



AN INVESTIGATING OF YEMEN EFL LEARNERS' WRITING PROBLEMS

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Abstract

This study attempts to investigate the writing problems encountered by Yemeni EFL learners. The sample of the study comprised 70 undergraduate students from Sana'a University. The data were collected using a questionnaire to identify Yemeni EFL Learners' Writing Problems. The results of the study indicated that students have some crucial problems when writing a paragraph or an essay. The results showed that the participants faced difficulty in planning or outlining the points before writing a paragraph or an essay. Furthermore, they faced difficulties in developing a good topic sentence for a paragraph and a thesis statement for an essay, writing supporting sentences to support the topic sentence, organizing ideas together in a unified and coherent manner, and writing a concluding sentence/concluding paragraph that summarizes the points of a paragraph or an essay. The study proposed some recommendations and suggestions to help Yemeni EFL learners to overcome their writing problems.

Keywords: an essay, a paragraph, EFL, problems, writing

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a combination of signs and symbols (letters of the alphabet, punctuation and spaces) to convey thoughts and ideas in a documented form. Writing is a key language skill to express, share, persuade, convince and document ideas, opinions, thoughts, attitudes and information to communicate with others in a productive way. It lays a concrete document foundation and an excellent beneficiary tool for sustainable future enrichments, developments and improvements by the writer, where feedbacks by interested or concerned people can be easily shared, taken into consideration and incorporated as relevant. Its content may be for learning, personal, official, social, scientific, technical or other purposes. It requires much time and concentration because there are a number of language aspects involved such as model texts, grammar, spell-check, punctuation and prepositions.

Writing activity is a productive skill in the language learning process, and it is closely interconnected with the remaining English skills (listening, reading, speaking, and grammar), as well as acquiring vocabulary. Learners writing proficiency can be continuously developed and improved with continuous practice and simultaneously learning the language features such as sentence construction, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, so forth, and all language skills must be involved. As learners become more proficient in the language skills, they will find themselves confident enough to communicate their ideas and opinions with one another. Indeed, learners find mastering English rules difficult because some language features are different from those of their native language. Thus, they face some difficulties in expressing themselves in a correct and clear comprehensive manner during writing. Lado (1957) states that "those language features that are similar to the learner's native language will be simple for him, and those areas that are different will be difficult" (p.2). Similarly, university students frequently use the same way of thinking and concept from their native language to express their ideas in English as well. They have to learn to think in English while they are writing taking into consideration the knowledge of the rules and grammatical concepts of the target language from oral to written language, in order to avoid making mistakes.

According to Brown (2000) “an error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker” (p.76). Usually students make errors due to their insufficient knowledge and ability of the rules of the target language. Selinker (1972) points out that making a mistake is a natural part of the learning process, and it is not the fault of the teacher or the materials or even the students. It is obvious that people are unable to learn any language without making errors first, which contributes in comprehending the acquisition of the skills of the foreign language. Through investigating students’ errors, the researchers will be able to examine, identify, classify and evaluate the problematic areas and type of students’ errors seriousness in writing, and in due course conduct further analysis to know in which language aspects they make errors and their frequency. Corder (1971: p.152) states that “errors are the result of some failure of performance”. Norrish (1983: p.7), like Corder, defines “an error as a systematic deviation that happens when a learner has not learnt something and consistently get(s) it wrong”. Thus, this study is an attempt to investigate the problems facing Yemeni EFL learners in writing paragraphs/an essay and the suitable solutions that overcome writing problems of Yemeni EFL learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of writing in the Yemeni situation

Writing is one of productive skills in language learning. The writing activity is different from other activities. Among the other skills, writing is seen to be a very basic requirement for human being since it goes in connection with his/her daily life. As a result, writing as a craft goes in parallel with human life since people need it to fulfill their different transactions. It has been used for accomplishing many jobs in our daily life since the old centuries of human life (McArther, 1992). However, “writing as a creative activity has been a regular paid form of employment only in recent centuries”.

Since language is a means of communication among people, writing accomplishes a lot of different communicative functions. For example, it realizes the documentary function in the social transactions of human life. Thus, no one can neglect its importance in the different aspects of human life. Apart from the importance of writing in general, writing in English is regarded one of the basic elements of intercultural communication. English is now a language of intercultural communication among different people all over the world. To achieve this intercultural communication, writing in English plays an important role. This appears obviously in the need of English writing for different purposes within the overall aim of realizing intercultural communication. For instance, English writing are used for international correspondence among people from different countries all over the world. In addition to the importance of writing in the overall aspects of human life, it also plays an important role at the individual level. To put it simply, writing is important for language, learning and teaching.

Writing plays an important role in language. In other words, writing, to some extent, contributes to language maintenance and development. Language as a science uses the form of written language as a container for reserving knowledge of this science. So, the basic knowledge of language is contained in books which use the form of written language. For example, dictionaries are used to contain the dictions of languages. For this reason, writing contributes to maintaining language. In addition, writing also helps in transmitting language from one generation to another, from one community to another. As far as the role of writing in learning is concerned, researchers in the field of writing emphasize its importance. For example, Zamel (1982 p:197) views the importance of writing in that it represents processes of "exploring one's thoughts and learning from the act of writing itself what these thoughts are". In a similar way, Raimes (1983) asserted the role of writing in reinforcing learning.

First, writing reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms, and vocabulary that we have been teaching our students. Second, when our students write they also have a chance to be adventurous with language to go beyond what they have just learned to say, to take risks. Third, when they write, they

necessarily become very involved with the new language; the effort to express ideas and the constant use of eye, hand, and brain is a unique way to reinforce learning (Raimes, 1983 p: 3).

Researchers like Gebhardt and Rodrigues (1989) and McCutchen (2000 cited in Klein. 2007) ascribe the importance of writing to the fact that it integrates both of brain and sense or thinking and writing at the time of composing. In another study, Raimes (1985) suggests that writing should not be seen as just one of the language skills to be learnt but also as an efficient way for generating language. Thus, she views that writing is also an important tool for language learning. In this regard, Hedge (1988 p: 7) argues that it is "an aid to learning". Similarly, Reid (1993, p: 49) suggests that "writing is a form of learning". For Harmer (2004, p:31), "it may provoke language development". In the same direction, Klein. (2007, p:607) find that "writing contributes significantly to learning during analogical reasoning".

As it is important for learning and learners, writing is also significant for teaching and teachers. Effective teaching requires different skills that involve writing (Burton, 2009). As a matter of fact, writing plays important roles in different teaching activities such as "planning lessons, jotting down ideas, taking messages, marking student's assignments, drafting class reports, editing drafts of texts, critiquing course books, designing units of work, note-taking, recording the gist of meeting, filling in assessment sheets, making journal entries, sending emails, writing up projects and so on".

Furthermore, writing offers teachers a way to learn about what they do. Thus, writing is important for teaching in that it helps teachers in different aspects and stages of teaching. As far as the importance of English writing for Yemeni EFL learners is concerned, it is assumed that having a basic knowledge of English in general and writing in particular is of a paramount significance. This is because, firstly, Yemeni learners need to cope with the international changes in the different fields of human life. Secondly, it is assumed that through communicating in English, where writing in English plays an important role, some national problems can be solved with the help of international communication. Regarding the need to cope with the international community, it is thought that through communication, where writing is regarded as an essential mode for this purpose, Yemeni learners can acquire basic knowledge of how people from different communities think, plan and act. As regards the importance of writing for solving some national problems, it is assumed that English writing is one of the basic windows through which people can correspondently benefit from the experience of people from different countries across the world.

Previous Studies

Many studies have been done to identify students' writing problems. Mohammed (2019) presents a study to investigate EFL students' problems in writing skill at secondary level. The aim of this study is to investigate the problems that face EFL students in writing skill at secondary level. The data for the study was collected using two questionnaires, the first was distributed to (50) of secondary EFL teachers, and the second questionnaire was distributed to students at Hasahisa secondary school, in Gezira state, Sudan. The results of the study revealed that: most EFL students are unable to write expressive, coherent and logically sequenced sentences in their writing; Teachers' follow-up improve students' performance; and reading literary texts enhances students writing skills.

Ibnian, (2017) presents a study on Writing Difficulties Encountered by Jordanian EFL Learners. It aims at exploring difficulties that university students face when they write in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It also aimed at proposing solutions to help EFL learners overcome writing difficulties. The sample size consists of 82 English majors from the World Islamic Sciences and Education University in Jordan. The instrument used was a questionnaire on difficulties encountering English majors while they write in English. The questionnaire also included an open-ended question on suggestions and solutions

that may help the students overcome writing difficulties. The results showed that: First, “lack of ideas” was the foremost difficulties faced by Jordanian EFL students in writing class; second, “the incorrect use of mechanics of writing”; third, “lack of clear assessment instruments and marking schemes”; fourth, “time restriction”; fifth, “The unsuitable methods of teaching writing”; sixth, “vocabulary restriction”; seventh, “topic inappropriateness”; eighth, “lack of materials for consulting”; (ix)ninth, “grammar difficulties”; and tenth, “lack of teacher's help”.

Al Fakih, (2015) presents a study on university students’ English writing problems: diagnosis and remedy. It aims to identify university students’ writing problems in English language and suggest ways of solving them. The study was conducted in the Teachers’ College, and the College of Education, Nile Valley University, North Sudan in 2014. The descriptive research method was used. The Sample of 20 English language students were selected using a simple random sampling method. They were guided to write a composition of about 250 -300 words on “A description of my own home town/village”. The students’ compositions were reviewed twice by 10 English language instructors. The purpose was to identify the errors and mistakes made by the students. The findings showed that the sampled university students have various writing problems: language problems at the levels of morphology and syntax; usage errors, and mechanical mistakes, that is, spelling, punctuation and capitalization; lack of several writing development skills; and cognitive problems.

Shahhoseiny, (2015) presents a study on Errors in the paragraph writing of EFL learners: A case study of first year translation students at university of applied science and technology in Bushehr, Iran. It aims to reveal the total number of errors in paragraph writing in First Year Translation students in Bushehr University of Applied Science and Technology. The sample of 70 students at First Year Translation in Bushehr, Iran as foreign language learners participated in this study. The results showed that: there were 165 errors in paragraph writing; there was no significant difference in the number of errors between topic sentence and supporting sentences; there was also no significant difference between topic sentence and concluding sentence in paragraph writing; still, there was a significant difference in the number of errors between supporting sentences and concluding sentences; and the largest number of errors were in supporting sentences.

Banlomchon, (2006) presents a study on error analysis of free compositions in written English by Thai high school students. It aims to analyze the most common errors and to analyse the frequency of errors occurring in a writing sample of 100 free compositions of Thai high school students (grade 12) of Nakprasith School, Nakhonpathom Province. The research instruments consisted of 1) ten writing topics, 2) five picture stories, and 3) a scheme classification of twenty-five types of error. The results of the research were prioritizing as follows: The ten most frequent from a total twenty-five types of errors were: 1) determiners, 2) wrong choice of words, 3) verb forms, 4) agreements, 5) prepositions, 6) punctuations, 7) tenses, 8) capitalization, 9) nouns, and 10) misspelling. The common errors from a total twenty-five types of errors were analyzed and found that 57.39 percent were grammatical errors, 25.06% were lexical errors, and 17.55% were mechanical errors respectively.

METHOD

Participants

The participants of the study consist of 70 undergraduate students, Department of English, Faculty of Education Arhab, Sana'a University. The researchers select the Fourth Year to be the participants of the study because their number is convenient for the study. More notably, it is the right time for evaluating their writing skills after spending four academic years of studying English courses. The participants were relatively homogeneous in terms of their cultural background because all students in Sana'a University are Yemenis and share the same language and culture.

Instruments

The data of the study are extracted from the participants by using two instruments: Questionnaire for learners in order to investigate their writing problem and an Open-ended Interview for professors in order to get solutions to overcome Yemeni EFL learners' writing problems. These instruments are designed to highly achieve the purposes of the current study.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to investigate the Yemeni EFL learners' Writing Problems. The questionnaire contains 9 items. The participants were asked to choose the appropriate response code for the items. In the current study, the questionnaire was designed based on the five Likert point-scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Open-ended interview

In order to enhance achieving the objectives of the current study and to gather the information that cannot be obtained from the participants' responses of the questionnaire, the researchers interviewed five professors at Sana'a University and Azal University for Human Development. They asked the interviewees an open-ended question. The question was about some solutions that can be helpful in solving writing problems that face Yemeni EFL learners when writing a paragraph or an essay.

The Validity of the questionnaire

The questionnaire and open ended interview question was given to four professors in English linguistics who teach writing courses at Sana'a University. They were asked to check the validity of each set of items clarity, relevance and accuracy. Therefore, the *questionnaire was developed and modified based on their comments and notes.*

Procedures for Data Analysis

Data gathered from the questionnaire were coded and entered into SPSS and presented in the form of frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation to describe the students' answers for each item in the questionnaire by using the five Likert point-scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. The five Likert point-scales were used to identify Yemeni EFL learners' writing problems. The results of the questionnaire were presented in simple tables and figures by

using frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation followed by an explanation that describes the content of the tables. Finally, the results were discussed and explained in the light of the previous studies. According to the open-ended interview, the five professors suggested many solutions that help learners to overcome the problems that they may face when writing a paragraph or an essay.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

After collecting the data, the data were analyzed by using the SPSS program. The researchers followed the statistical procedures to get the frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations that are required to answer the study questions. The details of data analysis are as follows:

Yemeni EFL learners' writing problems

To identify the Yemeni EFL learners' writing problems, a questionnaire was designed, survived, processed and analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation were generated as shown in the following tables:

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of Yemeni EFL learners' Writing Problems

Writing problems	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
I have some difficulties when writing a paragraph/ an essay.	1	1.4	15	21.4	13	18.6	30	42.9	11	15.7	70	100
Before I start writing, I usually have a problem planning or outlining the points I am intending to write about.	2	2.9	6	8.6	11	15.7	37	52.9	14	20	70	100
My biggest problem in writing in English is developing a good topic sentence for a paragraph and a thesis statement for an essay.	3	4.3	18	25.7	13	18.6	31	44.3	5	7.1	70	100
I have a lot of difficulties in organizing my ideas together in a unified and coherent manner.	4	5.7	13	18.6	13	18.6	27	38.6	13	18.6	70	100
I face many difficulties in writing correct English sentences.	8	11.4	23	32.9	8	11.4	23	32.9	8	11.4	70	100
I always find problems in choosing the appropriate vocabulary to express my ideas or opinions clearly.	7	10	7	10	12	17.1	30	42.9	14	20	70	100
I often find many problems in writing supporting sentences to support my topic sentence.	3	4.3	21	30	11	15.7	26	37.1	9	12.9	70	100
I have lot of spelling and punctuations mistakes.	7	10	12	17.1	15	21.4	24	34.3	12	17.1	70	100
My biggest problem is in writing concluding sentence/concluding paragraph that summarizes the points of my paragraph/essay.	5	7.1	31	44.3	13	18.6	12	17.1	9	12.9	70	100
Average	4.4	6.3 %	16. 2	23.2 %	12. 1	17.3 %	26. 7	38.1 %	10. 6	15.1 %	70	100

Table (1) above shows that the average of N. 26.7 (38.1%) of the participants "Agree" that they have a significant problem in their writing, whereas N. 10.6 (15.1%) "Strongly agree" and N. 12.1 (17.3%) were Neutral, N. 16.2 (23.2%) "Disagree", whereas N. 4.4 (6.3%) "Strongly Disagree". From the

table above, it is observed that the participants really face big problems during writing a paragraph or an essay.

Based on the descriptive results shown in Table (1), (F = 37, 52%) of the participants face a problem in planning or outlining the points they are intending to write about. It is worth to mention that (F = 30, 42.9%) of the participants agreed that they have some difficulties when writing a paragraph or an essay which is quite a big number. In addition, (F = 31, 44.3%) of the participants have a critical problem in developing a good topic sentence for a paragraph and a thesis statement for an essay. Furthermore, (F = 27, 38.6%) of the participants have difficulties in organizing their ideas in a unified and coherent manner. Moreover, (F = 23, 32.9%) of the participants face many difficulties in writing correct English sentences. Besides, (F = 30, 42.9%) of the participants find problems in choosing the appropriate vocabulary to express their ideas or opinions clearly. Moreover, (F = 26, 37.1%) of the participants often find many problems in writing supporting sentences to support their topic sentence. In addition, (F = 24, 34.3%) of the participants have lot of spelling and punctuations mistakes. Finally, (F = 12, 17.1%) of the participants have a problem is in writing concluding sentence/concluding paragraph that summarizes the points of their paragraph/essay.

Data Analysis

1. Yemeni EFL learners' Writing Problems:

Figure 4.1: Frequency and Percentage of Yemeni EFL learners' Writing Problems

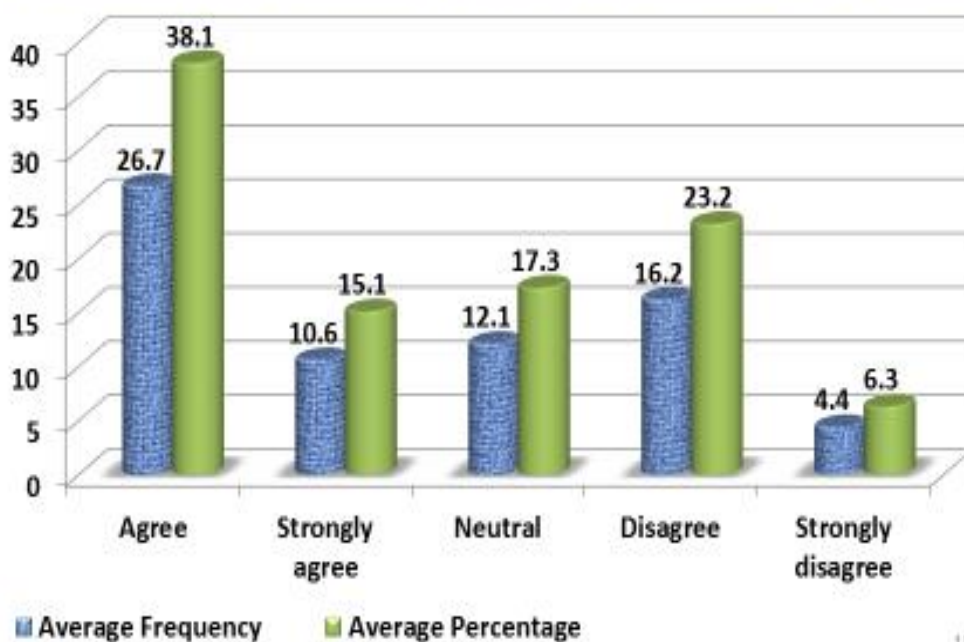


Figure 1 demonstrates clearly the average frequencies and the average percentages of the five Likert point-scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree) as shown in Table 1. It can be noticed that the highest number of participants agreed to have writing problems with an average frequency of 26.7 representing 38.1%.

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and Rank of Yemeni EFL learners' Writing Problems

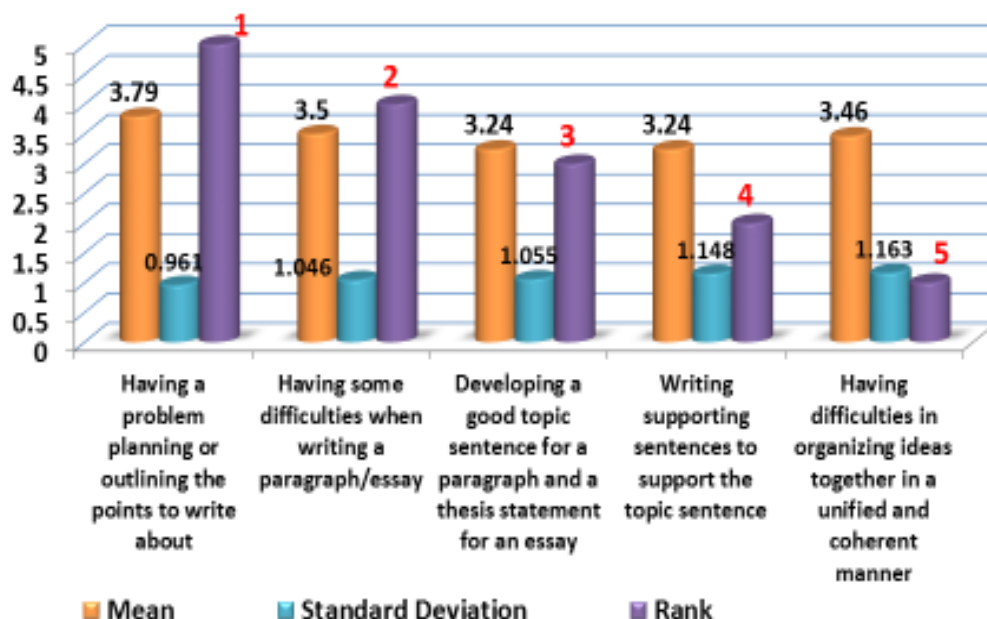
Writing problems	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
I have some difficulties when writing a paragraph/ an essay.	3.50	1.046	2
Before I start writing, I usually have a problem planning or outlining the points I am intending to write about.	3.79	.961	1
My biggest problem in writing in English is developing a good topic sentence for a paragraph and a thesis statement for an essay.	3.24	1.055	3
I have a lot of difficulties in organizing my ideas together in a unified and coherent manner.	3.46	1.163	5
I face many difficulties in writing correct English sentences.	3.00	1.263	9
I always find problems in choosing the appropriate vocabulary to express my ideas or opinions clearly.	3.53	1.213	7
I often find many problems in writing supporting sentences to support my topic sentence.	3.24	1.148	4
I have lot of spelling and punctuations mistakes.	3.31	1.234	8
My biggest problem is in writing concluding sentence/concluding paragraph that summarizes the points of my paragraph/essay.	2.84	1.187	6

Table (2) above showed that Yemeni EFL learners face many problems when they are involved in writing activities. The results indicated that the item number 2 (*planning or outlining the points*) ranked first ($M = 3.79$, $SD = .961$) in writing problems faced by Yemeni EFL learners. Followed by item number 1 (*agreed having some difficulties when writing a paragraph/essay*) which is ranked second ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.046$). Also, Item number 3 (*developing a good topic sentence for a paragraph and a thesis statement for an essay*) ranked third ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.055$) whereas item number 7 (*writing supporting sentences to support their topic sentence*) ranked fourth ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.148$). The results also revealed that item number 4 (*organizing their ideas together in a unified and coherent manner*) ranked fifth ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.163$) while item number 9 (*writing concluding sentence/concluding paragraph that summarizes the points of their paragraph/essay*) ranked sixth ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.187$). The descriptive statistical results also showed that item number 6 (*choosing the appropriate vocabulary to express their ideas or opinions clearly*) ranked seventh ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.213$). Besides, item number 8 (*having a lot of spelling and punctuations mistakes*) ranked eighth ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.234$). Finally, item number five (*writing correct English sentences*) ranked ninth ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.263$).

Data Analysis

1. Yemeni EFL learners' Writing Problems:

Figure 4.2: Mean, Standard Deviation and Rank of Yemeni EFL learners' Writing Problems



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Figure 2 shows that the main Yemeni EFL learners' writing problems ranked by standard deviation, in addition to the mean. They are ranked from 1 to 5 according to their importance and criticality.

Solutions to Overcome Yemeni EFL Learners' writing problems

In order to collect solutions that help Yemeni EFL learners to overcome their writing problem, the researchers interviewed five professors at Sana'a University and Azal University for Human Development and asked them the following question "Based on your experience in the field of English language and linguistics, what are the suitable solutions do you suggest to overcome the students' writing problems when they write a paragraph or an essay?". Five professors were interviewed to answer the question in order to provide suitable solutions. Their answers are summarized as follow:

- **SOLUTION 1:** Students should be trained on the basics of paragraph and essay writing.
- **SOLUTION 2:** Students should develop the habit of writing daily.
- **SOLUTION 3:** Instructors should use genre-process approach to writing, and not product oriented approach.
- **SOLUTION 4:** Weekly contact hours should be increased.
- **SOLUTION 5:** Writing tasks should be carefully selected. They should meet students' needs.
- **SOLUTION 6:** Grammar is an obstacle that hinders students from writing. So, students should have Knowledge about grammar, punctuation, sentence structure.

- **SOLUTION 7:** The good solution to improve the writing skill is that students should write more, read more, listen more and memorize many vocabularies that enable them to write. The more the student read the better and easier they write and compose.
- **SOLUTION 8:** Students should avoid thinking in their mother tongue. They must be careful about the differences between L1 and L2.
- **SOLUTION 9:** Students should start with outline then use mind-map to fill in details.
- **SOLUTION 10:** Students should have an experienced teacher in writing to revise their work.
- **SOLUTION 11:** Students should familiarize theirs with different text types.
- **SOLUTION 12:** Teachers should help students to overcome their fear of writing by introducing a model writing strategies and be on the lookout for learning difficulties.

Based on their best knowledge and experience, the five professors in Linguistics provided some suggestions and solutions that can help the students overcome their problems in writing a paragraph or an essay. The first professor suggests that “students should be trained on the basics of paragraph and essay writing and develop the habit of writing daily. Furthermore, instructors should use genre-process approach to writing, and not product oriented approach, as well as they should increase weekly contact hours and writing tasks should be carefully selected in terms that these tasks should meet students' needs”. This finding confirms the importance of teaching writing from the early beginning at schools, and most importantly practicing writing every day. For more clarification, students should practice a lot of writing exercises and assignments and write a lot with deep discussion of common mistakes that they might commit. Also, the use of genre-process approach by teachers can have an important role in helping students recognize the steps they go through to create a writing text which lead less stressful and motivated writing. Hence, students will have enough practice with being aware of how they could improve their writings.

On the other hand, the second professor suggests that “Grammar is an obstacle that hinders students from writing. So, students should have Knowledge about grammar, punctuation, sentence structure”. For more clarification, students usually lack confidence while writing due to the fear of making grammatical mistakes. Therefore, the solution is to have excellent teachers and excellent grammar books. The third professor states that “the good solution to improve the writing skill is that students should write more, read more, listen more and memorize many vocabularies that enable them to write”. Furthermore, he mentions that the more the student read the better and easier they write and compose. The fourth professor states that the important solution for overcoming the students' problems of writing a paragraph or an essay is “students should avoid thinking in their mother tongue. They must be careful about the differences between L1 and L2”. Moreover, he mentions that students should start with outline then use mind-map to fill in details by drawing either as notes or as higher quality picture when more time is available. The fifth professor states that to overcome the students' problems of writing a paragraph or an essay is to have a native-speaker proofread their work. In addition, students should familiarize theirs with different text types which mean that students must know the differences between narrative, descriptive, expository and persuasive text types because the paragraph can be used to describe or explain an endless variety of things. Thus, it is very important to know how to use each paragraph type for right purpose. Another suggestion is that teachers should help students to overcome their fear of writing by introducing a model writing strategies and be on the lookout for learning difficulties which means that teacher should first provide a clear and simple model to encourage student to write and to illustrate the strategies that student must follow to have a perfect writing text.

Discussion

In general, it was found that the participant of the current study faced different problems during writing a paragraph or an essay. It can be noticed that the problem of planning or outlining the points that the students are intending to write about is on the first rank 26.7 (38.1%) and it can be the highest of all based on the data. Then the item that states of having some difficulties when writing a paragraph/essay comes on the second rank 30 (42.9%), on the third rank comes the problem of developing a good topic sentence for a paragraph and thesis statement for an essay 31 (44.3%), on the fourth rank comes the problem of writing supporting sentences to support the topic sentence 26 (37.1%), on the fifth rank comes organizing ideas together in a unified and coherent manner 23 (32.9%), on the sixth rank comes writing a concluding sentence/concluding paragraph that summarizes the points of a paragraph or an essay 12 (17.1%), on the seventh rank comes the problem of choosing the appropriate vocabulary to express the ideas or opinion clearly 30 (42.9%), the mistakes of spelling and punctuation comes on the eighth rank 24 (34.3%), and in the lowest rank comes the difficulties of writing correct English sentences 23 (32.9%). This result is in agreement with Amani (2018) as she shows that most EFL students are unable to write expressive, coherent and logically sequenced sentences in their writing. And this result matches with the results of the current study. Furthermore, the result of the current study is also consistent with Al-Zankawi's (2018) findings which revealed that students used planning strategies during writing and in making some efforts at revision. Similarly, a study conducted by Ahmed (2010) showed the similarities with the results of the current study. Both studies focused on the problem of the cohesion and coherence of EFL essay writing.

Ibnian (2017) revealed that Jordanian EFL students lack ideas in writing class, the incorrect use of mechanics of writing, vocabulary restriction and grammar difficulties. These results are notably consistent with the results of the current study. In addition, the results of the study conducted by Al-Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014) presents a study which showed similarities with the result of the current study that most school and university students encounter difficulties in lexical and content aspects of writing.

Also, the findings of the current study are consistent with the findings of AL-Fakih's (2015) study that shows that the sample university students have various writing problems including mechanical mistakes; that is, spelling, punctuation and capitalization, lack of several writing development skills and cognitive problems. Another similar study with the results of current study is Muhammed's (2015) study. The findings show that EFL learners face substantial challenges in writing paragraph, such as paragraph components and mixing a number of ideas in one paragraph and irrelevance of controlling ideas and supporting ideas.

The results of Banlomchon's (2006) study has some similarities with the results of the current study which shows that students have some errors regarding wrong choice of words, punctuation, and misspelling. The common errors from a total 25 types of errors were analyzed and found that 57.39% were grammatical errors, 25.06% were lexical errors and 17.55% were mechanical errors respectively these results are in agreement with the current study. The last similar study with the current study is Shahhoseiny's (2015) study. The results show that there were 165 errors in paragraph writing and there was a significant difference in the number of errors between support sentences and concluding sentences and the largest number of errors was in supporting sentences.

Conclusion

Based on the data analysis of the types of the writing problems, the results revealed that planning or outlining the points before writing seems to be difficult for the majority of the Yemeni EFL learners at Sana'a University. Moreover, the results indicated that that many students agreed of having some difficulties when writing a paragraph or an essay. Most importantly, the results indicated that students' biggest problem in writing in English is developing a good topic sentence for a paragraph and a thesis

statement for an essay. Furthermore, the results also revealed that some students find many problems in writing supporting sentences to support their topic sentences. Additionally, the results indicated that students face a lot of difficulties in organizing their ideas together in a unified and coherent manner. Most notably, students have problem in writing concluding sentence that summarizes the points of paragraph/essay. Also, the results revealed that students find problems in choosing the appropriate vocabulary to express their ideas or opinions clearly. Another problem which was faced by students was having a lot of spelling and punctuations mistakes. The last problem encountered by students was having many difficulties in writing correct English sentences

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