and (3) students are not interested in the writing activity. So, without teachers' help and feedback, the students can never develop self- confidence and build the "writing habit" (as cited in Ghodbane, p. 78). Hence, the main role of a teacher is to enhance and encourage his students to write by making writing more enjoyable. In fact, the teacher should be selective in choosing or exposing the students to attractive topics and determines the objective of writing such topics (Dornyei, as cited in Ghodbane, p. 78).

All in all, students view writing as a risky adventure. Learners' phobia grows from the fear of being harshly corrected; they fall into the trap of pleasing their teachers and satisfying themselves and their mates. They are unable, to confront the fear in order to learn and improve their writing level and ameliorate their low achievements (Boscolo and Hidi, 2008, p. 9).

5.4. Mother Tongue Interference on English Writing:

In addition to the lack of both reading and interest in writing, students face another obstacle that hinders their writing abilities. The majority of the students claim that when composing their writing in English, they usually think in Arabic. Many studies have concerned with this problem. EFL teachers emphasize the need for EFL students to a linguistic competence: to think and write as far as possible in English. Friedlander (1997) reported, “writers do any of their work in their first language” (as cited in Ghodbane, p. 82). This practice of writing will inhibit the acquisition of English due to transfer of structures and vocabulary from first language in an incorrect way. In our case, few of EFL students write in Arabic and then practice translating into English what they have written. This, for sure, can be a motivating activity towards the acquisition on English competence.

In contrast, many other studies indicate that it is not necessary to be good writers in L1 to be so in L2, or third language writing. Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll, & Kuehan, (1990) concluded that “the acquisition of L2 literacy skills by adults already literate in their first language is a complex phenomenon involving multiple variables” (as cited in Ghodbane, pp. 82- 3).

So, the writing conventions differ from one language to another. In anyway, not any person is a naturally gifted writer. Writing is a skill that can be learned, practiced, and mastered. Writing remains the most difficult skill to be mastered even for native speakers (as cited in Ghodbane, p. 83).

In conclusion, the factors behind students' poor writing achievements are endless. However, the focus was on the major ones. Our EFL students are not interested in reading, which is the most appropriate means for improving their writing skills. They are not motivated to write, and even if they are engaged in writing, their purpose is just to get good grades. They also suffer from mother tongue interference; they usually think in L1 and write in L2. So, along with these factors, is there any possibility to improve students' skills in essay writing? If it is done so, how? These questions pushed me, as a researcher, to intervene and put into practice my objective, which was already mentioned, of improving essay writing skills through the use of both ICTs and, basically, Task- Based Approach with 2nd year EFL students.

6. Methodology:

This action research was conducted at the English department in Jijel University for the purpose of measuring the effectiveness of ICT

together with Task- Based Approach in teaching essay writing to second year EFL students. The study took place during the second semester (February, 10 to May, 15) of the academic year 2013- 2014.

Two groups were the samples used in this study. They were groups five and six. They were carefully chosen because I taught them essay writing from the beginning of the semester and I conducted many sessions in writing- both lecturing and workshops. Also, it was impossible to conduct the study with other EFL students in other groups; for it is not permitted to teach other students who already had a teacher assigned to them. The data were collected through students' assignments and home works and a questionnaire so as to measure both the new strategy and the learning received in the class.

6.1. Procedures:

In conducting this action research, I organized carefully the sessions of both lectures and workshops. In teaching writing to EFL students, each teacher is assigned three sessions per week: one lecture and two sessions of workshops for doing practice. In my case, I used to teach groups five and six together in the screening room which is fully equipped with technological materials; such as, the Internet, data-show, film projector, microphone, and the slaps.

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According to the curriculum that I designed, teaching essay writing was basically about how write the different types of essays: process essay, cause- effect essay, comparison- and contrast essay, classification essay, narrative essay, descriptive essay, argumentative essay, and the historical essay. When lecturing about types of essays in the screening room, I presented my lecture in a power point format.

I explained every point related to the lecture that I prepared for one hour and fifteen minutes. During the lecture, I also used to make use of some YouTube tutorial videos, which are related to the topic of the lecture, that I downloaded in case the students wanted further information. Then, I gave the students ten minutes for asking questions in case they did not understand an element in the lecture.

The last minutes left were the time for giving tasks to students. The tasks were mainly home works to write essays, which are related to the type they had just studied with me, about the topics that I used to assign. Accordingly, in order to know what the topic was about, the assigned students had to see attentively the video I made to identify what topic to write about. The videos were of YouTube source and included particular topics. The students had only one day to prepare and present their work in class.

After three months of conducting this action research, I designed questionnaire for both groups. It was mainly about the writing process, essay writing skills, the factors that hinder them in their writing exams, and the strategy that I introduced and worked with.

6.2. Results & Discussion:

6.2.1. Class observation:

After lecturing and assigning home works to students, it is time meet in class for the workshop so as listen to students' presentations. The assigned students had written their essays about the topics I already assigned. They also made copies for their classmates so as to follow them when they read their essays in front of them. When their presentation was over, time now is left for evaluating, criticizing, and assessing students' work.

From the first session, I asked the students to fully evaluate each work, since they had copies in front of them. In the first session, most of the students did not intervene maybe they had never dealt with this strategy, or fearing that if they criticized they would be harshly criticized in their turn. So, I was to lead the discussion in class. I evaluated the students' work in both form and contents.

To deal with the essay's form, I used to read loudly each part of the essay: introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and the concluding

paragraph. Then, I commented on students' writings by indicating the mistakes and errors, and correcting them on the blackboard: It was rewriting each part of the essays correctly on the blackboard and in front of them.

The second time there was completely a change. I did not intervene at all. It was the students themselves who had done the work. After the assigned students presented their work, the rest of the class raised their hands to comment, evaluate, criticize, and assess their classmates' presentation. I just opened the floor for them and guided them. Everyone in the class wanted to share in conversation and discussion.

What I have already noticed in this strategy can be summarized as follows:

The Increase of Students' Motivation to Practice Essay Writing:

The students found the strategy highly motivating. The tasks that they were assigned had to do with what they studied with me. Also, ICT tools when they were used in the screening room made the lectures about how to write different types of essays very interesting to them. Besides, when reaching the time of assigning tasks, all the students raised their hands to practice essay writing even before they saw the video about the task. When I asked them why they did so, they

responded that they were eager to research a topic and write an essay about. It was a means for them to practice reading and the research skills of writing: quoting, summarizing, and paraphrasing.

What I had noticed was that some of the students who had already performed and written essays asked for more assignments so as to correct their mistakes they had made in previous presentations. Moreover, students from other groups used to attend when they heard about the strategy I was using with my students and how interesting it was. These students also asked for tasks and assignments to perform in my class.

Giving Corrective Feedback:

The students who were subject to this study participated in correcting, commenting, and evaluating their peers when they made their presentations in class during the workshops. They even used to spot the mistakes and correct them on the blackboard. Not only this, but they used to judge their classmates on the contents they used in their essays. To illustrate, a group of three students presented their comparison- contrast essay on the famous characters of *John Rambo* Vs. *Jack Bauer*. When they finished presenting their essay, immediately a girl student made the first comment which was as follows:

“Sir, one item is neglected in the comparison. Both characters are patriots who lost all their friends and devoted their lives for their countries.” I asked her: “How did you find out this important item?” She answered: “Sir, in the lecture I was watching the video before giving the task and I discovered this item which is important in comparing between both characters.”

As seen above, the learning process became completely learner-centered since the students did everything in the workshop.

The Practice of Reading as a Source of Writing:

All the students who took part in the study confirmed that giving them tasks was the major source for them to practice reading. Since tasks were given, students started to search for information from a variety of sources in the library and the Internet. They copied pages and printed documents they downloaded from the Web and practice reading to fully understand the material before using it.

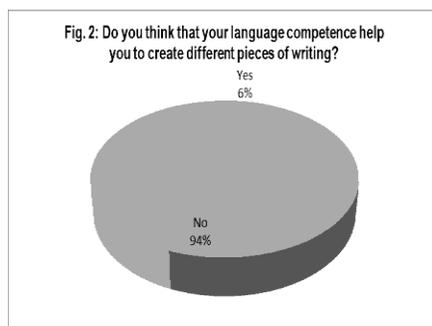
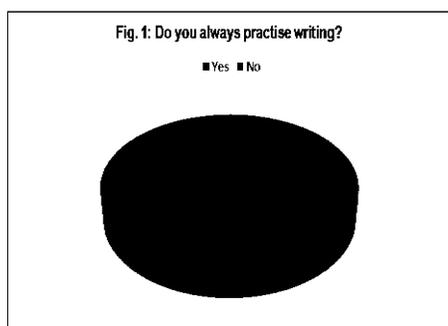
A True Learning Experience:

What I noticed from the workshops during the study that this strategy helped the students learn lot of things about the writing experience. Before they started writing their essays, the students learned that it is very important to outline for their essays if they want to write better academic essays. For this reason, each pair of students

used to write down their essay's outline on the blackboard before they started their presentation.

Moreover, they knew that when writing essays, they are doing some kind of research. So, they had to practice the research skills of summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting. They also used to give importance to their references list at the end of their essays presentations.

6.2.2. Questionnaire results :



The findings in figure 1 indicated that few of EFL students practice writing because they are aware of their needs and the requirements to improve their general language proficiency, since writing is one area of language proficiency. However, they lack guidance and feedback which are necessary for them to improve. Similarly, in this study it is found

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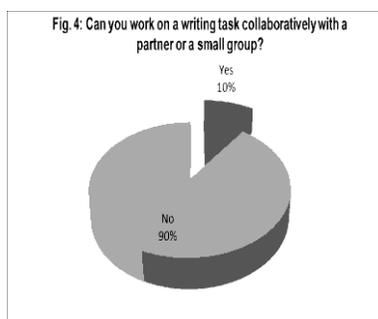
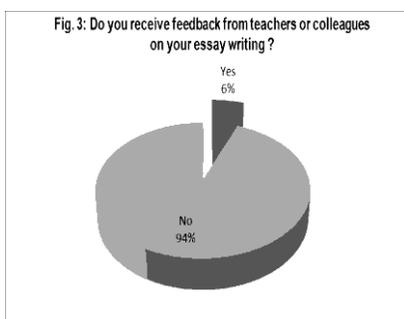
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that 94% of EFL students lack the language competence to create a piece of writing in English language.

Although they were positive about the use of language competence in writing, the students stated that the mother tongue interference does not help them acquire patterns of English words and vocabulary to enhance their writing skills.



Although EFL students agree on the importance of feedback, they unfortunately do not receive corrective feedback- also comments and suggestions, from their teachers. So, the findings in fig. 3, show that only 6% receive feedback, even though not daily, from their teachers.

On the other hand, it can be said that teachers believed that their students' writing are not always clear. They believed that students have problems in proper use of the English language: word format, sentence structure, coherence, and cohesion.

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Accordingly, one factor which leads to students' improvement in essay is absent. Therefore, it can be fairly argued that EFL university level students in Algeria do want, accept, and appreciate teachers' feedback about their written production.

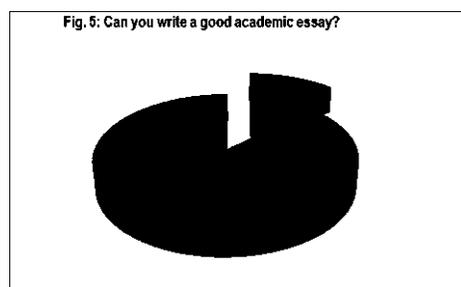


Figure 5 demonstrates another deficient on EFL students. Although the students admitted that their primary objective- when coming to university is to achieve language proficiency in English and to master essay writing skills, only 13 % of the students interviewed believe they can write a good academic essay. This result indicates that there are differences in writing among the students. Also, some students have better means than others to improve language acquisition. The students, too, stated that there are no appropriate methodologies used by the teachers in teaching essay writing.

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Fig. 6: Can you write using an academic style and tone?

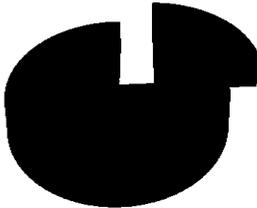


Fig. 7: Can you logically organize your ideas when you write an academic essay?

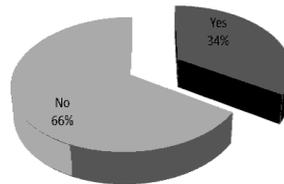


Figure 6 below shows that 76% of the students cannot write in an academic style because they were exposed extensively to academic writing. Also, they did not learn effectively what the rules of academic writing are. In figure 7, 66% of the students believed that they are unable to write logically and organize their ideas in their essay writing. This might be due to the different methodologies used by their teachers earlier in the secondary schools.

Fig. 8: Can you edit your writing to improve the wording, grammar, punctuation, and spelling?

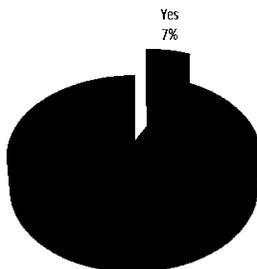
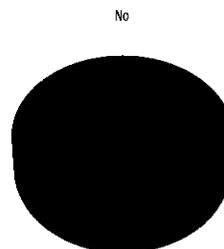


Fig. 9: Did tasks assigned by the teacher help you understand and improve your essay writing ?



According to figure 8, 93% of the students practice proofreading in order to check their writing in syntax, grammar, vocabulary, and cohesion. However, they fail to produce well written productions because of the lack of collaboration and the absence of teachers' feedback. Figure 9 shows how effective the strategy of Task- Based Approach used by the teacher in teaching essay writing. Accordingly, the students knew tasks meant doing research and looking for information that are necessary in essay writing. They also understood that more practice in essay writing leads to improvement.

7. Conclusion:

This study investigated the importance of implementing Task- Based Approach, together with ICT, in teaching essay writing to EFL students at the Jijel University in order to draw both teachers' and students' attention to the importance of using this teaching strategy and authentic tools in their classes. The results showed the students' improvement in their presentations to the writing class.

The findings emphasized that the students had positive attitude toward essay writing skills, since they believe that it is a key element to English language proficiency. One of the most important points emerged from this research is that a number of students expressed that they were not satisfied with their present essay writing skills. They are

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likely to improve better their essay writing skills if they find the appropriate methodologies for teaching essay writing implemented in class while the use of ICT in teaching writing made them pay tremendous attention to this particular skill.

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