



Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

University of Oran

Faculty of Letters, Languages and Arts

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**The Effects of Evaluation Methods
on Written Products from a Formal
Perspective: the case of SBA 4th year
students**

*Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Magister in Educational Psychology and Didactics*

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General introduction

Writing is viewed as an extremely complex language activity which requires simultaneously an organised cognitive ability and a good control of its components. It is a language process in which mental activities (such as thinking, organizing and drafting) are involved to achieve a final product and are interwoven with its controlled components (like coherence, sentence-structure, punctuation, vocabulary, and spelling). On the basis of the foreign language norms, a good control of such variables produces good texts and indicates high linguistic competence as well. In an academic context, it has a communicative aspect and it is a potential evaluation tool which determines either in a specific or general manner the students' FL linguistic competences through their written performances after a short or long-term of learning English as a foreign language.

In most of the Algerian foreign languages faculties, the final written product of students in English has been in most situations a problematic case for teachers because a number of these components are not used "correctly". Even after four years of studying English, Algerian students demonstrate serious weaknesses in their written productions. This fact is widely known in the L2 or FL research on the students' writing disabilities. The disability in writing English does not necessarily mean "errors" or "fossils" but it can be tied with other formal features such as the essay layout and the English orthography.

Furthermore, Algerian EFL students' writing disabilities do not constitute a recent phenomenon. In fact, during the last two decades, it has been outstandingly observed and manifested in the context of FL learning. The process of university academic assessment has reported through the revelations of university teachers that the majority of students' summative exam-papers still show a bad usage of English grammar and orthography, i.e. the formal features of English are not respected by a great number of students. Even with the advanced ones (the 4th year graduate students), this fact persists although they have been taught these features in the first two years of the curriculum, a point which calls insistently and undoubtedly for an investigation.

For this reason, this paper intends to investigate from a formal perspective the issue of foreign language students' disabilities or difficulties in writing English (mainly the frequent and the persistent ones) and to understand the causes of their production. Of course, Algerian students of English are not the only EFL learners who exhibit repetitively such a reality in their performance. Indeed, the literature on EFL lists countless disabilities made by foreign learners in other

countries. Therefore and generally speaking, understanding why EFL students still produce the same errors is what exactly inspired theoretically and practically the framework of the thesis or present research.

Why looking for the factors that stand behind this population's failure to write correct English or at least to give an acceptable and a readable form to their written language outputs? In fact, if this inquiry is theoretically and practically propped up by some evidence, it is to help Algerian students of English to improve the form of their written productions and to reduce the number of their frequent errors or disabilities in writing, even when they are under examination (summative or final term examinations), and, if possible, before reaching the final academic advanced level. As noted above, the Algerian students do not constitute the only EFL case in having difficulties in writing. Thus, it was felt important to review studies and research dealing with this issue in order to have a wide and clear picture of the causes which promote EFL students' failures rather than improvement in writing. This reviewed literature would tightly or broadly help in describing the Algerian students' areas of difficulties in English and would compare their case with other cases in similar situations.

In regard to what has been evoked above, my paper centres upon the following related and significant issues:

- What makes EFL students unable to achieve good or successful written production?
- Why do they produce the same and/or frequent errors in summative exams?
- Is this error frequency or writing disability due to insufficiencies in the teaching programme (teaching the English writing approaches)? Or to the modulation?
- Is it due to the types of writing assessments, students go through? (i.e. the summative tests).
- Is it tied with the Algerian students themselves? (i.e. to their preference for spoken English, to their demotivation towards the act of writing itself, to their anxiety, to their lack/absence of practising free English writing or to any other psycholinguistic or psychological factors?)
- Have error analysis approaches generally been able to identify in a clear manner the source(s) of EFL learners' errors? Are they specifically able to identify the ones in the Algerian written performances?
- Have they succeeded in solving the issue of EFL learners' disabilities in writing?

- Are students aware of their areas of breakdown in writing (disabilities) after summative exams?
- Are the actual teachers' ways of responding (evaluating/correcting) to the students' written summative performance (such as circling, underlining the erroneous forms, or commenting) helping them to know about their disabilities or to overcome them?

Or:

- If this error frequency is due to a natural fact (fossilization), how are the achievements of successful written productions explained?
- How are EFL students' competences academically evaluated on the basis of this natural fact?
- Is it impossible to reduce such a fact in their productions?
- If yes, how can we help EFL students in general and the Algerian ones in particular to achieve good written productions or at least, to write correct English?

The above issues on EFL students' disabilities in writing imply at the same time that the theme of "students' disabilities in writing" may be related to different reasons rather than to a unique cause. However, it is assumed that the main reason behind students' failure to reduce the frequent errors sticks around their unawareness of these repetitive forms because of the insufficient teachers' methods of correction such as circling, underlining and commenting. How we reached to such a hypothesis or assumption is briefly mentioned below and more elaborately throughout this thesis.

EFL students' disabilities or difficulties in writing have been theoretically hypothesized and methodologically investigated over five chapters in this dissertation. Hence, before exploring briefly the concern of each chapter, on the basis of these issues, one would wonder why the complexity of the English language items has not been proposed as one of the students' error frequency or disabilities since English itself is naturally different from their first language, Arabic or Berber. Indeed, the issue is not that simple because learning in general occurs whether the language is easy or complex. Complexity has never contracted the theory of learning on a specific ground, and English whether considered native or non-native language, is not an exception. We cannot claim that English is a very difficult language to acquire; otherwise, this would have dropped it from the list of the foreign languages taught in Algeria. Moreover, whether English is difficult or easy, it has been noticed that there are good and successful cases of English written products as well as good learners of it.

The thesis was originally meant to contain 4 chapters instead of 5. However, reviewing the literature on students' writing difficulties and errors has pushed us theoretically and practically to work on two different but related subjects: the definition of the writing product and the error analysis approaches and devise one chapter for each. This separation is suggested to help readers deal with the density of information without difficulty while reading this material.

Therefore, Chapter 1 is devoted to the definition of the writing product and its assessment. It was necessary to go through the writing product theory for a couple of reasons and objectives. First, it is important to make the readers know about the English language faculty our focus is upon (i.e. writing from the product approach perspective). Second, it is important to make them know about its constituents during the production stage (i.e. the language components that constitute its substance, which are needed to write in the target language) because, as it mentioned above, a number of its variables should be controlled at the performance level.

This control requires to acquire first the 'knowledge' of these variables and which, later, is termed as 'competence' once it is highly performed. In terms of acquisition, such a knowledge is taught through the grammar and written expression modules, which last for two academic years in the Algerian foreign language faculties; whereas, the writing product is assessed periodically through written exams in all the academic years (four years) in different modules: linguistics, civilization, and literature, etc. Compared to the students' spoken outputs –which are tested only in one module (oral expression), students are asked to write essays during exams in most modules.

Beside the writing product's components, other factors such as reading in English, motivation, practising writing, and writing mediational tools are also discussed as potential features for improving oneself as a writer of English. Why implement here the notion of "the writer behaviour" with the students' progress in writing? Simply because if this "failure" in applying the target language norms in writing is brought fourth and the "difficulty" comes to exist, it is not always due to the teaching ways or approaches or to any other suggested reasons above. It could be, in fact, linked with the students themselves (personalities, attitudes, motivation, in how they are doing in learning situations). It could also be that students do not acquire writing through simple literary practices such as reading and writing after the class, i.e. at home or in libraries, in other terms they do not practise writing.

A teacher can be very explicit with students when teaching progressively the curriculum of grammar and written expression modules, but if students do not continuously negotiate the given

input –who is going to do it for them? Differently said, a teacher of grammar, for an instance, may provide students with an explanation of a grammatical point in the classroom, and he/she trains them through drills, but after the classroom, this “knowledge” (i.e. the given input) needs to be memorized. The first step for memorization is the frequent revision. Thus, it is believed that if they do not revise their lessons regularly alone or with the help of a mediator –who is going to do it? Another step is to do some simple literary practices such as exercises on grammar and writing in order to “maintain and reinforce” such a knowledge, at least to reduce their errors in written performance. So, if they do not practise as much as possible English activities –who is going to do it? These points are discussed theoretically in chapter 1 and practically investigated through questionnaires in chapter 3.

As pointed out earlier, defining the writing product and its potential features is not the only objective. The evaluation/assessment aspect, and later the description and comparison of the Algerian students’ written productions in reference to the real norms or aspects of the English written product constitute further objectives. Thus, knowing the writing product would help us firstly identify the elements used at different levels in our students’ written performance and secondly evaluate their language behaviours.

When trying to identify the students’ writing disabilities, it was important to deal with the factor that leads us to such an identification, namely the assessment or evaluation stage. It was important to see how written productions are evaluated and corrected. In this perspective, the role of the teachers as assessors or evaluators will be first described, then discussed: we should look at the ways of correction teachers use to respond to their students’ written performance, and analyse the influence of their methods on the students’ progress or improvement to write good English. Also, how errors are identified and corrected was an important concern of the present thesis. Therefore, we felt that treating errors in the students’ written productions should deserve a whole chapter (cf. chapter 2). It was felt so because the treatment of error would constantly imply error analysis, and this fact is by itself a big issue to talk about.

As a result, chapter two is a theoretical collection on the error significance and terminology, its distinction from the notion of mistake, and the well-known approaches used to analyse it. The aim of theoretical variables will help us later in processing practically the data collected on the case-study of this dissertation (EFL Algerian students’ errors) in chapter 3. As it was mentioned above this will tell us how far the error analysis approaches (mainly the EA approach) have been fruitful in both describing the students’ disabilities in writing and reducing –if not eliminating

the phenomenon of error persistency in their writings. At the same time, it will inform us about the sources for the re-appearance of such a phenomenon, proclaimed by different authors and error analysts.

As a matter of fact, the exploration of error analysis approaches is twofold. First, we intend to see if its use is limited to defining errors only (just knowing their types and sources). Second, we are in need to know what can emerge after identifying the error types and sources. Thus, we shall seek to determine whether the role of the teacher is restricted to grading and annotating papers or whether it has to perform further essential and pedagogical assistance such as the mediational role that is intended in a first place to help student-writers to better their performance towards good and successful productions. In this context, we shall try by the end of this chapter, to show whether EFL learners, in general, and Algerian ones, in particular, will need another practical feedback after their summative exams or not.

The three remaining chapters constitute the practical side of this dissertation. Indeed, chapter 3 defines the research investigative tools, most of them proposed and elaborated personally. They all turn around the main inquiry of this dissertation i.e. they investigate nearly every suggested cause (already evoked above in the main issues), among which, the teachers' ways of responding is largely explored. The tools take the form of questionnaires and tables. The questionnaires are anonymous, either mono-categorized or multi-categorized; designed for both teachers and students because we think that since the former constitute part of the problematic in students' writing disabilities, their opinions may be of a great significance to tell us the main causes of the failure in writing good English. They will tell us about the students' language behaviours, and the influence of the timing and the programme of the grammar and written expression modules (which last only two years) on the students' FL competence and performance, too.

Nevertheless, it was discovered later, that these tools do not confirm the assumption built around the thesis' main concern and which is about whether students are conscious of their failures in writing in English. Therefore, it was additionally recommended to elaborate two urgent tools such as correcting the Algerian students' written outputs after summative exams and interviewing some advanced learners. The former was designed to collect data about the types of frequent writing disabilities as well as error frequency and describe how the teachers corrected the materials cross-sectionally (at a specific point of time) and longitudinally (at different points of time). We believe that if an x-disability is re-detected longitudinally, it means that the student-writer was not previously aware of it since the way it is corrected is not enough to turn him/her

recognize his/her fault. In addition, the interview as a tool is meant to collect data about how students feel towards their teachers' ways of correction, and mainly on whether they are satisfied or not.

The answers to these issues and the results of the research tools are organized, analysed as well as interpreted in chapter 4. A number of figures and tables are tied with this chapter as a direct or visible illustration to these findings. A part of these findings will impose itself as a recommendation or remediation to EFL students' writing disabilities. Though its shortness, chapter 5 consolidates the belief around re-shaping the actual ways of responding to students' writings in summative exams. It will typically propose a new form of teachers' feedback that should stand as promoting progress in writing English, and is inspired by the theory of learning/teaching through mediation. Also, a number of experiments on this feedback are suggested.

To sum up, the reader should bear in mind that we are not here selecting one of the suggested causes to the issue of students' writing disabilities; rather we are in fact trying to seek how every suggested cause has influenced the written performances of this case-study of research population (the Algerians) as well as find the best feedback that reduces these disabilities through future research. In addition, while collecting and presenting data, we have not put much emphasis on the content of these students' performances simply because we believe that content can differ from a student-writer to another; whereas the formal aspects (such as grammar and the English orthography as well as the essay layout) are conventionally controlled and should be respected in similar way. Also, the illustrative means in this thesis are not only presented in chapter 4 but other illustrative forms (appendices attached at the back of this material) are added to exemplify most of the data suggested theoretically in chapter 1 and 2, and practically in chapter 3 and 4. Most of these appendices constitute collected data from distinct sources but reconstructed through a personal effort to help the readers grasp their meanings well. The rest is taken from different sources and mentioned in each appendix.

Finally, three things are important to mention. The first is about the terminology used in this material. In fact, terminological constraints always tend to differ from a dissertation to another. One example concerns the use of "second language", "foreign language" and "target language" as one language. Indeed, they all indicate English since it is the focused point here although each term is viewed dependently. However, in most cases, we have tried to simplify the definition of terms for the readers and most of them are listed in the glossary. The second is about our real

intention when exploring the issue of EFL students' writing disabilities. We really did not at no time to despise the Algerian students for their weak performance nor to look down at the teachers' ways of correction. We want to specify that our critical attitude aims at discovering better ways to help both teachers in their corrective roles and students in writing good English. Through criticism, our own learning/teaching ways have known a kind of improvement even if not very important. The last thing concerns the efficacy of this dissertation: it is hoped that this work will be beneficial to EFL researchers and if there are any shortcomings, the responsibility is but our own.

1.1 Introduction:

Writing as a language faculty is not a simple feature to learn, and as a product, is not easy to achieve even in the case of EFL advanced learners. Our concern in this section is to look theoretically at what prevents most EFL learners to achieve a good written product. Hence, to figure out the causes behind their failure to achieve successful written productions one needs, in the first, place to understand what this language faculty is, its characteristics and its position in the academic institutions.

1.2 Approaches to writing:

Writing is viewed from different perspectives and approaches. Some consider it from a *product approach* perspective as an actual realization of texts/discourses. Others regard it from a *process approach* angle involving mental operations or cognitive abilities (such as thinking, planning and drafting) to produce a written text. Myles (2002) views the writing product as the final stage of the writing process. Basing himself on some models of language production, he describes the production of a written material as follows:

- A. The construction stage where the writer plans what he/she is going to write by brainstorming, setting an outline... etc.
- B. The transformation stage where the language rules are applied to transform the wanted meanings into the form of the message while the writer is composing or revising¹.
- C. The execution stage which is the physical aspect to copy down the generated phrases and sentences on papers.

In addition to these stages, *speech* is another factor involved in any writing activity because during the writing process, an individual talks silently to him/herself. Accordingly, writing is considered as a multi-dimensional language activity. It starts by thinking and generating ideas which are put on a paper through a physical move (the hand or any computer word processing), and finally, are constructed into a final and an organized realization (a text). All these features occur progressively along a silent speech phase. This implies that the writing process and the product cannot be separated, since, when thinking, words and sentences are *abstractly* produced in our minds, then, are *concretely* put on papers till a final product is formed on the basis of discourse/text conventions.

¹ - Of course, these two stages are motivated by goals set in advance by the writer. They are activated by memory to search for information, needed to generate phrases and sentences.

In this dissertation, writing is treated from the product approach; it concerns the written outputs (essays) of a designed category of advanced learners (fourth year university students) under specific conditions (summative tests)². The objective of such a choice is to determine and to describe the levels of proficiency and competence of these learners, as well as to try to explain - if possible- the most frequent areas of failure in performing with the target language at the level of language accuracy and linguistic competence.

1.3 Competence/performance and the writing product:

In foreign language acquisition, the issue of competence and performance is related to language ability. Competence is regarded as the knowledge of the way any language system is represented in the mind of the learners, and performance is seen as the control of that knowledge during an actual production (Ellis, 1994:296). In terms of evaluation, several language system researches view competence as a language internal factor which cannot be observed directly; whereas, performance is viewed as a language external factor that can be observed directly using different language tests. Unlike competence, which is characterized by abstraction, performance seems easier to identify and to describe. Indeed, the term output is associated with performance in many language learning contexts. A foreign language output, whether *spoken* or *written*, is by nature a language product that represents what the learner has performed during/after a short/long term of acquiring a specific foreign language syllabus.

Furthermore, the diversity of competence is borne out by language system researchers. In effect, language theoreticians show that competence itself comprises sub-classes such as: the linguistic, the socio-linguistic, the strategic and the communicative competence. Among this competence variety, the research focus is on *the linguistic competence*, mainly on *the grammar competence* in the fourth year students' written outputs. This focus has a purpose to discover whether they were able to use the English language system in a competent way through their performance in exams after four years of studying English. Upshur and Genesee (1996:152) define linguistic competence as:

“...the underlying linguistic abilities or knowledge of language that language learners have acquired. It is an abstraction that cannot be observed directly; we can observe only linguistic performance directly.”

For a concrete or a direct vision of such a competence, grammar tests are used to reflect the test takers/examinees' linguistic ability when using the foreign language grammar because the two

² - A summative test is a method of testing students which comes after a long-term period of time of teaching. It has a purpose to give final judgments and qualifications about the students' performances (cf. appendix 5).

authors believe that performance has a natural reference (a background) to the linguistic competence, and it helps to reveal degrees of *an inappropriate vs. an appropriate product, an incorrect one vs. a correct one*, or in general: degrees of *failure vs. success*. They (Upshur and Genesee. *ibid*) say that:

“Linguistic competence is inferred on the basis of linguistic performance, which is an individual’s ability to use language appropriately or correctly in a variety of situations.”

Using the FL appropriately or correctly by learners is not always the case after teaching/learning. In fact, the existence of *persistent errors* in a great numbers of students’ written works is an indicator of this fact. What educators agree upon is that language appropriateness/correctness, which is inspired by linguistic competence during the writing process, leads to a successful written production. One of the questions that could be raised is: what is a good or a successful written production? Or, what is the linguistic item that helps a learner write good English?

1.4 Criteria of accepting a written product:

In most Algerian educational institutions, Standard English is taught as a foreign language gradually through its linguistic system (phonology, grammar and semantics) over a given period of time. Within such standardization, learning and teaching should meet its norms/criteria of acceptance of what is conventionally right in the English system. However, to meet the norms of an official standard spoken/written production in a single paper seems difficult to obtain. While searching for Standard English production, to be used as a model or as a reference in evaluating students’ performances, one can discover different examples of criteria to accept a written piece of language. They are proposed by several authors (writing evaluators). There are areas of acceptance about which authors do agree, and others which are still subjects to debate. The present researcher is not the only one who encounters this difficulty; it is also met by other ones who interested in the literature of FL writing. Kroll (1990:141), one of the contributors to the building of FL writing theory, clears out this difficulty as follows:

“One of the difficulties in establishing clear goals for L2 writing students is the fact that native-speaker (NS) proficiency is hardly a simple issue. There is no single written standard that can be said to represent the “ideal” written product in English.”

It is felt that this difficulty is not noticed only during the teaching process, since EFL teachers can have several textbooks (as grammar textbooks for example) which provide them with the FL language teaching materials. The difficulty appears also in evaluating or assessing students’

performance. To see how this difficulty can be somehow solved, one believes that any written production is not created without words, sentences or paragraphs; indeed, these are its components/constituents. In terms of construction, the written product' constituents are classified into levels. Their arrangement to form/produce a piece of language is controlled by rules of grammar and discourse aspects. In addition, this arrangement may vary from a construction to another according to its purposes of production. Therefore, to solve somehow the problem of difficulty in identifying a good or a successful piece of English, some norms/criteria in accepting a written production are suggested on the basis of the following three viewpoints:

- 1- a brief comparison of speech vs. writing,
- 2- reference to English grammar rules and discourse aspects, and
- 3- meeting academic requirements.

1.4.1 Speech vs. writing:

The differences between speech and writing are very important to cite because they lead to shape one criterion of acceptance³. *Hesitations, self-corrections, interruptions* and meanings conveyed through *intonation* and *gestures*, are considered as the immediate or obvious differences which often characterize spoken language (Baynham and Maybin, 1996:41). Also, “*everything which has to do with accent and voice quality is lost in the written language*” (Gramley and Pätzold, 1992:115). On the other side, *spelling, punctuation* and *the organisation of the text* are the direct differences which characterize a written language (Baynham and Maybin, *ibid*). In terms of production, the linguists have found that spoken English tends to have more words than written language. On the contrary, writing takes more time than speaking, especially in producing large units of texts (Baynham and Maybin, *ibid*). Kress, quoted in Harris (1993:4), states how the differences between speech and writing can be discerned in spoken and grammatical structures as follows:

“*Speech, typically, consists of chains of coordinated, weakly subordinated and adjoined clauses; writing, by contrast, is marked by fully subordination and embedding.*”

This implies that in performance, writing is more *consistent* than speech. In addition to consistency, the English orthography is a concrete difference between a spoken sentence and a written one⁴. Spelling and mechanics (punctuation and capitalization) are the marks of a written

³ The present dissertation would not give details on the differences between speech and writing because it is not its domain of research; however, it mentions only sentence consistency and English orthography as two important differences.

⁴ Though the spoken and written sentences have the same communicative objective (i.e. conveying a message), they are performed by different discourse markers. In fact, as pitch and tone are the main make-up of spoken sentences,

piece. Spelling is regarded as the correct sequence of letters that form a word alphabetically. Capitalization is writing the first letter bigger than the others in a word, and punctuation is a set of small symbols used in writing (cf. appendix 1). Furthermore, the English orthography does not merely differentiate writing from speaking. It achieves the continuity of meanings in a written text. The usage of its features (spelling, punctuation and mechanics) “*groups the thoughts within a sentence into units for the convenience of the reader.*” (Ehrlich and Murphy, 1967:44) because this usage is governed by the English language rules or follows a convention; a convention which decides that almost everything written should correspond to the StE norms. As a result, their control determines a good mastery of the English language system, a high acquisition of its rules and linguistic competence.

1.4.2 Reference to English grammar rules and discourse aspects:

A written piece can be accepted when it respects the rules of the English linguistic system at the level of *form*, and when it follows the discourse aspects such as: coherence and cohesion at the level of *content* while interpreting this piece. Starting from the sentence, this syntactic unit and the fundamental basis of any written text, Harris (1993:6) explains its arrangement and expansion according to grammar and discourse needs as follows:

“In writing, the relationships between sentences operate at several levels. There needs to be thematic unity; there needs also to be a logical progression, often made clear by the use of conjunctions which express on the surface an underlying logic in the propositions of the text; there needs also to be grammatical linkage between sentences called cohesive ties.”

Isaacson (1996) shares the same intention as Harris. He adds that when these needs are found in a written piece, they effectively fulfil its communicative aspect as it is mentioned below:

“A writing product fulfils its communicative intent if it is of appropriate length, is logical and coherent, and has a readable format. It is a pleasure to read if it is composed of well-constructed sentences and a rich variety of words that clearly convey the author’s meaning.”

Clearly, these norms of acceptance can be regarded as the components of a good written production. Besides, Isaacson (1996) indicates, that a good language product involves a good syntax. In terms of competence, a good syntax indicates the syntactic maturity in the learner’s

mechanics are the same for the written ones. For instance, when someone writes the following sentence: “What time is it?” which is a question, he/she has to follow/end his/her sentence with a question mark “?”. On the other hand, if he/she utters/asks this sentence, he/she doesn’t say: “What’s the time question mark” in this way because the interlocutor understands naturally that the speaker asks a question from the tone of a question.

linguistic repertoire. To identify this syntactic maturity in any learner's output, three parameters should be available according to Powers and Wilgus, cited in Isaacson (1996)'s website article:

- 1- Variations in the use of sentence patterns.
- 2- First expansion (basic sentences patterns, formed by the addition of adverbial phrases, infinitives, and object complements and the formation of simple compound sentences).
- 3- Transformations that result in relative and subordinate clauses.

Moreover, as there are rules to follow for each variable or component in writing, there are exceptions. These are cases where these rules cannot be applied. According to Nunan, cited in Benseddik (2000:30), successful writing involves:

- 1- *Mastering the mechanics.*
- 2- *Mastering and obeying conventions of spelling and punctuation.*
- 3- *Using the grammatical system to convey one's intended meaning.*
- 4- *Organizing content at the level of the paragraph and the complete text to reflect given/new information and topic.*
- 5- *Polishing and revising one's initial efforts.*
- 6- *Selecting an appropriate style for one's audience.*

1.4.3 Meeting academic needs:

The academic needs are designed to guide learners and lead them directly to academic success once their written productions meet the agreed standards and requirements. Silva (in Kroll, 1990:17) mentions that:

“In brief, from an English for academic purposes orientation, writing is the production of prose that will be acceptable at ... an academic institution, and learning to write is part of becoming socialized to the academic community – finding out what is expected and trying to approximate it. The writer is pragmatic and oriented primarily toward academic success, meeting standards and requirements.”

Why a reference to the academic community? Because it is regarded as the parameter which has developed schemata for any academic discourse well, and who has put stable decisions of what is appropriate. In addition, it is the university human parameter, in assessment/evaluation phases, who is aware of what has been taught (the FL syllabi and curricula) to learners. Furthermore, in many EAP contexts, academic English writing cannot be described as good or bad, yet for many EAP advocates, it is in itself good and is taken as a model for writing evaluation. It has characteristics among which the linguistic ones are exposed in appendix 2.

1.5 The written material components:

It has been already mentioned that any written piece of language is made up of words, sentences and paragraphs i.e. a written material is the result of producing these three language levels.

These levels are the basic grammatical structures needed in writing. Before describing them, it is necessary to mention their most important aspect when they are used together. Indeed, while producing a written piece of language, words, sentences and paragraphs are drawn by a continuous physical move or an act of writing (handwriting or a computer application for writing). This is for the most part inspired by a flow of ideas abstractly present in minds and concretely presented on papers in an organised way rather than a random one. Such a product has been given the name: *text*.

1.5.1 The production of text:

Text, as a concept, was not easy to define in many works. In most of them, it emerges as a debatable issue especially when it is used in relation to discourse⁵. Some define this concept on the basis of what constitutes/produces a text. They believe that a piece of language, especially a written one, is a text when it has the quality of texture (in other sources called: textuality). Gramley and Pätzold (1992:182-183) illustrate this concept by indicating its properties. For them, textuality is the quality which ‘*distinguishes a written or a spoken text from a random collection of sentences or utterances.*’ It comes as a result of the interplay of the seven factors: cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality, and intertextuality. Within this interplay, continuity and connectivity are what link the text units. An illustration of these properties is presented within this dissertation (cf. appendix 3).

It appears from this presentation that texture is what gives substance to a written/spoken discourse. To textuate (i.e. to produce a text), it is necessary to integrate all the above seven factors; otherwise, the text would fail to fulfil the standards of its production. On the other side, for the writer who tries to integrate these seven factors during a production, writing does not become a simple language task indeed a very complex one which may lead to difficulties. According to Collins and Gentner’s say, cited in Kroll (1990:140):

“Much of the difficulty of writing stems from the large number of constraints that must be satisfied at the same time. In expressing an idea the writer must consider at least four structural levels: overall text structure, paragraph structure, sentence structure (syntax), and word structure... Clearly the attempt to coordinate all these requirements is a staggering job.”

At the same time, writing does not become only a product, but a skill to be mastered as well. Therefore, one might ask the following questions: are there basic elements that a writer needs in order to develop his/her writing skill? And if they exist: what are they?

⁵ This research does not empirically deal with this question because it is not the main concern of this study. However, it will give the main definition of the text.

1.5.2 Potential factors needed in and for writing:

1.5.2.1 English grammar:

Writing, from a broad point of view, is defined as “...based on some type of alphabetical scripts.” (Yule, 1985:8). Why alphabetical script? Because it represents a syllabus of sounds (speech) which speakers shape physically into letters. Though this alphabetical script is the basis in writing, it is not the ‘pillar’ of a written production. There is another element, which is not only a part and parcel of writing, but also an element or a factor of assessing and judging whether a written production is a conventionally *accepted or not, correct or false, ill-formed or well-formed* production. This pillar is *grammar* which builds the system of spoken and written languages. That is why students must learn and acquire grammar in order to write in the foreign language. It is essential that FL students should have in mind this type of linguistic knowledge. Brumfit, in Benseddik (2000:32), shows the importance of knowing the language systems (of which grammar constitutes a part) as follows: “*It is generally held that learners should first master the language system in a mechanical way, and only then hope to branch out on their own.*”

Theoretically, what are the most important grammatical features that foreign students need for language production? The most needed grammatical features are systematically shaped through three language levels: the level of words, the level of sentences, and the level of paragraphs. They are cited in this order because in most academic contexts, learning a FL starts by words, and when they are grouped, they produce sentences, and the combination of these produce larger text units. A brief description of these levels is included in this dissertation (cf. appendix 4). However, grammar does not seem the only potential factor for learners to become skilled writers. The writing skill calls for other factors that help learners reach academic success. Among these factors, reading comes as an important pillar for discovering the FL systems, rules and even cultures.

1.5.2.2 Reading in English:

Researches in FL teaching have revealed how far reading has good effects on written production and the development of writing abilities. A number of these revelations describe the relationship which exists between reading and writing. Bacon (1957), in Benseddik (2000:40), describes this link as follows: “*reading makes a full man, and writing an exact man.*” Furthermore, Harris (1993:90) claims that reading helps students to write well from their early stages as learners (pupils); especially, if they have trained themselves by reading voluntarily a wide range of texts. In the same intent, Clay (in Isaacson:1996), states that:

“The developmental route of very young writers involves trying to understand what written language is about as they look at books, become aware of environmental print, and put pencil to paper.”

Harris (1993:86) again mentions that *“there are several levels at which reading feeds into writing.”* He gives spelling, one feature of a written production, as an example to show how reading feeds into writing. He says that:

“...good spellers are not necessarily fluent readers, though they may be, but are almost invariably people who gave an interest in words and perceive both shapes and patterns of words. They will also have good visual memories and be disposed to get things right.”

Besides, reading in English in general, and reading different English texts especially, indeed, provides foreign students with models for future productions in English. It gives them opportunities to study the FL at the level of vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and the way to combine these variables to form sentences, paragraphs or texts in general. Eisterhold, in Kroll (1990:88) clarifies this idea as follows:

“Reading in the writing classroom is understood as the appropriate input for acquisition of writing skills because it is generally assumed that reading passages will somehow function as primary models from which writing skills can be learned, or at least inferred.”

He, additionally, supports his description by Stotsky’s survey of research in which the following points are determined:

- ✓ *Better writers tend to be better readers.*
- ✓ *According to some reported questionnaires, better writers read more than poorer writers.*
- ✓ *There seem to be correlations between reading ability and measures of syntactic complexity in writing. Better readers tend to produce more syntactically mature writing than poorer readers.*

Reading is also a means to explore the world of knowledge. In the field of teaching/learning a FL, it is considered as a potential factor in the hands of all learners, not only to learn but even to succeed. That is why it is included along their years of learning English and is taught in their first years of studies to keep them aware of its importance. Furthermore, and according to Lindsay (2002)’s website article, reading is seen as:

“...an additional exposure to the foreign language and it contributes to the development and updating of vocabulary. I may add that it is a good device to increase systemic knowledge (syntactic and morphological) as well as schematic knowledge (encyclopaedic, socio-cultural, topic, and genre).”

Thus, reading helps foreign learners create, firstly, part of their indirect language environment since they are not exposed to a native one. Secondly, it constitutes a device/strategy to discover

the FL system since it will be very useful to analyse the grammatical features and discourse aspects (such as the ones described in appendixes 1 and 4) in order to learn how to connect parts of texts (unity). Moreover, it has a further benefit when it offers learners opportunities to discover the methodological and the communicative aspects to treat or handle researches for academic requirements.

However, though reading has an immense value in learning and writing, it stands as an additional or a complementary factor besides grammar in constituting what learners need to write good English. On the other hand, reading and grammar as approaches are viewed as theories that need a lot of practice, for example, increase the habit to read in order to fulfil the learning objectives.

1.5.2.3 Practising language activities in English:

*“There is one single way to learn, said the Alchemist. It’s by action.”*⁶ (Coelho, 1988:197). Through practice or action, an idea or a theory is better incorporated and recognized. The theory of learning is not an exception because it needs to be successfully achieved. It is a multi-faceted phenomenon since it is related to a number of variables such as *teachers, learners, decision-makers, syllabi or curricula* and *settings*. Meanwhile, to achieve success every element is essential.

For instance, decision-makers and syllabi/curricula can provide the teaching material designed for every level of learner at the university. Teachers give regularly or progressively that material in terms of inputs. The acquisition and the negotiation of the given input (interaction) remains the students’ job because to acquire an input they need to learn in a continuous way and not only in formal settings (language classrooms where a teacher, a tutor or a lecturer is present), but even in informal settings (outside language classrooms) by themselves. Their role would be manifested in reading, writing and revising the FL forms and meanings after their classes. They need to do more practice and to train themselves at home, in libraries, or in any other academic setting because they have to re-adapt their study practices to the various forms of learning situations they met in lectures. As regards to writing, learning needs to be viewed by students as an important domain that exists continuously through practice and self-training.

Practising writing is part of practising learning. It becomes a very important factor for developing various language aspects (among which language accuracy). This is because, first:

⁶ Translation of the original version: “ *Il n’y a qu’une façon d’apprendre, répondit l’alchimiste. C’est par l’action.*”

acquiring a skill in a FL is not only a question of language proficiency, but also of literary practice in order to save/maintain competence, matched with the academic level. Second, practising writing helps those learners who have difficulties with foreign language skills to progress in written productions when it becomes nearly a daily activity. Furthermore, students' productions can also tell teachers whether they practise English often or not as for example through reading, revising and doing exercises in grammar, using dictionaries for vocabulary and spelling mastery for the sake of developing their competence as well as their performance.

However, whether students reinforce through practice their written productions for academic success, is strongly related to their personalities and beliefs. Baynham and Maybin (1996:61) indicate this fact in the following say:

“Literary practices are the observable activities in which reading and writing play a part, but they also depend on the meanings people attach to what they do: the values, attitudes and ideologies that are interwoven with their literary activities.”

This inevitably leads us to think of another basic potential factor which may develop the ability to learn the FL grammar, to read in the target language, and to practise frequently language activities linked to reading and writing: it is motivation, which is the interest or the desire to learn the FL whether spoken or written.

1.5.2.4 Motivation to write in English:

Language learning is affected by social, cognitive factors and the learner's personality in general. Accordingly, when the question refers to the student's personality, other facts such as *motivation, attitudes, and behaviours* are implied (Melouk, 1991:89). It is already known that, through language, learners actively construct their vision of the world, including value systems, beliefs, and attitudes (Harris, 1993:10). In addition, showing an interest to learn or communicate with the FL is generally underlined by motivation. Richards (in Robinett and Schachter, 1989:202) claims that: *“motivation to achieve communication may exceed motivation to produce grammatically correct sentences.”* Motivation towards the act of writing itself exists once the learners have an interest to communicate (since writing is a communicative mode, in addition to speaking). At the same time it denotes that a lack or absence of motivation may lead to unsuccessful acquisition of the writing skill.

If foreign language learners are motivated to integrate the FL knowledge, they will develop a higher level of proficiency and their positive attitudes can have a positive effect in written

outcomes. A fact which allows us to see whether the learner's interest/motivation towards writing exists is the learners' desire to write a successful writing product and to wonder how they can achieve it. On this context, McKeon (1992) wonders whether a student has asked such questions: "How do I know a piece is getting better?" and "How can I tell that someone is a good writer?" In addition, Swearingen (2002), based on Kellough et al's inquiries, wonders whether the learner has answered the following questions: "Where am I going [in learning writing]?", "Where am I now?", "How do I get where I am going?", and "Am I on the right track for getting there?" It is proposed that these students' attitudes towards learning writing may constitute the first step of motivation in order to become a good writer in English.

In short, in order that learners achieve a good English written product, they need the knowledge of the FL system (grammar), they need to read in English, and they need to practise frequent linguistic activities to train themselves in writing. However, all these cannot lead towards success unless the learners show an interest/desire to become skilled writers. Without the learner's motivation, these potential factors, which are collaborators in any successful writing, may not work to help him/her to master writing. As, Smith, quoted by Brookes and Grundy (in Robinson, 1988:103) writes:

"It has been argued that writing is learned by writing, by reading, and by perceiving oneself as a writer. The practice of writing develops interest and with the help of a more able collaborator provides opportunity for discovering conventions relevant to what is being written. The practice of reading may also engender interest in writing and provides opportunity for encountering relevant conventions in general."

1.5.2.5 Mediation and writing:

Smith's above quotation does not advocate grammar, reading and practice factors as well as the learners' contribution (i.e. learners' motivation) as the only requisites to learn writing, but calls also for an additional factor that makes learners aware of their areas of progress vs. failure in writing. This factor is the teacher, mentioned as the collaborator in Smith's terms. Indeed, even if the learner may seem motivated to equip him/herself with the stated factors (such as studying the FL grammar, reading and writing in English), he/she cannot be able to determine his/her level of performance. In this situation, he/she needs the intervention of the teacher. Though the latter does not stand as a writer in the students' language outputs, his/her presence is necessary. Huong (2003:35) demonstrates this fact as follows: "*individual students are viewed as capable learners but in need of directed forms of assistance in order to succeed.*"

A way to understand how a teacher intervenes in the students' productions is manifested in performing one of his/her periodic and pedagogical activity which is to judge or to coach learners' performance through correcting or evaluating i.e. what is generally known by the assessment phase. Assessment or evaluation is applied along the students' academic years at different levels of language production in order to determine their states of improvement and progress. It can be achieved through various forms like tests or exams, tasks demanding a written performance in language classrooms, and/or given as a homework, or in any assessment tool designed for writing.

However, in Smith's quotation, the teacher's role, as another factor of participation in the students' writing product, is not limited to that of an evaluator or an assessor, but he is also a collaborator who helps them improve and better their written materials after determining for them their areas of failure or disabilities (such as errors). In doing so, providing feedback is another pedagogical aspect of the teacher. The forms and the time of feedback are determined by the teacher (the evaluator) whatever the disability is and whenever it occurs.

Accordingly, the teacher's role, in the above case, becomes that of a *language mediator*: "*one aspect of the social activity which often occurs around reading or writing a specific text.*" (Baynham and Maybin, 1996:54). Mediation includes teaching aids as well as strategic orientations to problem solving among which students' problems in writing are not an exception. The sources or the forms of its aids "*can be either a material tool;...a system of symbols (most notably language), or the behaviour of another human being in social interaction*" (Huong, 1993:33). Thus, since language teaching/learning is a social interaction, the teacher's behaviour or any kind of his/her assistance (i.e. the mediation's human form) and his/her feedback (i.e. the mediation's object form) are regarded as *mediators*. In this context, Huong (ibid) defines the role of a teacher as a language mediator as follows:

"The mediational role of the language teacher does not simply mean that there is an additional work required of the teacher, but that the teacher takes on a qualitatively different role. Rather than just follow curriculum guidelines or focus solely on the sequential acquisition of skills by learners, the teacher in the mediational role engages in a joint effort with learners, mainly through interaction, to advance the learners' development."

To sum up, to understand why students have disabilities in writing, it is not enough to define the nature or the substance of the writing product. It is also necessary to deal with the assessment notion and later with the feedback one to see their effects on students' written productions.

1.6 The assessment of the writing product

1.6.1 The definition of assessment

Broadly speaking, the term assessment is associated with the term evaluation. For example, to assess is: *“to evaluate or estimate the nature, value, a quality of something”* (Pearsall, 2001:80), and to evaluate is: *“to form an idea of the amount number, value of; assess.”* (Pearsall, 2001:493). The present research considers assessment as evaluation, meant to measure or estimate something.

The above definition is set in terms of theory. In terms of practice, a test or an exam is a direct means or method, a procedure to perform an assessment/evaluation. The criteria that should be followed while constructing a test are: authenticity, variety, volume, validity and reliability (Swearingen, 2002). These elements of test construction are somehow debatable issues, among which validity takes a prior position. Though these debates are not the concern of the current research, a few words are necessary about validity to show the importance of assessments.

For most test researchers, validity is still a debatable question. The present research agrees with Chapelle and Jamieson’s (2003) point of view concerning this issue. They believe that the expression of a valid test is misleading, and they justify it by claiming that: *“a test is not in and of itself valid or not valid; instead, validity refers to the use of test”*. This research follows their position because it implies that if we give haphazard decisions, for example about our students’ abilities to write correctly in order to determine their levels of performance, this does not work, neither theoretically nor practically. We need to test our learners; then put decisions forward.

Nevertheless, while searching for a unique (common) definition of the assessment of the writing product, there seems to be no fixed one, shared by assessment specialists in this field (writing). There seems to be similar as well as different definitions in most cases where research has come up with data about this. Examples of similar and different definitions are presented below, and they are primarily viewed as beliefs/opinions about the writing assessment, experienced by several teachers-authors or just teachers.

The field of writing assessment has developed considerably in the last quarter of the 20th century, and it has taken a new orientation from the beginning of the 21st century mainly with the *feedback* notion⁷. For some researchers, its definition is inferred from the FL theory of teaching

⁷ A point discussed shortly in chapter 5, pp: 126-128.

and learning. Swearingen (2002) defines assessment according to Kellough and Kellough's statement:

“Teaching and learning are reciprocal processes that depend on and affect one another. Thus, the assessment component deals with how well the students are learning and how well the teacher is teaching.”

Following the same theory, Allen (2005) incorporates the term within a triangulation, as follows:

“It is useful to think of assessment as part of a triangle where what is to be learned (curriculum), how it is to be learned (instruction), and what tools instructors use to gauge that learning (assessment) are all connected.”

In addition, she confirms that these dimensions are not independent variables within classroom learning, in the sense that the acquisition of the FL cannot be successful if the link between the three is ignored. Her opinion on this is that:

“Each of these three dimensions is a necessary part of classroom learning; furthermore, when the link between them is broken, both students and instructors suffer. For example, if students are assessed on material, that is not part of the curriculum and was not taught, that assessment is not a valid measure of their learning in the course. Alternatively, having a clear link between assessment and curriculum makes the assessment process simpler for instructors. The more these three dimensions are aligned with one another, the more coherent the students' experience in your course will be, and the more valid the assessment will be as well.”

Taking into consideration the FL theory of teaching/learning in defining writing assessments, some authors like Peyton (1992), believe that they: *“could also be called indirect tests, since they don't assess writing itself but related sub-skills.”* This is true in the sense that writing as a skill is taught and learned progressively by dividing its substance/composition into components to facilitate its acquisition. Therefore, each successful acquired division (component) may indicate a mastery of a sub-skill.

In short, writing assessment is defined as the measure of the writer's (learner's) performance to determine degrees of success vs. failure. In addition, and in a practical way, a test is administered to estimate quantitatively and/or qualitatively these degrees. In most academic contexts, three possible processes are common to all tests of writing (Hamp-Lyons, in Kroll, 1990:78). They are adapted as follows:

- 1) **The construction of questions:** they are clearly subjective and carried by teachers.
- 2) **The construction of answers:** they have the same feature as the constructed questions and done by students.

3) **The scorings:** they have both subjective and objective possibilities carried by teachers.

1.6.2 The types of assessment:

Because of the developmental route of the FL learning and teaching theory over periods of time and different contexts, some of its aspects are changing. Assessment, as one aspect of this theory, is not an exception. The former appears in different types: some common, shared by teachers and educators, and some typical, proposed by one individual (teacher/educator). The present study chooses to present some assessment types, common as well as typical ones, separately in two tables. They are exposed according to the following features: *notion, time of occurrence, characteristics and purposes*.

In the category of common types, two frequent forms emerge: the *summative evaluation* and the *formative one* (also called *diagnostic evaluation*⁸) (cf. table **A** and **B**, appendix 5). The information about these types is based on data gathered from: Bachman, 1990:60-62; Harris, 1993:89-99; Genesee and Upshur, 1996:49-51; Isaacson, 1996 and Swearingen, 2002. Concerning the typical types, Airasian's model is exposed with the same procedure as for the common types of assessment (Isaacson, 1996). Airasian characterizes assessment into *sizing-up, instructional* and *official/academic* types (cf. table **B**, appendix 5). Hence, from Airasian's typical type of assessment, we can seize the meeting points between his typical model and the common model explained previously as follows: sizing-up as diagnostic, instructional as formative and official as summative types of assessment.

The diversity of assessment types could be explained probably on the basis of what exactly is preferable in each case. For example, Swearingen (2002) justifies the shift from a summative to a formative type according to an official mathematics school (the NCTM)'s statement which is:

“Assessment should be more than merely a test at the end of instruction to see how students perform under special conditions; rather, it should be an integral part of instruction that informs and guides as they make instructional

⁸ According to Swearingen (2002), while authors believe that a diagnostic assessment is a component of formative assessment, others see it as a distinct type. It is designed to ascertain each student's strengths and weaknesses, knowledge and skills. He gives an example of a mathematics department diagnostic test by which the department administers assess all mathematics students. It was done directly in the first weeks of a semester of a new academic year. The procedure was; for instance, that a Math 98 test covers a Math 97 test and a Math 99 one covers the previous academic year and so on. In our Algerian educational context, I have attended a seminar with the English Language inspector and secondary school teachers in SBA province on May, 2006. After discussing the new syllabus designed for first year learners, we constructed a diagnostic test of English; based on the M. C. Q method of testing for these pupils to be administered in the first weeks of their second year.

decisions. Assessment should not merely be done to students; rather, it should be done for students, to guide and enhance their learning.”

Furthermore, the efficacy of formative tests was assumed to have a great benefit for students who have not done well in studies; therefore, narrowing the gap between a low and a high performance while raising an overall achievement. This argument forced Swearingen (2002) to conclude his article by advocating the use of formative assessment types. He says that:

“In particular, it is especially crucial that they [teachers/educators] investigate and utilize diagnostic and formative assessment, both which are underused – yet effectual– components of the educational process.”

Whatever the type of assessment is, it has a *conventional purpose* i.e. a unique objective. In fact, assessment, whether summative, formative or diagnostic is designed to clear *implicitly* or *explicitly*, the nature of students’ performances by identifying areas of weakness vs. strength, and therefore, awarding terms of success vs. failure for each language skill. However, one would doubt about which assessment type is more useful for FL writing progress? Which one reveals the exact areas of weakness, for example, treats them in order to reduce their occurrence in our learners’ written works? Is it the summative or the formative one?

Part of the answer to these questions seems to infer from what some researchers say when they prefer one type to the other, as in Swearingen’s argument above. If in his point, the formative/diagnostic assessment could be regarded as a cue to the raised questions, what about the summative type? Is it always advocated to deal with learners’ weaknesses only within instruction time (course)? Could it be possible to deal with students’ disabilities in writing, for example, via a summative test? To make the inquiry clearer, is the function of a summative test restricted only to give a mark (a grade), while the function of a diagnostic test is extended to give further help and support to these students? Therefore, the latter seems more useful than giving a grade or a mark or even a comment! It is believed that among the keys to answer this problematic one is looking for some important features when dealing with the writing assessment. These fall in recognizing:

- 1- Why assess a written production?
- 2- What to assess in it?
- 3- How to assess the what in it?, and the more essential need is:
- 4- What after the ‘why’, ‘the what’ and ‘the how to assess’?

1.6.3 The objective of assessments

Generally, the future of many people depends on the outcomes of assessments (Swearingen, 2002). In testing, Chapelle and Jamieson justify assessment administration “*because a decision has to be made about examinees.*” Swearingen (2002), about this point, mentions that we assess “*writing samples across a variety of purposes for writing to give a complete picture of a student writing performance.*” Meanwhile, the issue of language ability, competence and performance, in all language proficiency (cf. pp: 11-12), is part of the required decision. This latter seems to be a primary one, yet, not the only one. Other decisions could be given according to final objectives of assessments.

Airasian (in Isaacson, 1996) suggests some important final goals, among them: 1) *the identification of students’ weaknesses and strengths* and 2) *the fit of diagnostic needs* in which 3) *instructional activities are evaluated*, 4) *feedback is given*, 5) *performance is monitored*, and 6) *progress is reported*. Swearingen (2002) quotes seven other final goals from Kellough and Kellough; among which six are presented below:

1. *To assist students learning.*
2. *To identify students’ strengths and weaknesses.*
3. *To assess the effectiveness of a particular instructional strategy.*
4. *To assess and improve the effectiveness of curriculum programme.*
5. *To assess and improve teaching effectiveness.*
6. *To provide data that assist in decision making.*

A lot of resemblance is seized between Airasian’s and Swearingen’s final objectives. Besides, these objectives somehow feature a good assessment, and in order to complete a good assessment, Swearingen (2002) argues that it should be guided by some suggested principles among which some are presented as follows:

- *The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.*
- *It works best when the programmes it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.*
- *It requires attention to outcomes but also equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.*
- *It works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.*
- *It fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.*
- *Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is a part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.*
- *Through it, educators meet responsibilities to students.*

After answering somehow ‘why we need assessments’ as a first step to determine decisions about examinees, the following step moves to clear ‘what to assess’ in the examinees’ written outputs. However, decisions about ‘how’ and ‘what’ to evaluate differ from a teacher/assessor to another because of the problematic that exists in these variables as in Donald (1993):

“When it comes to error correction, we are dealing with one individual’s reaction to a student’s piece of writing or utterance (since it is a personal job)...there will be some disagreements among about what, when, and how to correct.”

1.6.4 What to assess in students’ written products?

According to the nature/substance of writing as a product, the two aspects generally evaluated are *content* and *form*. Under each one, falls a number of writing variables (or what has been previously called the writing sub-skills). As Peyton (1992) points out, the assessment of writing in itself occurs with writing sub-skills (cf. p: 24). This denotes that the aspects which are designed for evaluation in students’ written performances do not consist of one variable only; indeed, it indicates that the ‘what’ is broken into other elements. Following the same idea as Peyton’s, Costas (2002) defines ‘the what’ to assess as:

“...the elements which characterize effective texts ... [and which] are also the ones examiners look for when assessing the writing of candidates for a large number of EFL public examinations.”

Similarly, Isaacson (1996) clarifies the nature of the “elements” and classifies them into five emerging writing product aspects. These five product variables are: *fluency, content, conventions, syntax and vocabulary*. In addition, one of the plans develops a framework to assess student’s written outcomes. This plan contains seven elements of writing:

| ELEMENTS | OBJECTIVE |
|---------------------|---|
| Fluency: | The number of words produced accurately. |
| Unity: | If the student’s essay is built around an identifiable main idea. |
| Development: | If the main idea is developed over a set of related paragraphs. |
| Syntax: | If sentences are constructed correctly. |
| Grammar: | If the student’s writes with few, if any grammatical errors. |
| Mechanics: | If punctuation and spelling are used appropriately. |
| Diction: | If the student’s words are appropriate to both writing subject and objective. |

This division in the elements designed for evaluation exists to facilitate the writing assessment. Therefore, a written production can be divided into areas. They may include: *the layout, grammar usage, vocabulary choice, sentence clarity and completeness, and text organization*. Under assessment procedures, they are the designed areas; called the *targeted writing areas*. They help teachers/evaluators to judge the written material. For instance, in the form of a written material, teachers may seek: 1) *the handwriting* i.e. if the material is easily readable or not, 2) *the layout* i.e. if a student has respected the essay form or the paragraph form, and 3) *language accuracy* i.e. whether he/she writes correct English. In the content of the written material, teachers may look for: 1) *text organization* i.e. whether the student has achieved an introduction,

a development and a conclusion, and 2) *language consistency* i.e. if the student's text is unified and logical (cohesion and coherence; in general the written discourse aspects).

Meanwhile, the choice of the targeted areas for evaluating writing seems to be more variable than fixed. It changes from a teacher/assessor to another. To illustrate this reality, a variety of targeted writing areas/aspects designed by several teachers/assessors are presented in the form of a table (cf. table C, appendix 6). In addition to the targeted areas, some methods to evaluate the writing product are also presented in the same table. These evaluation methods are clarified below in the step about how to assess the students' written performance.

1.6.5 Evaluation methods of the writing product:

After exploring the second step about determining what is assessed in students' written outcomes, the third step is about determining the ways their performances are evaluated and corrected. Meanwhile, this step indicates the role of the evaluator in writing assessments. In effect, the procedure, by which teachers evaluate and correct students' performances follows three phases: the pre-evaluation phase, the evaluation phase and the post-evaluation phase. They are called so due to their time of occurrence in most universities. Through every phase, teachers follow a number of steps.

1.6.5.1 The pre-evaluation phase:

It is a preparatory phase during which the evaluators set up the exam questions and collect the examinees' language products. It is characterized by the following steps:

- A. Teachers choose the assessment type (a summative/formative type).
- B. They prepare the test components in which the exam question is elaborated and the time to answer is limited.
- C. They collect the students' exam papers.

1.6.5.2 The evaluation phase:

It is the correction phase. It is characterized by the following steps:

- A. Teachers read every student's copy.
- B. They identify, while reading, the areas of progress (good English) and areas of breakdown (errors or mistakes).
- C. They respond to students' written performance by :
 - ***Circling***: a trait drawn by the teacher around the erroneous form which can be a word or a sentence. (cf. appendix 7)

- ***Underlining***: a trait put under the erroneous form. (cf. appendix 7)
- ***Symbolizing the error type***: the use of a writing symbol of an error⁹. It is put under or above the erroneous form –if there is spacing between sentences. Or, it is put in one of the copy’s margins. The placement of the symbol depends on the existence of spacing between sentences. A number of the most current symbols used while correcting a written production is presented in a table (cf. table D, appendix 8). Every symbol is defined and followed by examples about the type of error/mistake and its correction.

1.6.5.3 The post-evaluation phase:

It is the grading phase. It is characterized by giving scores to the written production. *Scoring* can be a subjective or an objective marking. A *subjective* marking is mostly designed for oral and written examinations. The marking is more complicated than a true/false answer because it is based on the teacher’s judgment in which he considers how well the candidate completes a given task (Charles et al, 2001:107). On the other hand, *an objective* scoring is mostly designed for multiple choice testing where the scoring is determined by a true/false answer. In this procedure, the examinee is asked to produce an answer which can either be a correct or incorrect (Charles et al, 2001:106-107). Such a type of marking is more advocated to test the learners’ grammar competence.

In terms of application, researchers in FL evaluation feature two basic scales: *the holistic* scale and *the analytic* scale. These are techniques used to evaluate a written product from both aspects (content and form). In the former, the examiner is asked to give a judgment on the examinee’s performance as a whole. Therefore, he only reads the whole production, at the same time, adopts one of the correcting steps, explained previously; then he provides a score. In using this scale, the evaluator may not pay much attention to any particular aspect of the examinee’s production, but he just judges its overall effectiveness (Charles et al, 2001:108; cf. appendix 9). The latter scale is a pre-established material. While constructing an analytic scale, the evaluator prepares and arranges writing rubrics on the basis of the targeted areas for assessment and the scoring. In this scale, the evaluator judges several components of performance separately (such as:

⁹ Writing error symbols are abbreviated written forms or shapes. Their origin is inspired from the type of the mistake (its nature) i.e. whether the error falls in grammar, spelling, incoherence...etc. For instance, if an error is a misspelt word, the symbol is **sp**, or if it indicates a bad use of punctuation, the symbol is **p**. Hence, the symbols are neither endless (in terms of counting because there is no total number of them) nor are they common between teachers. Some of them are always used by several teachers and others are rarely used; whereas, some symbols are not absolutely used because not all teachers use them. So, the classification and the use of these symbols are subjective –based on every teacher’s choice.

grammar, spelling, punctuation, and organization), and he joins a score to each component/rubric (Charles et al, 2001:109-110, cf. appendix 9).

Whether the scale is holistic or analytic, the result, after using them, is to provide a grade. This latter may be *quantitative* such as giving marks for each targeted area or grouping all the marks of the targeted areas to give a final mark for the academic administration need (e.g. the essay deserves 07/20, another one 11/20, etc); as it may be *qualitative* such as giving one of the rating degrees (e.g. excellent, good, average, etc), or providing comments (e.g. write an essay, bad handwriting, incoherent, etc). Meanwhile, both the targeted areas and the methods designed for writing product assessment are based on every teacher's choice as it is indicated in the data presented in the related appendices.

1.6.6 Critical issues on “what” and “how to assess writing”:

1.6.6.1 Debates on “what to assess”: form vs. content:

The data presented in the table indicate that determining ‘what to assess’ as well as ‘how to assess’ is not usually common between evaluators. Furthermore, the “content” aspect seems somehow a more demanding task, in terms of evaluation, than the “form” aspect is, since the content substantially exhibits further dimensions –not related only to the linguistic competence and language accuracy norms, but also to the conveyed meanings (the messages). More precisely, it deals with discourse components, mainly the interpretation notion. This may be more difficult to assess or to be put under objective criteria because interpretations, in most of the time, will be subjective. Moreover, it does not merely depend on how far every teacher interprets the student's written product, but also on how far every student wants to go through his/her performance. Liz Hump-Lyons, (cited in Kroll, 1990:77), clarifies this point as follows:

“Only recently have we come to understand that all writing, even expository writing on timed essay tests, is personal. Each writer brings the whole of himself or herself to the task at hand. In interpreting a task and creating a response to it, each writer must create a “fit” between his or her world and the world of the essay test topic.”

Nevertheless, content is neither neglected nor deeply treated in the analysis of the students' written outputs within this dissertation. This is due to the fact that any written piece cannot be judged for one writing aspect .i.e. maybe we can focus on one of them but we cannot neglect any. Besides, at the level of content, vocabulary is the most treated facet; particularly at the level of word choice, and just short comments are given about the state of the students' written work at the level of text organisation, i.e. the coherence aspect. However, the form of the students'

written outputs is the assessment focus in this research. Therefore, *layout, grammar and writing mechanics (spelling, punctuation and capitalization)* are the most evaluated sub-skills.

1.6.6.2 Debates on “how to assess”:

The division in ‘what to assess’ constitutes really part of the problematic because though those elements are what teachers/assessors look for, they are not shared between these evaluators. There are teachers who prefer to pay much attention to some writing variables/aspects and they totally neglect other aspects in the students’ written material; while others prefer to touch every aspect without neglecting any. For instance, some evaluators pay much attention to content rather than form or vice versa; whereas, others prefer to focus on both. This fact also confirms what Collins and Gentner (cited by Kroll, 1990:140) have noticed about the absence of a standard or universal English writing model which helps the evaluators to determine clearly the areas of assessment (cf. p:12). On the other side, the division in ‘how to assess’ really forms another part of the problematic, because as the difficulty has started with ‘what to assess’ it has reached the procedure of writing evaluation, too. The point that, again, compels Kroll (1990:141) to conclude by:

“Therefore, we cannot easily establish procedures for evaluating ESL writing in terms of adherence to some model of native- speaker writing. Even narrowing this discussion to a focus on academic writing is fraught with complexity.”

However, despite the difficulty in evaluating the writing product, hundreds of students’ written papers are corrected every academic year because any written piece can be evaluated once the assessor determines clearly his objectives. As a key to lessen the difficulty in evaluating writing, Harris (ibid) says that: *“What is important is that teachers should be quite clear about what they are doing when assessing writing.”* In addition, other researchers advocate the efficacy of analytic scales as good systems of marking a student’ writing product. Miliani (1993:37) justifies the benefit of analytic scales in comparison to holistic scales as follows:

“...a holistic scale approach may be unreliable when it comes to marking students’ performance since the teacher relies more on impressions than on well and pre-established criteria for marking. On the other hand, it may not be valid because when being evaluated the learners may not know why they have been given such a mark.....analytic approach helps the teacher to have a more objective attitudes towards his students’ performance by avoiding an impressionist kind of marking”.

Despite all the difficulties in assessing writing, the latter has an academic importance, since it helps the evaluator to level out students’ performance, then to decide to what extent the students

acquire the FL system in a proficient manner or not. This occurs by determining their areas of progress as well as their weaknesses in constructing with the foreign language. While he is correcting the students' written outputs, the evaluator identifies the students' abilities as well as their disabilities in writing. One of their disabilities features in the appearance of some unwanted or deviant forms that differ or do not match with those of the FL, i.e. errors. In encountering these deviant forms, the evaluator proceeds with one of the correction ways as to underline/circle them or provide the wanted/correct forms –if possible and when he desires that (cf. p: 29-31). Finally, he would add a score/mark for the sake of the academic policy, and he may write a general comment about the student's written production.

This feature of assessment is well-noted after each summative test all along the Algerian university academic years. This feature, known as feedback, is used by the evaluator as a response to students' written productions. Hence, one might ask: Is this response to students' written outputs all what is aimed after the assessment? i.e. is the only objective of such an assessment/correction limited to giving a mark or a comment, then awarding a certificate or a diploma to students? Therefore, one would doubt about the fruitful objective of assessing writing, and about the efficacy of teachers' responses to students' written outputs, and even more about the effects of these responses on students themselves and their progress in acquiring a foreign language. In other words, one would wonder about what after knowing 'why', 'what' and 'how to assess the writing product'.

1.7 The effects of the writing product assessment:

To answer this question, one would primarily wonder about who benefits from writing assessment outcomes. Surely, they are the academic institution and the students in a first place because for both, marks constitute requisites in every student's profile. They determine two important things: his/her admission to pass from an academic year to another year (1) till his/her obtention of the diploma (2). However, if the administration and the students are the beneficiaries of such a response, what about the student's competence and language acquisition progress? Are marks/comments only what the learner needs to improve his/her performance? Or do they help him/her to reduce his/her errors in writing which seem frequent in most summative productions?

1.8 The need for feedback after the writing summative assessment:

This dissertation advocates that the ways in responding to students' written materials may be sufficient to help students to better their writing, but they are paradoxically also somehow responsible for the recurrent existence of students' errors, particularly those related to the formal aspect of the target language. Students are not aware of their errors in writing after summative examinations, because in most cases, all what they know interested in is their marks. Besides, they may read comments when they are available, still they may remain unaware of their most persistent errors and disabilities since a mark/comment and a circled/underlined form do not show them their deficiencies in production.

Yet, a student's awareness of his/her errors may motivate him/her to better his/her writing. Moreover, it may convince him/her about why he/she has such a mark/comment. Therefore, it is believed that the possible convenient and pedagogical solution which could shape this awareness can be the feedback interference as a secondary or an alternative response to students' written outputs.

1.9 Conclusion:

Within this section, the need to learn the FL grammar, to practise frequent language activities, to read FL texts, motivation and even evaluating the learners' progress in writing have been cited as potential factors for improving FL writing. Differently said, their lack or absence may stand as the real cause for the learners' failure to achieve a good successful written production. However, blaming directly students for their insufficient effort towards the act of writing cannot be highly supported. Therefore, to consider that students are simply demotivated or do not practise language activities enough as causes for the occurrence of frequent errors seems somehow unfair, in the sense that their responsibility, in this case, is not certain. To investigate this problematic, it is needed theoretically, first, to define some of the students' weaknesses and problems in writing i.e. the production of errors and their recurrence, and second to criticize teachers' responses on students' productions, especially from the point of view of their effectiveness on students' proficiency. This clarification stands as a support to show the immense need to introduce an academic feedback on students' written forms whenever their productions exhibit deficiencies. All these factors are suggested for the purpose of achieving a correct foreign language acquisition and, hence a good competence.

2.1 Introduction:

Errors are important to study since their analysis may be the key factor to help understand why EFL learners are unable to avoid their most persistent errors in written productions. So, in this section, another literature is reviewed about the definition of error, its distinction from the mistake notion, its types vis-à-vis the target language and its possible causes to its appearance or re-appearance. Accordingly, a series of studies dealing with the error concept are mentioned within this chapter.

2.2 The natural existence of errors:

Research in FLA has revealed that learning a foreign language is processed in the minds of learners. They receive periodically and gradually from their teachers inputs which are the target language systems and rules. What is customary is that human minds are not perfect that is why not all the given input is acquired by learners in a section of time, but only a part of it i.e. the intake. Also, the amount of the intake varies from a learner to another because it depends: 1) on how the teacher presents the input (teaching methods), and 2) on how the learner negotiates the input (learners' individual differences). Therefore, as teachers we become convinced that the learner's output (idiosyncrasy or what he/she produces) is not expected to be the same as the given input. This implies that "*we should expect errors to occur*" (Lee, in Robinett and Schachter, 1989:145). Also, this denotes that an error has a natural existence. That is why it does not necessarily harm the relationship between the learner and his/her teacher since it becomes part of the learning process.¹

2.3 The definition of errors:

According to several EFL publications on error significance, the word *error* itself was submitted to different terminological constraints. Among these constraints, the error/mistake significance emerges as the first debatable issue. Before exploring this question, one must mention two kinds of error definitions: a general definition and a specific one. An error is generally defined as: "*an unwanted form which is not part of the TL rules/systems.*" (George, 1989:158; Ellis, 1994:51). This unwanted form constitutes an element that does not belong to the TL and a deviation from its system, as George, thus, clarifies it as follows: "*it is when the learner's output includes an unwanted form which is not part of the input that we may usefully speak of an error.*" (ibid), and "*a deviation from the TL forms*" as it is reckoned by a number of authors (Dušková, 1989:215;

¹ - Though the existence of errors is natural, they may harm the learning progress, especially if they are not sufficiently corrected; therefore, the learner will be unaware of them.

Schachter, 1989:227; Ellis, 1994:51). This indicates that an error signifies generally what does not correspond to the system of the target language.

The error recognition is very important because it leads to an easy identification in evaluating the learners' performance. However, though this general definition is understood, it does not make an error easy to identify, because in most dissertations, it is distinguished from a mistake which is a deviant form from the target language rules at the performance level while an error stands as a deviant form at the competence level (Corder, 1989:168). This point alters the definition of error from a general to a specific one as well as it leads to the distinction between an error and a mistake.

2.3.1 The error/mistake distinction:

It is suggested that “*any deviation from TL norms may reflect either a problem in performance or in competence.*” (Ellis, 1994:58). This reflection was originally made by Corder (1989); indeed, he clarifies the difference between an error and a mistake in relation to competence and performance. He defines an error as the arisen deviation resulting from a lack of the target language knowledge (since competence refers to the knowledge of the target language system and rules); whereas, a mistake is the arisen deviation from or as a result of an insufficient control of the target language knowledge (since performance means the control of that knowledge). Besides, this reference leads Corder to characterize errors as systematic and mistakes as non-systematic.

2.3.2 The systematic and non-systematic errors:

According to Corder (1989:168), errors are systematic deviant forms because they diverge from the target language system. Mistakes are non-systematic deviant forms because they reflect problems in performance, and they do not necessarily reflect problems in competence. His argument on this is his explanation of mistakes' sources of emergence. He explains that mistakes are the product of chance circumstances like physical and psychological sources. He claims that as adults, we are continually committing errors of one sort or another in our normal speeches. This occurrence is due to “*memory lapses, physical states such as tiredness and psychological conditions such as strong emotion*”, but these errors in performance “*do not reflect a defect in our knowledge of our own language*” (Corder, *ibid*). Following Corder's argument, Ellis (1994:51) concludes that:

“Mistakes, then, are performance phenomena and are, of course, regular features of native-speaker speech, reflecting processing failures that arise as a result of competing plans, memory limitations, and lack of automaticity.”

Accordingly, one might accept that *a mistake is in itself an error but typically a non-systematic one*. In addition, the two above quotations show that since mistakes do not reflect a lack of competence, they can be easily discerned and corrected. This feature does not merely characterize the language of native speakers but its foreign speakers too. Dušková (1989:219) considers mistakes as the forms which the speaker is able to correct. She states:

“Mistakes in performance are defined as those of which the speaker is immediately aware in the same way as a native speaker is immediately conscious of a slip of the tongue...”

2.3.3 A critical view of the error/mistake distinction:

What can be noticed from the above quotations is the fact that their authors consider the mistake significance from spoken outputs' contexts. They note that though adults' speeches contain mistakes, they are excused. On the other hand, one would question if they are excused in written outputs' contexts. It has been already mentioned that speech is part of writing, and what distinguishes a spoken output from a written one is the quality of consistency (Harris:1993, Baynham and Maybin:1996, cf. Chapter 01 p: 13). A spoken output may not always be consistent because speech conventionally knows some kind of freedom so that the language rules do not control it; whereas, a written form should be consistent (controlled).

In addition, the feasibility of Corder's distinction is somehow doubtful because one would ask whether the unwanted/deviant forms in our advanced learners' written outputs are regarded as mistakes (non-systematic) or errors (systematic). It is true that students' written outputs are inspired by their interior speeches, so, if pursuing his distinction to answer this question, one would conclude that any deviation in this respect is a mistake. For example, if a deviant form is the absence/omission of the '-s' morpheme in a verb to indicate the present simple with the third person singular, it is then a mistake. This does not mean that the learner is incompetent because his mistake resulted from a bad control of the present simple rule. It did not occur because of his/her lack of knowledge of this rule because he/she, as an advanced learner, has already received such a rule. His deviant form signs a problem in his performance only. This also confirms Ellis' earlier claim that states that any deviation may reflect a problem either in performance or in competence.

However, Corder's distinction and Ellis's assignment restrict the reflection of a deviant form: if it is not a problem of performance, it is one of competence and vice versa. Thus, one would admit that there is no deviant form that reflects a problem in both as it is illustrated in the above example. However, is it always the case that a mistake reflects a performance problem and not a competence one? That is why the use of the word "*either*" in Ellis assignment and the use of competence and performance in this context seem problematic.

Another important issue is that competence cannot be observed directly as performance. It is through performance, whether oral or written, that we can reach competence. If we take for granted Corder's as well as Ellis's intentions, it may imply that only mistakes (the non-systematic errors) can be seen and found because they are in performance, but systematic errors are not visible; they can probably be deduced. Therefore, though learners are low-performers, they are competent. Nevertheless, if the deviant form in the previous example (an omission of the "-s" morpheme) is a recurrent or a persistent deviation i.e. it is detected throughout the academic years of an advanced learner, is it called a mistake or an error? More precisely, is it a systematic or a non-systematic error? It is believed that the detection of a deviant form over years, makes it resident in the learner's mind, and its residence in his/her mind means resident in his/her knowledge –it exists in his/her language system. So, it will not reflect a problem either in the learner's performance or in his/her competence, but in both.

As a result, the error/mistake distinction in writing does not always reflect weaknesses just in performance or in competence, but to set a reasonable decision calls for other factors such as the time factor, the error types and the error sources. It is believed that to decide if an error reflects a failure in performance or in competence or in both, it is necessary to deal with error analysis, because this will help to have some - if not all - evidence about what the types of errors are, their times of appearance (rare or frequent), and why they are produced. This may also further help to know how improvement in writing can be achieved successfully.

2.4 The analysis of errors:

In a first place, educators felt and still feel the necessity to analyse errors in order to understand and explain why students' productions diverge from the target language system. Moreover, due to error analysis, educators discover that errors are varied and can be classified according to their nature, time as well as of appearance. In addition, error analysis means also error treatment. Foreign language researches have effectively shown that this treatment is manifested in countless

studies. These studies have been based on different hypotheses, suggested by several error analysts.

2.4.1 The error analysis approaches:

In analysing errors, two well-known approaches emerged: the Constructive Analysis and the Error Analysis, abbreviated as (CA) and (EA) respectively. Both approaches meet in explaining why errors occur. They were/are designed to discover the sources of errors. Although this was their meeting point, the approaches have emerged as opposite. Indeed, their analysis differs in terms of hypothesis, methodology and findings.

2.4.1.1 The Constructive Analysis Approach:

CA hypothesized that the learner's product is created through a combination of two different language systems: his/her native language system and the target language system. Since the learner's native system is different from that of the target language, his/her product may contain errors based on the differences between the two systems. Concerning this point Kleinmann (in Robinett and Schachter, 1989:363) says:

“Proponents of this approach claimed that those features of the TL which were similar to the learners' NL would be relatively easy to acquire, and that those elements of the TL which differed from the learners' NL would be relatively difficult to acquire.”

Methodologically, a constructive analyst compares systematically the structures of both the native language and the target language in different manifestations to find out the erroneous structures. Furthermore, CA findings are twofold: theoretical and referential. The former set up its theory of analysis which is *the ability to predict problems encountering foreign language learners in productions*. Therefore, as a foreign English speaker and a native Arabic speaker, I may guess in advance that an Arabic learner's product may, for example, contain errors in the use of capitalization because it is not part of his/her native language system. Or, his product may contain errors of punctuation, not because punctuation does not belong to his NL, but because the use of punctuation, in his NL is different from that of the target language (i.e. English). The second finding of CA explains the unique source for error production. Its analysts confirm that errors occur primarily as a result of interference when the learners do transfer native language habits into the target language. (Ellis, 1994:299).² In summary, the information gathered from the CA approach, as it is conceived, is central in the sense that a deviant form, is

² - For more information, cf. to Robinett and Schachter, 1989:6-137. It concludes some literatures that studies errors on the basis of CA theory.

terminologically called, classified and justified by a static notion which is an error of transfer (an intralingual error).

However, other analysts have emerged with new studies on error production from the 1960s. They have weakened the usefulness of the CA approach, and most of them have rejected its hypothesis, methodology and even results. Their argument is that CA has been an inadequate predictor to error sources because it has limited the source of an error to the NL interference only, but their new studies have evoked other sources for error production. Most of these studies are based on the Error Analysis approach, inspired by a new methodology and firstly set up by Corder. Its main methodological steps are the collection of a language product, the identification of errors, their description and their explanation.

2.4.1.2 The Error Analysis Approach:

In EA methodology, a sample of a language product is collected; then, errors are analysed through the main methodological steps. Every step completes the other, for instance, the identification and the description of errors may indicate their types and times of appearance in a collected sample. Furthermore, they may help in explaining the error occurrences (sources). An explanation of these steps is provided below since the study of students' written productions in this dissertation is based on EA methodology.

2.4.2 The collection of a sample of a language product:

According to Ellis (1994), an error analyst may collect a sample of a language product in relation to different factors. Among these factors are the time factor, the amount of the sample and the background of the sample. The error analyst uses the time factor to refer to the period of time when he collects his sample. This collection can either be cross-sectional (i.e. at a single point in time) or longitudinal (i.e. at successive points in time) (Ellis, 1994:50). On the basis of the amount of the productions, the error analyst decides whether to collect a massive sample i.e. to collect a great quantity of learners' productions, or a specific sample i.e. to collect a small quantity of learners' productions, or an incidental sample which means one sample of a single learner's language product. Finally, using the sample background, the error analyst defines/presents the material of the collected sample. Ellis (1994:49) illustrates these factors in the following table:

| Factors | Description |
|------------------------------|---|
| A Language | |
| Medium | Learner production can be oral or written. |
| Genre | Learner production may take the form of a conversation, a lecture, an essay, a letter, etc. |
| Content | The topic the learner is communicating about. |
| B Learner | |
| Level | Elementary, intermediate, or advanced. |
| Mother tongue | The learner's L1. |
| Language learning experience | This may be classroom or naturalistic or a mixture of the two. |

Table E. *Factors to consider when collecting samples of learner language*

2.4.3 The identification of errors:

In a collected sample of a language product, an error is identified and/or described either thanks to its *type* vis-à-vis the nature of the target language, its *source* and its *times of occurrence over time*, or to any other factor suggested by the error analyst. Methodologically, this was possible by locating the error place within the TL items and rules (i.e. system). Reviewing studies, undertaken in the context of CA and EA approaches, one determines effectively that a TL item can be produced erroneously from different aspects: either this item is *misused* (vis-à-vis its rule in the TL system), or it is *misplaced* (vis-à-vis the TL syntax), or it is *wrongfully chosen*, or it is *missed* (omitted where its presence is necessary) or it is *added* (where it should not be). Of course, these aspects of error detection are not restrictively branched out by a contrastive or an error analyst. It happens that, we (teachers) identify these aspects of error production while assessing our learners' performance through listening or reading, even if we do not describe them in a sophisticated or scientific manner.

However, identification as a procedural step in the EA Approach is a matter of debate among error analysts. For instance, there are deviant forms which an error analyst locates or identifies as errors whilst another analyst may not consider them as so (Dušková, 1989:217). Furthermore, the words 'identification' and 'description' of errors are used interchangeably, and in other studies, they are distinguished (cf. Schachter and Celce-Murcia 1989:276/7; Ellis, 1994:52/4/7). Nevertheless, this dissertation uses meaningfully each of them separately. It is believed that once an error is *identified* (i.e. detected), it is then *described* (i.e. characterized) –though these steps are complementary in the same context (analysing errors). In the former, errors have to be identified according to the general definition of error which is any form deviant from those of the TL; then they are described according to one of the stated factors (type, source and frequency).

Therefore, to avoid difficulties in identifying errors in a language corpus, one would admit that an error's detection will be according to what a researcher (an error analyst or an evaluator) conventionally feels that an x-detected language form is an error while he/she is listening to a spoken production or he/she is reading a written production. Thereafter, once identifying a deviant form, he/she characterizes it qualitatively and/or quantitatively i.e. provides the features of description.

2.4.4 The description of errors:

From the 1960s, new studies on error analysis have emerged and have been fruitful because they have provided pedagogues and teachers with plenty of descriptions based on errors made by learners of a foreign language. These studies/descriptions have been undertaken by several error analysts on both language faculties: speech (utterances) and writing (sentences). Like the identification of errors, analysts have described errors according to the three mentioned factors: *the error nature, its source and its frequency over time*. Their findings (i.e. their descriptions) are either qualitative or quantitative or a combination of both. Sometimes their results meet qualitatively and in other cases they differ. On the other hand, and absolutely, they differ quantitatively because of the number of the population and/or the sample of the language products used for analysis. The efforts of error analysts have been beneficial. Three main aspects emerge after the description of errors in any collected language product:

- a. The nominalization of an error:** most of the identified errors are given a specific name or term.
- b. The categorisation of an error:** most of the identified errors are arranged within a specific class or type called 'descriptive taxonomies'.
- c. The causality of an error:** most of the identified errors are assigned to a specific source or reason of appearance i.e. explaining why it is committed.

Before exploring examples of describing errors and their three benefits to pedagogy, two points seem necessary to mention: the first one concerns the population(s) or the case(s) study in these analyses, and the second one is the description of errors as a methodological step in the EA approach. The studies on error analysis concerned both the NS and NNS of English. However and since the point-study in this dissertation concerns EFL learners' productions, the descriptions of errors made by NS of English are ignored, not because their errors are not regarded as deviant forms of English, but simply because: 1) the population of this current research is a foreign

English one (i.e. Arabic speakers³), and 2) it is suggested that reviewing a literature on errors made by English foreign learners may shed light on why the population studied in this dissertation have disabilities in writing good English. The second important point about describing errors is that error analysts agree on the fact that “*not all errors can be described*” (i.e. cannot be named, classified, explained and/or counted). Indeed, they confirm that this methodological step (errors’ description) is not always an easy procedure. Meanwhile, this difficulty is already noticed in the identification of errors as it is explicitly indicated by Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1989:276):

“Errors are typically described with regard to the target language system. The question is asked: “Is this a deviation from the target language?” as all investigators know it is not always easy to decide. But even when this decision is possible the next question is really the critical one: “What structure in this error is?”

2.4.4.1 The descriptive factors in the nominalisation of errors:

With the emergence of studies on analysing errors, a set of terms have been assigned by different error analysts to a particular error in order to specify it or distinguish it from another error. In terms of theory, the error analyst could probably name an error according to the previously stated factors. Each name indicates either the type of an error, its source (a possible or a suggested cause for its production), and/or its time(s) of appearance during the evaluation phase. Among these terms, the researcher has chosen 24 and lists them in Fig. 4 (cf. appendix 10).

2.4.4.2 The target language factor:

Errors have been primarily named and classified according to their type vis-à-vis the nature of the TL system: pronunciation, grammar and semantics. This variability in the nature of the TL has been used as taxonomies for categorising or classifying qualitatively errors, and even counting them. In this context, two main descriptive fields emerge as a consequence of error description: *the linguistic errors*, branched into: lexical errors (vocabulary), phonological errors (pronunciation) and grammatical errors (morphology and syntax), and *the pragmatic errors* which involve interpretive errors related to the socio-linguistic features (misunderstanding of the speakers’ intention or failure to apply the rules of conversation or discourse aspects). Only the former is described along this material because it meets with the point-study of this current investigation which is the evaluation of students’ linguistic competence/performance in writing from a formal perspective.

³ - Cf. chapter 3, pp: 77.

The linguistic categorisation is said to be the simplest descriptive classification because it allows “for both a detailed description of specific errors and also for a quantification of a corpus of errors” (Ellis, 1994:54). Its main descriptive taxonomies are: lexis, pronunciation and grammar. In addition, the TL grammar is in itself a multi-pot of items and rules, so it was advocated by analysts to adopt another sub-categories or secondary taxonomies (morphology and syntax) as a facilitator way to describe or classify the occurred grammatical errors –both qualitatively and quantitatively when it is desired. In each sub-category, grammatical errors have been labelled by any of the error identification aspects (omission, addition, disordering and a misuse of a TL grammatical item).

A constructive or an error analyst, once identifying a deviation, describes its nature or its kind by identifying its physical state comparatively to the TL (a qualitative description). Also, the ability to identify errors varies from a researcher to another. Corder (in Ellis, 1994:52) indicates that when errors are easily or rapidly identified, then are called *overt errors* because “there is a clear deviation in the TL form”; (eg: I runned all the way). When their identification is meaningfully somehow late or inferred, then are called *covert errors*, and which may occur in well-formed products but “which do not mean the learner intended them to mean”; (eg. It was stopped).

Whether the identification of an error is rapid or late, it is found that learners, generally, make errors in both comprehension and production. Accordingly, Ronald 1993 refers to errors in comprehension as “receptive” or “a faulty reception” which result probably from a misunderstanding of a TL form, and are manifested in wrong word choices and word orders. Burt, (in Ellis, 1994:63-66), denotes that “they affect overall sentence organisation” i.e. they are related to the content or the message of the output as in this example: “the instructors were boring” (instead of: the instructors were bored). This type of errors is also called *global errors*, and they may be categorised within the so-called lexical or vocabulary taxonomy. They manifest “instances of a misuse or a distortion of word” as in “when I remind (recall) my last travel (journey)” or in “last year, I attended (visited) Eastern Germany” (Dušková, 1989:216).

Errors in production, like grammatical errors, are called systematic errors. They are also called *local errors*, to which Burt (in Ellis, 1994:66) refers as those errors which “affect single elements in a sentence” i.e. they are related with the form of the output; as in the following example: “the instructors was bored” (instead of: the instructor was bored or the instructors were bored). The misuse of “-s” (i.e. a morphological error) in any English plural form or in a verb with a third person singular in the present simple, for example, is called a local error. Moreover, if an error is

identified as holding a mixture of different TL deviations, it cannot be named specifically; it is broadly called a *miscellaneous error*. The following are examples of studies on qualitative description of errors.

Richards (1989:209-214) describes cross-sectionally six classifications of errors made by an ethnographic population of eleven backgrounds (Japanese, Chinese, Burmese, French, Czech, Polish, Tagalog, Maori, Maltese and the major Indian and West African languages). His findings are exposed in six tables (cf. Robinett and Schachter, 1989:209-214). He manages each category of errors in a single table as follows: category 01: *Errors in Production of Verb Groups*, category 02: *Errors in the Distribution of Verb Groups*, category 03: *Miscellaneous errors*, category 04: *Errors in the Uses of Prepositions*, Category 05: *The use of Articles*, category 06: *The use of Questions*.

With a homogeneous population (50 Czech post-graduate students of English), Dušková (1989:216-239) describes cross-sectionally nine classes of errors in their written productions by means of two main taxonomies: lexical and grammatical ones. She exposes lexical errors in one table and devotes eight tables for the grammatical ones as follows: eight categories in the **Grammatical taxonomy**: *Morphological Errors*, *Errors in Model Verb*, *Errors in Tenses*, *Errors in the Use of Articles*, *Errors in Word Order*, *Syntactic errors*, *Errors in Constructions and Government* and *Errors in the Use of Prepositions*; whereas, one category is described in the **Lexical taxonomy**. Dušková also provides a new descriptive aspect of errors called the error grossness. Although evaluators consider that errors are equal (i.e. an error is an error whatever its descriptive aspect is), she claims that there is a whole scale of deviant forms varying with the degree of deviation. This even helps her in arranging errors into an orderly increasing deviation starting from the lower scale to the upper one as it is obviously marked in “*I’ll not speak*” and “*I’ll be wait*.”⁴

Like Richards’ features of study, but longitudinally, Kroll (1990) describes by means of six categories errors in 100 essays of an ethnographic population (25 advanced English students from Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Persian and Spanish backgrounds). She exposes them in one table and each error category contains its typical errors or sub-classes of errors (cf. appendix 11).

Corder’s error definition or ‘his error/mistake distinction’ involves also a descriptive fact about errors called error systematicity (Ellis, 1994:56). He categorizes errors according to the TL system into three types: 1) *pre-systematic errors*: those which the learner makes before knowing the TL rule (i.e. his/her unawareness of the existence of a particular rule in the TL system); 2)

⁴ Cf. Robinett and Schachter, 1989:217-218 where Dušková cites examples on error grossness into four categories.

systematic errors: those occurring when the learner discovers the rule but it is not the right one, and 3) *post-systematic errors*: those occurring when the learner knows the right TL rule but uses it incorrectly, i.e. makes a mistake (a non systematic error). Although the nature of the TL constitutes a crucial point or a reference in describing those deviations from its system, it was not the only factor considered. Other factors such as the source of errors and their frequency over time play other descriptive features.

2.4.4.3 The source factor:

The sources of errors have been another important factor, in addition to the nature of the TL one, in describing errors qualitatively. Errors have also been named and classified according to other possible reasons for their occurrence. These reasons stand as a cause to explain or justify an error occurrence, and they are either identified due to specific indicators or proposed as a personal belief (without absolute statements). Flick states (in Ellis, 1994:61) that:

“The assignment of a particular error to such categories as ‘transfer’, ‘over-generalization’ or ‘ambiguous’ has been largely an arbitrary matter, subject to the individual biases and point of view of the researcher.”

In figure 4 (cf. appendix 10), *induced*, *interference*, *intralingual*, and *developmental* errors are examples or deviations identified by a specific indicator source. For instance, induced errors are said to be occurring due to wrong or insufficient ways in teaching a TL item or a rule. Studying cross-sectionally errors made by a homogenous population (Tunisian intermediate and advanced learners of English), Stenson (1989:258) identifies induced vocabulary errors such as “pray/worship” and “should/must” which learners use them similarly in any production of the TL because they have been previously taught these items incorrectly. She states that: “*a teacher may inadvertently mislead students by the way he defines a lexical item, or by the order in which he presents material.*” (Stenson, 1989:256).

The L1 effect is an indicator source to interference errors because the learner transfers his/her L1 habits into the TL language, and both CA and EA findings have demonstrated this fact; whereas, the learner’s state of acquiring the TL is an indicator for both intralingual and developmental errors. Intralingual errors are those errors “*originating within the English itself*” (Celce-Murcia and Schachter, 1989:274), and are related to two states of learning a TL rule: 1) a faulty generalization of a TL rule, as when the learner generalizes, for example, the addition of the ‘ed’ morpheme to all verbs in English to mark the past simple, or the addition of the ‘s’ morpheme to all nouns in English to mark the plural forms, and 2) an ignorance of a TL rule restriction, as

when the learner applies incompletely a TL rule during production or he fails to learn conditions under which this x-TL rule is applied. Finally, developmental errors are those deviations occurring due to the learners' false hypothesized concepts on the TL, as when the learner attempts to build up hypotheses about the English language from his/her short or limited experience of it in the classrooms or textbooks (Richards, 1989:199). In addition to the sources of errors and their place in the TL system, the frequency of errors in a collected sample of language (cross-sectionally or longitudinally) plays another factor in error descriptions. This frequency has led to naming errors as well as to counting them.

2.4.4.4 The frequency factor over time:

Errors have also been described according to their time of occurrence. In terms of practice, the error analyst could technically describe an identified error on the basis of the time of its appearance by using a technique called *relative frequency*. The latter is designed to count the number of errors in both its general definition and its descriptive aspect (its nature and source) in a collected sample of a language product. Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1989:278) define this technique "as numerator the number of times an error was committed and as denominator the number of times the error type could have occurred." The strategy is that the analyst counts the occurrence(s) of an error or its type; for example, if it occurs one time only once or more than once within a collected corpus at a specific point of time (i.e. cross-sectionally) or over different points of time (i.e. longitudinally).

The resulting names for this factor are: "a *nonce error*" for an error which occurs once either in a cross-sectional analysis or in a longitudinal one; whereas, "a *frequent*" or "a *recurrent error*" refer to an error occurring several times in a cross-sectional analysis and "a *persistent error*" or "a *fossil*" occurs in a longitudinal one. Examples of error analysis undertaken by means of error frequency are Dušková's (1989:215-39) and Kroll's (1990:140-53). Dušková identifies cross-sectionally a total number of 1007 errors, ranged between 756 recurrent/frequent errors and 251 nonce errors (cf. appendix 12). Kroll identifies longitudinally a total number of 2307 errors (cf. appendix 11).

Schachter and Celce-Murcia (ibid) justify the use of this strategy as "more informative than earlier absolute statements". It is informative in the sense that it provides teachers and pedagogues with scientific data or statements rather than vague or general statements or beliefs (i.e. objectivity vs. subjectivity). Also, it seems a cooperative tool and a helpful procedure during or after describing/analysing errors, and works hand in hand with the other two factors: the error type or

classification and its explanation/source since it informs about them. In describing the nature of an error, this quantification indicates firstly how many times an erroneous form is frequently produced by EFL performers, and secondly where this item can be classified, both in order to decide which TL item is difficult to acquire by these learners. In the second factor, it clarifies implicitly or explicitly why such an error is produced, i.e. which factor forces its inducement in order to suggest a possible remediation to facilitate its acquisition by its producers.

Moreover, Dušková explains that frequency can be split into two levels: high frequency vs. low frequency. Basing her analysis on error taxonomies, she notices that the highest frequent category of errors lies in the use of the English articles. They constitute 75% (i.e. 260 errors from the total number of 1007). Among these 260 deviations, 228 errors are recurrent, of which 61.40% (101 errors) are typically **the omission of the definite article “the”**⁵. She concludes that the use of the English article “the” is the Czech’s linguistic/grammatical point of difficulty. On another hand, Kroll (1990) finds that the most recurrent category of errors is the word-level choice. They constitute 48.10% which is an average percentage of class vs. home, of which 11.40% determine **the lexical/phrase choice** as the highest frequent item within this classification⁶. Kroll concludes that her ethnographic population of study exhibits a major difficulty in choosing the right English lexis, and that this difficulty is fossilized.

On the other side, this strategy –though useful, is neither always used nor always ignored in every error analysis. In fact, not all analysts who identified errors use it, perhaps because identifying the EFL students’ point(s) of difficulty in acquiring English is not necessarily confirmed by this technique. Examples of non-quantitative studies are Richards (1989), Selinker (1989) and Stenson’s (1989). Richards (1989:200) identifies cross-sectionally **a misuse of English preposition** which appears as the point of difficulty for an ethnographic population of eleven backgrounds (cited above). Selinker (1989:182) identifies three main systematic points of difficulty in acquiring English grammar: **a misuse of articles, plural forms and the past tense**. Like Selinker’s features of study, Stenson identifies two main points of difficulty: one in lexis category and the other in grammar category. At lexis, the learners have difficulties with **word distortion** and also **vocabulary choice** (as one of Kroll’s findings) (Stenson, 1989:258-9); whereas, in the grammatical category, their productions exhibit morphological difficulties,

⁵ Cf. Robinett and Schachter , p: 237

⁶ Cf. appendix 11.

precisely in **the use of the “-s” morpheme in the English plural forms and the third person singular in the verb forms** (Stenson, 1989:263-264).

However, what can be pointed out from the above data is that it is difficult to say whether those deviant forms with a high frequency are more difficult to acquire than those with a low frequency. About this fact Dušková (1989:218) states that this: “*lower frequency of an error need not necessarily mean that the point in question is less difficult, but simply that the point itself occurred only in some (not in all) papers.*” Furthermore, this confirms the belief that errors cannot all be counted, thus cannot all be described.

The researcher shares this belief on the grounds that an error analyst is simply a human being. He/she is not able to count all the deviant forms in a collected language product simply because he/she is not a sophisticated calculator, as it may happen that he/she may overlook an erroneous form unconsciously or even consciously because he/she does not regard some deviations as errors. Besides, regardless of the fruitful results of the cross-sectional studies, their findings are partially effective. As a consequence, one would admit that in order for an error analyst to decide on the EFL learners’ point (s) of difficulty in acquiring English, studies on errors must be ongoing longitudinally and not limited at a specific point of time. This feature was meant to be investigated in this current dissertation.

Another critical issue about errors is that: “does an identified error stand only for a typical descriptive aspect i.e. can be named only as grammatical, or due to interference, or persistent, etc?” Or: “can an error share different descriptive aspects (names) in a collected sample of a language product i.e. can an x-grammatical error be an interference error or a frequent error, etc?” In most error studies, it has been proved that an identified error can also be viewed through a combination of different descriptive types once it exhibits the characteristics or the indicators of these types. Concerning this fact, Richards (1989:198) states that:

“These [deviations] are representative of sorts of errors we might expect from anyone learning English as a second language. They are typical of systematic errors in English usage which are found in numerous case studies of the English errors of speakers of particular mother tongues. They are the sorts of mistakes which persist from week to week and which recur from one year to the next with any group of learners.”

2.5 The different causes of errors:

The production of errors, though it is natural, is a fascinating fact, especially if it becomes a continuous phenomenon with advanced learners since it indicates their difficulties in performing with a target language; thus it influences badly their performance and it reflects their incompetence. Meanwhile, understanding why learners commit errors has led to find out remediation to reduce their difficulties and to achieve good progress in acquiring the target language and academic success, too.

In addition, although the sources of errors cited previously are informative, they are not sufficient to explain or to understand why learners commit errors. As a consequence, and for proof-reading, it is necessary to search for other factors responsible for the existence of students' deficiencies in writing, especially those which are frequent and persistent, being aware of the natural existence of errors while correcting students' written outputs. In doing so, five general factors or causes which work as inhibitors to students' progress in writing are identified. They are presented in figure 5 (cf. appendix 13) in addition to a number of related aspects, tied and classified with each general cause as an attempt to clarify them. According to that figure, it is believed that students' deficiencies in writing increase due to: *psycholinguistic factors*, *psychological factors*, *the teaching factor*, *time factor* and *evaluation/assessment methods*.

2.5.1 The time factor and students' disabilities in writing:

It is thought that the devoted time to answer an exam question (i.e. to write it) is not sufficient. But before exploring this point, one would ask "how is time associated or related with writing?" It was already mentioned that writing itself is both a process and a product (cf. p: 10-11). Thinking/brainstorming, organizing, drafting or editing are not momentary (i.e. instances of time), but are themselves periodic stages which naturally need time, short or long, to occur. Therefore, they are necessary for any writer, young or advanced, to process his/her performance until achieving a final written production. In this context, Harris (1993:10) states that: "*writing is a process that occurs over a period of time, particularly writers pause, think, write, pause, think, revise and so on.*" Besides, it is suggested that if learners are given enough time, their written realisations will be proficient because "*the amount of time allowed to produce an essay might affect the level of masterpiece.*" (Kroll, 1990:140). She (1990:141) clarifies:

"Time may also be a key factor in other aspects of writing, such as the ability to produce a text with control over such discourse features as organization and coherence."

Accordingly, time becomes associated with the writing ability. However, the belief that candidates need more time to complete successfully a written production is generally rejected nowadays. One of the recent conferences on students as writers, confirms that whether students require additional time, in writing presumably to allow more drafting and to revise, is not necessary i.e. is not an absolute fact (Peyton, 1992). He also states, according to the findings of Hamp-Lyons's research, that:

“English proficient writers do very little revising and don't make good use of additional time anyway. Therefore, they don't perform differently when given 30 minutes, an hour, or even several days to write.”

In addition, in exploring this point, it appears that not only the time-amount question is discussed as a responsible factor for a successful production, but also “*where that time (that amount of time) is given i.e. the writing environment*”. According to Myles, a writing environment “*is perceived to be stressful or threatening*” and for instance, during writing performed under timed test conditions, “*learners' affective states can influence cognition.*” Why the learner's affective states? Because this environment will raise students' anxiety, a crucial fact that disturbs their writing process and thus influences negatively their writing product. Kroll (ibid) states that: “*many students and teachers feel that writing under pressure is a very unnatural situation and perhaps cannot lead to work that is truly representative of anyone's best capacities.*” Moreover, this fact is noticed with the NS and the NNS of English, who frequently comment that under examination conditions their writing deteriorates (O'Brien, 1988). One of their comments, restated by O'Brien (in Robinson, 1988:67) determines that:

“...constant anxiety that reached panic levels due to time constraint; unable to think clearly –SEVERE ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS; general feeling of under-achievement and dissatisfaction; embarrassment at style produced and lexical simplicity ...”

The above points show that evaluating students' written performances through examination is inadequate since it would not provide objective judgments about their real states of competence or qualification. Therefore, what can be suggested is to assess their production in an unthreatening environment (such as the home) and to accept homework papers instead of exam-papers. This suggestion can be, at the same time, regarded as a remediation to students' disabilities. From such a perspective, an investigation dealt by Kroll (1990) is very interesting to cite. Her two basic enquiries were: “*to what extent does the amount of time allowed for the preparation of an essay affect its success both on the syntactic and the discourse levels?*” and “*does time buy reduction of error and improvement in rhetorical competency?*” (Koll, 1990:142). She

hypothesizes that exploring the effects of time on writing performance in different testing situations (such as home vs. class) may determine the efficacy of both the time allowance and environment as remediation.

She conducted a research on error analysis of 100 essays of 25 advanced learners (stated previously). Her experiment was done across two distinct writing contexts: in class with one hour i.e. under time pressure, and at home with 11-14 days, i.e. freedom of time without any kind of help to students at this period. Her writing evaluation rubrics or the targeted areas were on 1): the sentence-level syntactic construction (language accuracy) (cf. appendix 11), and 2) on the global-level essay (discourse aspects). In the syntactic taxonomy, every morphological, syntactic and lexical error was identified, classified and recorded in each composition. It was supposed that an extra time would decrease the number of errors; however, Kroll's findings determined the contrary: 1165 errors at home vs. 1142 in class. For example, the percentage of errors in English articles—though under pressure (in class) was interestingly lower (10.8%) than the one at home (14.0%). In addition, the percentage of punctuation errors shares the same description as articles (11.8% vs. 13.5%). The fact that led her to conclude that: *“it does not appear that additional time in and of itself leads to a sufficiently improved essay.”* (Kroll, 1990:150). As a result, evaluating students' written performance through an essay- type examination (under pressure of time) is not a harmful procedure but furthermore an academic feature which proves students' real competence.

2.5.2 The teaching factor:

It is thought that students' disabilities or errors in writing are partly related to the quality of teaching the target language since teaching constitutes, for the learners, the primary means for the acquisition of the features of the target language. Some teaching schools believe that error frequency in students' performance is due to a bad teaching quality of the TL items and rules. Corder (1989:163-164) states that:

“the school which maintains that if we were to achieve a perfect teaching method the errors would never be committed in the first place, and therefore the occurrence of errors is merely a sign of the present inadequacy of our teaching techniques.”

Also, Stenson's research findings (cited previously) show that error frequency occurs or is induced because of the wrong teaching of a TL vocabulary or rule. She states (1989:260) that while teaching *“a final danger lies in over-reliance on grammatical terminology without sufficient attention to function in the sentence.”*, and that for example *“grammatical errors that would not*

ordinarily occur may also be induced through misunderstanding of meaning or usage or occasionally through faulty explanation.” (Stenson, 1989:259). As a result, faulty explanation of a TL item leads to faulty reception of this item. On how learners build such reception, Ellis (1994:60) explains that:

“There are probably cases when learners do internalize faulty rules derived from instruction and in such cases the resulting errors will reflect their competence.”

In addition, Richards (1989) explains that developmental errors, in the corpus of his study (cited previously), are *“sometimes due to poor gradation of teaching items”*. For example, he notices that the learners’ use of the present continuous instead of the past simple or the present simple when writing about events is assigned to the wrong presentation of this TL form in some teaching textbooks/courses. Other error analysts explain that intralingual and induced errors reoccur due to drills designed for training learners to use the taught TL item (Selinker, 1989; Stenson, 1989). Selinker denotes that nearly in all English proficiency, Serbo-Croatian students exhibit a non “he/she” distinction as a problem where their performance always shows “he”. He (1989:180) claims that:

“It seems to be the case that the resultant IL form, in the first instance, is due to the transfer of training; textbooks and teachers in this interlingual situation almost always present drills with he and never with she.”

Similarly, Stenson determines that the way a drill on using a TL item is structured may mislead learners because it forgets the semantic content of the produced output (cf. Robinett and Schachter, 1989:260-261). She (1989:260) says that:

“In reducing textbook exercises to rote mechanical repetition, students produce some bizarre semantic violations that would be unlikely to appear in real speech (language product).”

Moreover, it has already been noticed that teaching the target language can be approached differently, and that teachers do adopt different methods or techniques while presenting a TL material. This point led some researchers to enquire about whether frequent deficiencies in students’ performances result from these approaches. For instance, Silva (in Kroll, 1990:19) wonders if *“a given approach is informed by an appropriate and adequate theory of FL writing”*, and *“to what extent programmes based on the approach have been shown to be efficient and effective in improving students’ writing?”* He points out that the teaching approaches are not sufficiently grounded in appropriate and adequate theory because nearly in every approach not all the TL elements are taught. Therefore, if a learners’ product exhibits an absence of some of the TL

items, it is because the missed items have not been a focus in the approach these learners have been taught with. In this respect, Silva (1990:19-20) mentions that:

“Each [teaching approach] privileging and largely limiting its attention to a single (albeit important) element of writing. Controlled composition focuses on the lexical and syntactic features of a text, whereas ESL – current–traditional rhetoric focuses on discourse level text structures. The process approach attends to the writer’s composing behaviours; the EAP approach focuses on the reader, in the form of the academic discourse community.”

Besides, some EFL teachers believe that the Communicative Language approach (CLT) is the main cause of failure in writing because this approach focuses more on speech i.e. on a spoken performance rather than a written one (Benseddik, 2000:1/51-52). Others believe that the focus on the writing product approach in teaching writing does not help students’ to write accurately because the writing product is an end, so, what makes this end good is related to what happens before, i.e. the writing process. Based on his experiment with third year secondary school students, which advocates the writing process approach, Benseddik (2000:42) shows that EFL students *“gradually want more teacher involvement and guidance, especially at the revision (editing) stage”*. In addition, Ziv (1984) and Freedman (1987) indicate similarly that *“when the teacher intervenes as the student is writing and revising, the final product shows improvement over the intermediate drafts”* (in Leki, in Kroll, 1990:64). However, one enquires about academic examinations where teachers’ intervention is not allowed. This fact is also indicated by Silva (1990:16) who claims that *“a process orientation ignores certain types of important academic tasks (particularly essay exams)”*. According to Horowitz, (in Silva, *ibid*) confirms that this fact:

“gives students a false impression on how university writing will be evaluated... [It] overemphasizes the individual’s psychological functioning and neglects ...the realities of academia of academia”.

2.5.3 Psychological and psycholinguistic factors:

2.5.3.1 Anxiety:

Some researchers believe that the source of an error is not related to teaching (i.e. teachers and approaches), but it is tied with its doer (i.e. learners). As a result, psychological and psycholinguistic features seem to affect learners’ productions. From a psychological point of view, two well-known factors for error production emerge: learners’ anxiety and their demotivation towards the FL writing. The anxiety point has already been mentioned with the time and environment factors (cf. p: 51-53). Of course, not only time and environment may be seen as stimuli for students’ anxiety. There are other stimuli such as the nature of the exam

question or the subject being loaded with the exam question. However, with advanced learners, especially university students, this latter fact has minor influence because the content of university modulations is clear for them.

2.5.3.2 Demotivation:

Learners' demotivation is indicated either by an absence of motivation or lack of motivation towards the act of writing itself. It was previously noted that motivation is considered as a potential factor to develop progress in writing with English (cf. chapter 1, p: 20-21). In fact, learners' attitudes, motivation and beliefs can really explain why some FL writers *perform better* than others (Melouk, 1991; Myles, 2002). For instance, some learners, when asked if they enjoy writing in English, inform that "*it's a waste of time*" or "*English sounds more spoken than written*". These kinds of students' confessions show that writing is disregarded, and they will progressively make students passive. Therefore, they will exhibit lack (if not an absence) of practising writing, a fact which has already been mentioned as another potential factor for developing the capacity to write accurately the target language (cf. chapter 1, p: 19-20).

2.5.3.3 The learner' brain or mental mechanisms:

From a psycholinguistic perspective, it is assumed that errors exhibit psycholinguistic facts about learners because, in an attempt to express themselves in the target language, learners do "*activate a latent internal structure*" which is an "*already formulated arrangement in their brains*" (Selinker, 1989:175). This brain activation features their behaviours during production and is manifested through internal structures and processes. Other language researchers refer to this fact as intermediate processes or mechanisms (George, 1989). As a way to understand error frequency, they started their investigation from what happens in the black box i.e. the learner's brain (George, 1989:159).

In doing so, and based on his definition of error (cf. p: 36), George (1989:158) hypothesizes that "*it is by observation of the differences between input and output that we deduce their nature and manner of functioning.*" He refers to the storage of information (TL items) or memory as an internal process which allows language performers to select the TL material designed for a communicative purpose. Since this selection can be sometimes incomplete (because not all input is stored), their performance will be defective or erratic. Even when information is available, if it is not memorized by the learners through practising language activities or drills from time to time, it may disappear from their language repertoires. Concerning this fact, George (1989:159) confirms that:

“Information is usually stored provisional. If there is no, or only slight subsequent for it, it fades ... Though information may be stored, inefficient search techniques may make access difficult, so that persistence seems uneconomical and, in order that some output is achieved under pressure of time, items are substituted for others in a makeshift manner.”

This also denotes that, for instance, the TL grammar remains provisional if it is not learned frequently through revision of grammar rules. Therefore, persistent grammatical errors in advanced learners may be justified by students' lack of revising the TL grammatical rules. In addition to the process of memorization, other processing problems inhibit learners from accessing their TL knowledge; consequently, they “*cause them to fall back on some alternative, non-standard rule that they find easier to access*” (Ellis, 1994:51). Among these internal processes, Selinker (1989) suggests five central mechanisms: 1) language transfer, 2) transfer of training, 3) strategies for FL learning, 4) strategies for FL communication, and 5) overgeneralization of the TL rules.

2.5.3.3.1 Language transfer:

The process of language transfer or the interference of the mother tongue has been largely viewed as the cause of learners' errors especially when these interference errors are persistent because they indicate that learners use their first language continuously. This fact has been already hypothesized by the CA approach and confirmed by its findings. Richards (1989:207) mentions that:

“interference from the mother tongue is clearly a major source of difficulty in second language learning, and constructive analysis has proved valuable areas of interlanguage interference.”

Even with the EA approach, this fact is interestingly described. For example, Dušková (1989:219) justifies the difficulty of Czech learners in using the English articles by the non-existence of articles in their mother tongue. She identifies also another kind of language interference at vocabulary level where the learners' words exhibit French spelling as in “*remarque*” (Dušková, 1989:228).

In addition, the error cause, on the basis of the language transfer process, is not merely justified by an absence of a TL item in L1 (at grammar level) or by the spelling of other languages (at orthography level), but also by the learners' understanding of a TL vocabulary with a similar meaning in his/her mother tongue (at a semantic level) as in Stenson's example: *pray* and *worship*. In any case, a class of errors can easily denote the language transfer process because these errors emerge as observable features in students' production (even in the case of the

advanced ones) as it is stated by Rutherford and Schachter (in Robinett and Schachter, 1989:303):

“It is well-known that any stage in the learning of language by adults there are observable features of learner production that can be attributed to influence by the learner’s native language. Such influences, when manifested as identifiable errors, are what one usually refers to as negative transfer or interference errors.”

Accordingly, language transfer becomes an inhibitor to EFL learners’ progress in either spoken or written performances. However, other researchers have showed that *“regardless a language prescription, writers will transfer writing abilities and strategies, whether good or deficient, from their 1L to their second language”* (Friedlander, in Kroll, 1990:109). In addition, it is advocated that EFL learners use their L1 while performing with the TL; otherwise, it would frustrate them and lead to a breakdown in communication. Edelskey’s study (1982) determines that the effect of L1 (knowledge and strategies) works as an aid rather than as an inhibitor in FL writing (Friedlander, *ibid*). Furthermore, some studies recount that L1 can positively affect FL composition because it will help FL learners, at least in the retrieval of the topic information (Friedlander, 1990:110). As a consequence, whether learners’ language transfer is manifested positively or negatively in their foreign performance, they will naturally continue to use their mother tongue willingly or unwillingly.

2.5.3.3.2 Strategies for FL learning and communication:

The processes of strategies for FL learning and communication work hand in hand because once a learner adopts any strategy in learning and performing, it is for a communicative goal. These two processes can lead to overgeneralization and transfer of training processes. In fact, as it is generally known, a strategy can be understood as the means which the learner uses as an attempt to express meanings in the foreign language. It is said that there are various internal strategies on the part of the FL learner which affect to a large extent the surface structures of his/her outputs (Selinker, 1989:181). One of these strategies is reducing the TL to a simple system by a learner. For example, rather than taking into consideration some restrictions in the TL grammatical rules, he/she either overgeneralises or builds false hypothesized concepts on a TL item, as when he/she adopts the case of some TL morphemes (*‘-ed’* and *‘-s’*, cited previously) or believes that all verbs are either transitive or intransitive.

Richards (1989:209-214) exposes another strategy called analogy. In his study, he justifies the misuse of English prepositions in relation to this strategy as when the learner, encountering a

particular preposition with one type of verb, attempts, by analogy, to use the same preposition with similar verbs. For example, an EF learner may adopt that “he said *to* me “would give” “he asked *to* me”, or “go *with* him” would give “follow *with* him”. It is clear that this strategy leads to faulty conception about the TL items, as Richards (1989:199) mentions that it “*covers instances where the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of his experience of other structures in the target language.*”

2.5.3.3.3 Fossilization:

Selinker’s psycholinguistic discovery of the five central processes gave birth to another fact about persistent errors. According to this mental reality, error persistency is of itself a psycholinguistic phenomenon called fossilization; a brain mechanism which works to keep errors remaining potentially in performance. Even when they are likely to be eradicated, they do re-appear because their re-occurrence is reinforced by one of the five processes (Selinker, 1989:178). Other authors refer to fossilization as backsliding which prevents EFL learners from reaching the NL competence (Ellis, 1994:353). As a result, one would constantly believe that whether the cause of frequent errors is due to one of the suggested factors (i.e. wrong teaching, learners’ insufficient strategies or processes, anxiety, demotivation, time or writing environment) it may not stand as the prime cause to error frequency in any performance as fossilization does. Because it is assumed that through remediation (for example: giving enough time, providing ease writing environments or even adjusting teaching approaches etc), errors still occur because they are themselves fossilized features. In this context, Selinker (1989:183) states that:

“Many IL linguistic structures are never really eradicated for most second language learners; manifestations of these structures regularly reappear in IL productive performance, especially under conditions of anxiety, shifting attention, and second language performance on subject matter which is new to the learner. It is this observation which allows us to claim that these psycholinguistic structures, even when seemingly eradicated, are still somehow present in the brain, stored by a fossilization mechanism (primarily through one of these five processes) in an IL.”

In spite of the fact that fossilization is a natural and a re-appearing fact, how are successful written productions explained? Is fossilisation taken into account during assessment/evaluation phase? Particularly, how are our advanced learners’ fossils (like the fourth year ones) academically judged? Because while answering an exam-question, learners may stick to the exam topic i.e. the content, although it could be presented differently by every learner, is one, turns around the exam topic. However, the form of their written productions is variable: there are those which exhibit a good control of language accuracy where the TL rules of grammar and

English orthography are generally respected, and there are those which show a low or bad control of them. Thus, are their performers (students) judged competent even if their productions hold fossils?

What is customary with graduate students is that there is no perfect performance, written with no errors. A successful written production does not mean a zero-error production but in successful ones, every teacher/evaluator expects, at least, few errors and a good control of language accuracy after four years of learning English. Nevertheless, what is observed is that writing with few errors concerns only a minority of learners even among the advanced ones. Therefore, what about the majority whose performances contain persistent errors? Couldn't it be possible to reduce the persistency or frequency of errors before reaching the final academic year?

Moreover, if one applies Selinker's theory of fossilization, which is restricted to two facts: (1 its effects are not eradicated or eliminated despite remediation, and 2) because it is the nature of the human brain, therefore a progress in writing would not be expected. This attitude would lead to accept those wrong, frequent and permanent observable features in our advanced learners' outputs; meanwhile, within such an evaluation framework, 'competence' might mean something different than "mastering the TL rules and knowledge", and second would deteriorate or dramatize the efforts which have been tried and which could be designed to aid our learners to overpass most of their fossils for final realizations of successful productions.

Accordingly, exploring the reasons why advanced learners still commit the same errors cannot always be related to one specific cause (as to insufficient time, un-relaxing writing environment, language transfer, or even to fossilisation, but it can perhaps refer to any of these reasons. Thus, Selinker notes that: "*we may not know that a particular [error] is a result of language transfer or any of the stated factors*" (ibid). Furthermore, it seems that knowing the causes of error-production is not highly efficient to understand learners' failures in performance. Even when knowing them in order to adjust the situation (i.e. find a remediation) seems unworkable. Consequently, neither the error-cause, nor the stated error-remediation help performers to progress in writing, simply because they do not show the weaknesses or the areas of failures (the points that should be avoided). They may do so to the evaluators (i.e. teachers) but not to the performers (i.e. students-writers). This, effectively, may imply another cause to explain the continuous phenomenon of error-production with advanced students. It can probably be the students' unawareness of their fossils since after summative tests, they continue ignoring those persistent unwanted forms.

Besides, talking about the learners's awareness or unawareness of their errors requires insistently to be acquainted with the factors that raise or burry their consciousness of errors. It is believed that probably the most apparent factor is teachers' correction of their outputs (what and how teachers respond to their performance). In other words, do the actual responses (like: commenting, circling, marking, etc) help the examinees to locate their weaknesses (i.e. raise their awareness) for further reduction and less occurrence of errors? As a consequence, as it was previously demonstrated within section one (cf. chapter 1, p: 33), the present material investigates in the effects of teachers' responses whilst evaluating students' written performance, which means: to what extent do the qualitative responses (like comments) as well as the quantitative ones (like notes, marks, scores, etc) influence the students' progress and reduction of frequent errors? This is so to see if they learn effectively from these responses.

It is generally believed that: *"the clearer a teacher's understanding of the sources of students' errors, the better he will be able to judge which ones are the most worth concentrating on"* (Stenson, 1989:69), and particularly, these forms which deserve a thorough concentration and analysis are the frequent errors. Within such a context, Dušková (1989:219) points out that:

"We are of the opinion that an error analysis should be based primarily on recurrent, systemic errors that are made by a number of learners..., no matter whether they reflect defects in knowledge or whether they result from inadequate habit formation."

This opinion is also shared between teachers-evaluators as in: *"A great proportion of our time is consumed in correcting errors, but there is often a nagging feeling that we are correcting the same errors over and over again"* (Mentello, 1997). Mentello, also, questions whether our efforts (teachers' efforts) in error correction actually translate into students' learning.

The theory behind the problematic of this dissertation is whether teachers' corrections or reactions to students' written performances after summative examinations indicate their failures and weaknesses while performing with the target language. It is hypothesized that as far as students are aware of their errors along the academic years, the written form of their IL may progressively hold few errors, but if teachers' ways of correction are not sufficient to raise their consciousness, this would create a gap that promotes the re-appearance of the same errors and at the same time, keeps the learners away from reaching the FL writing norms. The researcher is not the only one who felt this necessity to review the teachers' ways of corrections. Chaudron, in Robinett and Schatcher (1989:429), clarifies the pedagogical objective of the teachers' ways of responses thus:

“Strictly speaking, one might consider as corrections as those treatments which after correction of a given item, succeeded in establishing the teacher’s consistent correct performance and his autonomous ability to correct himself on the item.”

Consequently, insufficient ways in responding to students’ written production are suggested to be another important cause to error permanence in addition to the stated reasons above (cf. figure 5 in appendix 13).

2.6 Responding to students’ written productions:

Responding to students’ performance is a pedagogical habit. It comes during and after the correction phase. Therefore, reading constitutes part of this job but not all of it. Leki (in Kroll, 1990:58) states that some teachers see that responding is just to be a reader; *“Hence, it is unrealistic to pretend that teachers can read student texts in the same way as we read texts we select for ourselves.”* Reading, in this sense, will be very specific, designed to locate and present later on details rather than general comments like: ‘good’, ‘boring’, ‘perfect’,...etc. Moreover, Leki (in Kroll, 1990:59) typically, goes further when he figures out the teacher’s evaluation along this activity (i.e. responding). Indeed, the teacher-evaluator’s personality is moving forward, backward and onward as in the following description:

“The role of the writing teacher is schizophrenic⁷, split into three incompatible personas: teacher as a real reader (i.e., audience); teacher as coach, and teacher as evaluator.”

In addition, while reviewing the literature, responding does not appear static but variable according to every assessor’s goals (cf. chapter 1, pp: 31-33). Broadly speaking, a common sense or a belief about its nature emerges from those who have experienced it and who can assert that it is a tiring evaluation activity, despite its academic necessity. In fact, some regard it as: *“one of the most frustrating tasks of any L2 teacher.”* (Mentello, 1993); others view it as taking *“the instructor’s much time and energy”* (Cozzens, 2005). More typically, Hyslop (1990) says that:

“Responding to student writing is probably the most challenging part of teaching writing. It does not only take a tremendous amount of time and demand a great deal of intellectual activity, it also affects to a large extent how students feel about their ability to write.”

⁷ - Though the word ‘schizophrenic’ holds a negative sense it is used here only to indicate that a teacher may live a dilemma. It does not mean that evaluation will be an easy activity to do but a tiring one especially with a great numbers of students.

Though its difficulty and importance for academic assessment, it is assumed that it is the most common cause of students' frequent errors among those presented along this dissertation. It is so, due to the influence of its three basic features: 1) what to assess: the targeted area for assessment (the issue of 'content vs. form' or vice versa), 2) how to assess: teachers' ways of correction (comments, scores, etc) and 3) what after assessing: the absence of feedback (the writing mediator).

2.6.1 The issue of “content” vs. “form” in the written productions:

The major question confronting any theory of responding to student writing is where we should focus our attention. This observation summarizes much of the conflict about teachers' responses to a written work, exactly on whether teachers' feedback should focus on form (i.e. grammar and orthography) or on content (i.e. organization, coherence, etc). This issue has already been developed in the first chapter of this dissertation (cf. p: 31-32). So, what will be added below is but a completing point of view. To decide which writing targeted area should be focused upon, three different positions exist: those who advocate the focus on “content” rather than “form”, those who advocate “form” rather than “content” and finally those who state that the focus should be on both “content and form”.

Some evaluators focus on the content or the message of the students' writing simply because they feel that specific detection of errors is but a consumption of time and energy. For example, one of the opinions determines that: *“it may not be worth the instructor's time and effort to provide detailed feedback on sentence level grammar and syntax.”* (Myles, 2002). Thus, responding to students' written outputs based on such a writing targeted area (content) would mean reading only –even if a score or a comment is awarded later. As a result, this focus would impel many teachers to consider “content” as the unique writing targeted area for granted in evaluation. Also, this would keep “form” neglected –not forgotten– as if it were not part of writing. However, content is just one aspect of a written production and some writers regret the incompleteness of the evaluator's job: *“however, a lot of teachers evaluate just the first rubric: the information being held over the essay”* (Miliani, 1993:29)⁸.

Moreover, some justify the neglect of the “form” aspect by three reasons: 1) they feel that it is what students wish form them to focus on the content during correction; pretending that they have leant by heart the information or have read a lot about it with the aim of answering what it

⁸ - A translation to : « *Cependant, beaucoup d'enseignants n'évaluent que le premier volet : l'information contenue dans l'essai.* » (Miliani, 1993).

is expected from them in testing. 2) As a consequence to the first reason, they would not enter in any kind of controversies or discussions with students. And 3) since students are foreign learners, they cannot rely on their accuracy/linguistic competence. So, if the form of their written performance is poor at the cohesion level, the meaning or the content is sufficient to be understood. Though this would simplify evaluation, it would not bring progress in writing, mainly with the reappearance of the same “poor form”. In fact, what matters here is the issue of FL competence, too, not only avoiding tensions with student-writers. On the contrary, students should be made aware of their poor forms, simply because the latter are a reality in their performance, not a coincidence.

In addition, there is another issue or problematic, raised with the focus on “content” rather than “form” –it is the “interpretation”: not only what the student-writer intended to say, but also what the reaction of the teacher-reader is or will be. Researchers have revealed that teachers may become more subjective to the point that they may intervene with their written own content as a direct correction or feedback to an ambiguous or incomplete/fragment form, which some believe to be a kind of violating the performer’s (student) freedom of expression, despite the fact that this does not occur in the evaluation of all written performances. About this, Allwright (in Brooks and Grundy, 1988:109) notes that:

“When meaning, particularly, is unclear, teachers are tempted to impose themselves in intrusive, overbearing way by offering a model sentence in place of the original – a model that too often substitutes their own ideas for those the non-native was originally trying to express.”

Beside this reality, this would lead to controversies with students, contrary to what some teachers have thought. Contrarily to those who believe they should focus on “content”, others stick to “form” only. In looking for the reasons that underlie their choice, one seems interesting and recurring, and what is more, it promotes the dissertation’s objective which is around FL writing progress. A number of studies have indicated that the focus on form tends to be more workable with students than content. For instance, some studies have found that the location of errors improves accuracy. In addition, these surveys have indicated that students welcome their evaluators’ pointing out grammatical unwanted forms (Brice,1995; Cohen, 1987; Ferris,1995,1997; Leki,1991; Kadecki and Swales,1988; Fathman and Whalley,1990).

Others, according to their findings, confirm that: *“grammatical feedback had more effect on error correction than content feedback had on the improvement”*; among which Fathman and Whalley’s findings appear the most successful one. In fact, they found that: *“specific feedback on grammatical*

errors has a greater effect on the improvement of grammar accuracy than the general feedback on content” (Leki, in Kroll, 1990:61). They, also, noted that: “*students who received feedback on form do make more improvements on writing tasks than those who do not*” (in Kroll, 1990:180). An additional reason is the criterion of the FL linguistic norms and rules. Indeed, if evaluators focus on “form”, it is because it can be somehow handled easily since they can refer or rely on this criterion in case of controversies; whereas, for the “content” aspect, they would find it probably hard to handle it since they rely on their own and different interpretations (i.e. subjectivity).

On the other hand, to focus only on “form” in the written production is worthless since the form is just another writing aspect as “content” is. Therefore, some researches try to adjust or provide equilibrium between the opposed opinions. This equilibrium in responding is not related to the teachers (correctors) but to the writing product aspects, as if it were unfair to focus on one of its aspects. Although the debate about the issue of “content” vs. “form” is unsolved, it is suggested that attention must be on both. (Fathman and Whalley, 1990:178-81; Leki, 1990:57-8). Once the focus is on both, progress in writing can be expected. Some even put the focus on the two aspects, a condition to reach improvement in writing in the TL, as Kroll (1990:153); states: “*we can only help our students improve if we address all aspects of writing performances.*” To solve somehow this issue, it is proposed to analyse students’ form of their written outputs without neglecting the content aspect; however, much attention would be given on form. Once a decision is made about which aspect the focus will be on, then, the questions will concern the ways of responding/correcting effective to it.

2.6.2 The issue of “grading, scoring and comments” in the written productions:

Some evaluators would, for instance, respond to a writing product either by grading or scoring or writing comments or even a combination of them. What is known is that scoring (marks) are meant for the academic administration. So, there is no debate about it; however, what matters here is its usage alone (i.e. it is the only response in students’ papers). When a performer is given; for example, 07/20 or 11/20: is he/she aware of what harms or better his/her production? If a score is tied with comments, two important observations have been noticed by a number of FL writers: 1) the reactions of students over their scoring and comments, and 2) the issue of the effectiveness vs. ineffectiveness of comments on students’ writing product.

It is observed that students react over this kind of response with two main behaviours: either they may not read the annotations or if they do, they are blocked. Concerning the first behaviour, Burkland and Grimm (Leki, in Kroll, 1990:62) notice that students discard completely the paper

(i.e. their own written product), and they are “*often in disgust at the injustice of receiving a low mark for an essay they had worked hard on.*” In the second case, they usually “*have no idea how to respond to it*”, and that is why they become blocked. What can be understood here is that the two types of reactions could have also been inspired by their unawareness of the real quality of their productions not because the response is absent, but it is not consistent enough.

Other researches confirm that marking errors either by means of circling or underlining leads to more poor writing i.e. no improvement (Cozzens, 2005). She argues that: “*error marking can discourage student writers.*” i.e. it would demotivate them towards the act of writing itself. She states that:

“When a student gets a paper back covered with circled or even corrected errors, she may feel too disheartened to learn anything from instructor’s efforts.”

In the case of students who are not demotivated, this kind of response “*can narrow a student’s concept of revision*” (Cozzens, *ibid*). This can result in the students’ focus on one aspect of writing (e.g form: grammar and mechanics) and neglect the other (content in their messages). In the same context, Mentello (1997) quotes from Leki’s review of literature that: “*marking errors on students’ papers does not help them improve their writing nor eliminate their errors.*”

The problematic arisen with students’ reactions cannot be merely related to having bad marks or many circled or underlined items in their papers. It is also linked to the ineffectiveness of this kind of response (trying to make them aware of their language difficulties; but not really showing them what is wrong or what their recurrent errors are). Otherwise, if the aim is only to expect positive reactions from students, so marking (circling and underlining) would not be used nor bad scores would be given. However, we cannot constantly assume such an alternative response just because students are frustrated; simply as it was mentioned previously if the marking is there because there is something wrong with the TL norms.

Moreover, if marking errors impels students to pay attention on one targeted writing area (the form or the content of the written product), this will, at least, constitute a step towards progress in FL writing. Anyway, as it explained earlier, the problematic is not the absence of teachers’ responses, but rather their quality and efficiency. Accordingly, Peyton (1992) claims that these methods:

“can certainly give a rough indication of where a student is a strong or weak and needs to work more, but they cannot replace the thoughtful qualitative response to writing.”

Consequently, the use of comments has been suggested to be tied with scores or marking errors as a key to help students improve in writing. Leki (in Kroll, 1990:58) justifies this by:

“Teachers continue to write comments on students’ papers because we sense that our comments help writers improve; because written comments help writers seem more feasible and more thorough than conferences on every paper; and because, for most writing teachers, our jobs require us not only to evaluate our students’ writing but to be able to justify our evaluations.”

While providing a specific comment to written performances, Ferris (2003) proposed that evaluators have to ask themselves two key-questions: 1): *“does the student understand well the teacher intent in this comment?”* and 2): *“if the student acts on this comment, will it improve this paper and will it inform his/her writing development?”* on the theoretical ground, Bata (1972) questions *“how does written commentary affect students’ self-confidence and self-esteem?”*

On the practical ground, a great number of studies have reached the conclusion that: *“teacher comment has little impact on student writing”* (Leki, 1990:61). For instance, based on data gathered by Fathman and Whalley (in Kroll, 1990:179) on the usefulness of comments written in the margins, at the end of a paper or both, Hyslop indicates that *“neither marks nor content have great effect on the quality of students’ writing”*. Bata and Stiff (Fathman and Whalley, in Kroll, *ibid*) do this so as to see if students do really benefit from comments when they are located on the hand side of the paper because they doubt about the fruitful position of such a response. Unfortunately, Stiff concludes that: *“the location of comments had no effect.”* Other authors view comments as not enough as a significant response to students’ writing productions. Leki (1990:63), for example justifies this as follows:

“Critical comments are difficult for students to interpret if only because weak writers are probably also weak readers...; and finally, written comments are difficult for students to act upon.”

Again the same problematic arises insistently: it is not the absence of teachers’ response which is the problem, but rather its quality. It seems clear that teachers’ ways of responding are not helping students to be aware of their difficulties in writing in order to avoid the most frequent. The situation indicates their ineffectiveness for FL writing progress since most of them are unclear, inconsistent or of a complex nature (Houng, in Robinett and Schachter, 1989:447). Mentello (1997), based on Zamel’s research, concludes that: *“Generally speaking, our teachers’ error correction practices tend to be random and arbitrary instead of being based on a clear and a*

focussed strategy.” In addition, Cohen and Cavalcanti (in Kroll, 1990:155-176) note that teachers’ feedback/correction create a real ‘misfit’ or a ‘gap’ between their responses and students’ interests. As an explanation, they say that: *“part of the problem lies in the nature of the teacher’s feedback, which is unclear, inaccurate, and unbalanced.”*

Besides, another common feeling emerges about teachers’ ways of responding. It is linked to the lack of knowledge as far as error correction approaches and strategies are concerned (Mentello, 1997). On the other side, if there is knowledge, the given feedback is either not used sufficiently or misunderstood (Costas, 2002). In relation to writing improvement, this would probably make teachers re-think of their current ways of responding as if they *“need to do more than to assign a generalized grade”* (Harris, 1993:98). He goes on to say that they must: *“strive continuously to find the best ways to help our pupils find fulfilments as writers”* (1993:122). This point of view supports Hyslop’s (1990) who writes:

“It becomes increasingly obvious that teachers may become less pressured and more effective in dealing with response only as they are able to redefine their role from that of an examiner who must spend enormous amounts of time grading every paper to that a facilitator who helps students recognize and work on their own strengths and weaknesses.”

Therefore, insufficient ways in responding to students’ written productions are believed to be another important cause to error permanence since they do not succeed in helping students at least to correct themselves as already reckoned in Chaudron’s quotation (cf. p. 62). Yet, the different situations and opinions above about these ways determine one possible reality: these practices cannot be rejected but should be reshaped into a more fruitful, informative and motivating feedback. This feedback would be a kind of response for both students’ behaviour and product. Thus, feedback or correction while responding to students’ FL outputs must be *“designed to promote correction, but it is not itself correction.”* (Houng, 1989:447).

2.7 The need for reshaping new feedback in FL writing theory:

According to the data presented above, promoting correction and improvement in writing would be expected to follow students to correct themselves and better their written performance. This would not be possible unless they know from their teacher-evaluators where they are wrong. Even when learning a simple task, as Houng (1989:446) notes, *“people require information on the success or failures of their attempts at performance”*, and feedback is, by all means, a mediation which every FL performer needs in order to get involved; therefore he/she may feel motivated not to write simply but to improve one’s writing, too. Costas (2002) argues that:

“During feedback, learners are invited to identify the merits and shortcomings of their writing performance, understand the reasons for those shortcomings and discuss possible improvements.”

In addition, this would mean that feedback is understood as a means that can raise consciousness as well as impel learners to better their interlanguage. Nevertheless, some researches claim that the importance of fruitful feedback is not ignored but *“with masses of papers to read, to respond, and a fair degree of uncertainty about what is helpful vs. not helpful, instructors can lose sight”* on it (Ferris, 2003). Despite this fact and according to most of the reviewed literature above, students must be told what their writing disabilities are, whatever their cause is, despite the various constraints known by teachers, as Leki (in Kroll, 1990:66) puts it:

“It is obvious that writing teachers need effective and efficient ways to respond to student writing without becoming what Hairston (1986) calls “compositions slaves”. Students writers need and deserve responses to their writing.”

2.8 Conclusion:

To sum up, all the literature, reviewed through chapter one and two (concerning the FL writing’s nature, assessment, errors, ways of responding and feedback), has been used back up issues related to the question: why do advanced FL students still commit errors –mainly persistent ones in their written products? Accordingly, the sources support the hypothesis which assumes that among all error-causes, students’ unawareness of their persistent errors due to the insufficient ways of teachers’ responses/corrections after summative examinations appears to be the most probable reason. Furthermore, this hypothesis claims for reshaping a feedback that can best work with students’ persistent deviant forms, but which will be developed in further studies and investigations. However, some recommended theories about FL feedback on written productions are suggested in chapter 5. Meanwhile, on the basis of what has been reviewed and supported theoretically about this assumption (in chapter 1 and 2), an error analysis of a corpus of FL advanced students has been undertaken in chapters (chapter 3 and 4); so as to see how far the teachers’ responses or corrections influence the students’ writing products both qualitatively and quantitatively.

3.1 Introduction:

A rise in students' writing disabilities has been observed over the years through the university term assessment/evaluation in the English Department of the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences in SBA¹. This phenomenon noticeable in the written exams of different modules, revealing a kind of FL writing degradation does not concern only EFL students in SBA; in fact, it is witnessed in most Algerian universities. Lakhdar-Barka (2006) states that:

“During the last decade, various research projects have been initiated in response to an alarming failure rate recorded in most departments of Algerian university. As regards English, one of the main reasons of this failure lies in the students' inability to master the writing skills required in most academic subjects when taught and/or evaluated.”

This degradation which is naturally evaluated negatively, consequently puts students in embarrassing situations since they cannot understand why they obtain such results in spite of the their efforts they make. On the other hand, their teachers justify their evaluation by the fact that students' papers show too much incorrect use of English, especially from the grammatical and mechanical sides. As result, the form of their written products is not linguistically accurate. Therefore, it was advocated to understand what makes fourth year students unable to improve their foreign written performance though they have learned English for a period of four years and are regularly evaluated by their teachers. To do this, some tools for investigation were elaborated and suggested as an appropriate means to collect information about this phenomenon.

3.2 The research population:

The case-study of this research is represented by fourth year Algerian students who have completed a diploma (4-year licence) in the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences of SBA. This population was chosen typically for the reason that: their language products, compared to beginners, should normally exhibit a good performance and less difficulties in writing especially at the formal level i.e. it should contain few errors in grammar and mechanics.

This belief was based on two assumptions: they had been studying English for a period of four years, and second: they had been academically assessed (evaluated) twice a year over the four years (which is 8 times in all²). During their 1st and 2nd university years, they are supposed to acquire the basic grammatical and writing elements. Consequently, they become acquainted with

¹ - Sidi Belabbes (SBA) is one of the 48 Algerian provinces. It is situated in the north-west of Algeria.

² - I did not include the make-up exams of July and September which give a supplementary chance to students who fail the first two exams.

what should control their language performance such as the use of grammar rules, punctuation, etc. In addition, the fact of being academically evaluated twice a year should normally have eliminated their points of difficulty in writing in the FL, i.e. students should have learned from their teachers' feedback (correction). However, their written performance exhibits the same persistent errors at the level of "form" because they do not understand the teachers' evaluation practices. Therefore, it is believed that this situation would not lead them towards the improvement of their writing skills in the foreign language.

At the initial stage of investigating why students still commit the same errors, it was assumed that the most important cause lies in the students' negative beliefs and attitudes towards the act of writing, due to most of the time manifested in an absence of practising English activities due to their demotivation. To investigate this, it was important to collect data about the existence of this phenomenon (i.e. students' problems in writing) and to elaborate two questionnaires on the basis of the MCQ method, designed for teachers and students. It was believed that through the opinions of students (writers) and their teachers (evaluators) about how these students feel towards writing, how much efforts or preparation they devote to writing or while writing and how they are doing or feeling while answering written exams, a final proposition about what prevents them from improving their written performance can be derived or confirmed.

The FL literature on students' writings shows that the causes of students' disabilities cannot be linked to students' negative attitudes only; indeed, the fact could be tied with other sources such as: the amount of time devoted to answer a written exam, or the insufficient timing of the written expression module (3 hours per week taught only during the first two years), or anxiety, etc. Clearly, it was strongly hypothesized that to restrict the investigation about students' disabilities in writing to one typical cause might not be so scientific. Thus, it was decided to include or implement the other suggested factors or causes³ in the two questionnaires, but branched into categories so that the information collected can be easily interpreted. These questionnaires were prepared as follows:

3.3 The students' questionnaire:

The main objective of questioning the 4th year students is to find out their own conception of writing English as a foreign language as well as their attitude while writing throughout the four

³ - Cf. to chapter 2 p: 51-68 i.e. all the reviewed causes of students' difficulties with the exception of teachers' insufficient ways of responding to the students' written materials because at the initial stage of research I haven't been theoretically well-overwhelmed by the topic.

academic years. Differently said, it was planned to discover 1) whether they have difficulties in writing in general and what fosters their difficulties, 2) how they do in written exams and finally, 3) what they do or how they solve these difficulties (cf. appendix 14). Indeed, these objectives helped the construction of this questionnaire, which structured upon three main categories covering close-ended questions, named alphabetically A, B and C and entitled as follows:

- ✓ Category A: **Students' knowledge of the existence of their difficulties in writing.**
- ✓ Category B: **Students' own strategies to overcome their difficulties and to improve their written production.**
- ✓ Category C: **Students' attitudes during the assessment periods.**

In category A, two questions are proposed to the students to discover whether they know this kind of difficulty and the cause behind it (cf. appendix 14). In the first question, the informant (the 4th year student) can answer by putting a cross (x) near the square of the item “yes” or “no”; whereas, in the second question, he/she has to choose among the four items, suggested as causes of his/her difficulty. His/her choice will correspond to what he/she believes is/are the source of his/her weaknesses or disabilities in writing in English.

In category B, two questions are designed in order to understand if the student-writers are adopting strategies to overcome the disabilities in writing once they are aware of them or not. They are viewed to be the same as the questions of category A which implicitly may indicate the causes of the students' problems in writing, especially if the informants' choices of answers are “no” in question (1.) which is about whether they try to solve their weaknesses and “seldom”, and “never” in question (2.) which is about how many times they use the most regular strategies that are believed to be used by EFL learners to learn writing or to better it.

In category C, eight questions are suggested (cf. appendix 14). Although they are explicitly directed to collect data about how students react towards writing during their four academic years (including written examinations), they are implicitly holding part of the assumed causes to their problems in writing. For instance, in question (1.), if the student's focus is on the item “speech” rather than the item “writing” during his/her years at the university, this may indicate why his/her written performance has been gradually decreasing since “writing” was neglected. In question (2.), the item of “anxiety” as a chosen answer can be his/her cause if the exam requires a written activity; besides, it can be present also in question (7.), which may denote another

distinct cause, which is the amount of time given to answer a written exam (i.e. one hour and a half) which may not be sufficient.

Questions (3.), (4.), (5.) and (6.) can show how much the student cares about writing before and during exams. For example, in question (3.), the item (c.) which is rewriting the lessons in his/her own styles) may denote that this preparation before exams cannot always be the cause of his/her difficulties in writing since it indicates that he/she trains him/herself; whereas, the items (a.) and (b.) can be the cause since item (a.) (which is writing just the night before exams) may indicate less practice of writing in English, while item (b.) (which is learning only by heart) indicates no practice at all. During an exam, the student’s focus, in question (4.), on the item “content” more than the item “form” may denote his/her difficulty since grammar and mechanics or language accuracy are more tied with form more than content. Question (5.) and (6.) may indicate if the student is aware of the importance of the item “editing/revising” his/her written performance before submitting it to the evaluators, a chance to solve the possible neglected points while answering, such as the ones of grammar and mechanics.

The table below gives information about the research population who answered the questionnaire: the academic year, the total number of enrolled students⁴, and the number of students who filled in the questionnaire handouts. Although it was decided to question all the four year students of this academic year, only one third (1/3) of the total number of students accepted to fill in the questionnaire despite the anonymity of the tool used⁵:

| 4th year class | N° of enrolled students | N° of student-informants |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A (2003-2004) | 141 | 30 (≈ 21,27%) |

Table F. *Factors in describing the population of the students’ questionnaire*

3.4 The teachers’ questionnaire:

Unlike the students’ questionnaire, the teachers’ questionnaire is mono-categorized with seven questions; all of them are aimed at describing the students’ written performances during examinations. Teachers’ answers are important in the sense that they may indicate if students have problems in writing correct English and where the difficulties are manifested, since they are the evaluators/assessors. In addition, their beliefs about what can be the sources of the students’

⁴ - I got the number of the students enrolled during 2003-2004 from the administration of the English department of SBA University.

⁵ - I told all the students about the objective of this questionnaire and also that it would be anonymous. However, only a part of them responded to the material.

failure to achieve a successful written material may be fruitful as they are the human parameter who accompanied them during their academic years.

Since teachers are those who are familiar with students' evaluation and assessment, they are believed to be the most suitable source of information in describing their students' productions. Following the same ways of closed questions-answers in the students' questionnaire, teachers as informants are designed to choose the answer (s) to the items that are related to every suggested question (cf. appendix 15). For instance, in question (1.), teachers are asked to choose among the five items of degrees (from a. "very good" till e. very "bad") to qualify the written performances of the 4th year class (2003-2004) during the four academic years. Whatever their opinion is, it is important to ask them in the next question (question 2.) whether they have noticed that those students have difficulties in writing correct English.

Consequently, once they confirm the existence of the disability, they can state the frequency of the difficulty in question (3.) which is about whether it occurs "frequently" or "never" as well as what type always reappear: is it in the bad use of English grammar (a. item), being out of the topic (b. item), the wrong use of writing mechanics (c. item), the lack of vocabulary (item d.), misspelling (e. item), incoherence (f. item) or the bad handwriting (g. item).

In question (5.) they are asked what the students' main focus is in answering most of their written examinations (content vs. form). This question meets with the same aim of question (4.) in the above students' questionnaire (of category C) which may indicate a source or a cause of their difficulties if the main focus, observed by their teachers (i.e. according to their answer) is "c. seldom" or "d. never" on the form. Within the same context, teachers are asked in question (6.) to what extent their students respect the layout and the criteria of essay production (the introduction, cohesion, coherence and the conclusion).

In the last question (i.e. question 7.), four items are suggested as the main possible causes of students' failure to write good English, of which two are tied with the students' lack of reading and writing (items a. and b. respectively), and one cause is tied with the insufficient current timing and programme of the written expression and grammar modules (item c.) or it may be in the lack of documentation concerning writing in the university library (item d.). In addition, the number of the teachers-informants is eleven (males and females). They are either permanent or trainers-teachers in the Department of English in the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences of

SBA. What is important for this investigation is the fact that these teachers have experienced the assessment and the evaluation of students through essay-type examinations.

3.5 The incompleteness of students' and teachers' questionnaires:

What can be noticed through these two questionnaires is the absence of reference to the students' awareness of the nature of their difficulties in writing (which is also reckoned or presumed to be a cause for their difficulties). It was thought as it was mentioned above, that causes of students' failure in writing can be inferred just from the student-writers and their teacher-evaluators opinions. However, it is important to know what the difficulties of these students in writing are, especially the most frequent ones. Therefore, opinions can play only a small part of the investigation since students were not questioned about the types of their difficulties; a point which suggests another question about how they know them. Though their evaluators were asked about these types, it was assumed that students' unawareness of frequent errors after examinations at every level of the licence, may be the most explicative source of their writing failure.

Furthermore, it was impossible to question the teachers about the effectiveness vs. the ineffectiveness of their ways of correction or whether they arrange correction sessions with their students after the evaluation phase (after exams). In other words, it was impossible to ask teachers whether their current ways of correction (such as: circling, underlining, commenting, etc) helped much their students to overcome their errors. In order to avoid controversies or conflicts with teachers, it was finally decided to investigate this issue only at the first stage i.e. what they observe in their students' papers and not what they do after they have corrected them.

3.6 Additional tools for investigation:

Of course, it was possible to question again students (through an additional questionnaire) about the types of frequent errors they make and how they recognize them, but the result would not be guaranteed. It was thought that correcting their written material would rather play a more interesting aspect of the investigation since it would shed light on the types of these difficulties of which the most persistent forms remained fossilized aspects. Also, interviewing some students of different levels (3rd year and 4th year) about whether their teachers' ways of correcting their written productions made them aware of these persistent errors deviant from the target language. Thus, beside the two questionnaires, the correction and the interview emerge as necessary tools of investigation as to collect as much fruitful data as possible for further effective analysis.

3.6.1 Correcting the students' written productions:

Correcting students' written products is primarily designed to investigate the phenomenon of error persistency over their four academic years, mainly to identify the reasons why they still commit the same errors, among which the influence of teachers' ways of responding to their productions is believed to be one of the most explicative cause. Accordingly, correcting students' written productions as a tool of investigation would demand 1) the collection of their written productions, performed after summative examinations in different modules, 2) the analysis of the errors identified within such a collection and 3) the analysis of ways teachers use in the correction of these errors. As a result, this may allow the description of their linguistic competence and the comparison of its findings with the students and teachers' description.

3.6.1.1 The research sample of error analysis and its characteristics:

A general definition or description of the research population, whose errors are sampled, is given in the table below. This suggested table is an adaptation to the one of Ellis's (1994:49):

| Factors | Description |
|------------------------------|--|
| A Language | English (FL/TL) |
| Medium | 4 th year student's written production. |
| Genre | An essay form. |
| Content |(British civilization module)(written expression module)(American literature module) |
| B Learner | Arabic learners |
| Level | Advanced learners. |
| Mother tongue | Arabic language. |
| Language learning experience | Secondary school classrooms and English department (of the SBA faculty). |

Table G. Factors designed in collecting the research sample of learners' language

The tables below define part of the quantification as well as the qualification of the research population's corpus⁶. They define the fourth year students' written materials in terms of: time progression (in two different academic years), modulations (the quality of the writing inspired by the module exam-question), and the quantity of the written outputs and their performers (the numbers of student-writers and their papers). This collection has been levelled out as follows:

| | Academic year | Module | N° of students | N° of papers | Total |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|-----------|
| Class A (2003-2004) | 2 nd year | Written. exp | 10 | 10 | 20 |
| | 4 th year | Brit. civ | | 10 | |

⁶ -The other part is meant to be estimated after investigating the effects of teachers' feedback, and identifying the students' most frequent errors i.e. the research findings.

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Class B (2004-2005) | 3 rd year | Am. lit | 10 | 10 | 20 |
| | | Am. lit | | 10 | |
| | 4 th year | Brit. civ | | 10 | 20 |
| | | Brit. civ | | 10 | |
| | | | 20 | 60 | 60 |

Table H. *Factors in collecting and defining the 1st and the 2nd fourth year classes' writings*

It was decided thoughtful not to include all the written productions of all fourth year student-writers simply because the issue raised within this dissertation (i.e. the effects of teachers' responses on students' written outputs) is not related to the amount or the quantity of response correction proceeded in every student's paper, but the question is related to the impact of such a response on the students-writers' awareness vs. unawareness of their frequent errors. Therefore, it was thought that a small quantity of students' papers (i.e. a specific collection), one paper (i.e. an incidental collection) is sufficient for investigating this issue. So, it was decided initially to select randomly 10 fourth year students' written products of two different classes: the 2003-2004 class and the 2004-2005 one, named respectively **A** and **B** class. Both were investigated longitudinally, not cross-sectionally⁷.

Since persistency refers to the reappearance of errors, it was thought that identifying the re-occurrence of an x-error at a specific point of time in the students' written outputs would not be significant unless it is re-identified (i.e. detected again) at another point of time, (for instance, in the next term exam or in the following academic year). It would be more significant in the sense that its second (or more) appearance longitudinally might determine two important conclusions or explanations: it is the student's point of language/linguistic difficulty, and it is unknown to the student because the way it is indicated (corrected) is not meaningful to him/her. Thus, he/she will ignore it and he/she may spontaneously commit it again.

In such an investigation, one would normally analyze students' written performance starting from their first academic year to the final one (fourth year) to find and understand their most frequent errors. For instance, the researcher would take one fourth year class and study its populations' errors by branching his/her study over four progressive analyses. So, with one of the suggested classes (for example: the 2003-2004 class), his/her analysis would be branched over the following timeline: 2000/2001 (1st year) – 2001/2002 (2nd year) – 2002/2003 (3rd year)

⁷ - It has been advocated in chapter 2 (cf. p: 50) that researches on error analysis would be or will be more significant only if they are carried over different points of time (i.e. two or more periods of time).

and finally 2003/2004 (4th year). Unfortunately, due to some administrative problems, it was impossible to follow this timeline analysis because collecting students' papers for every academic year of the four year licence was not possible since the designed papers were not available at the administration level⁸.

Therefore, two different fourth year students' written outputs, analysed in this investigation, were longitudinally defined and characterized as follows: the written material of the (2003-2004) class was analysed once through their written products of the second year (i.e. 2001-2002) and again when they were in the fourth year (i.e. 2003-2004). So, as it was noted above, ten written performances of the same students were collected in the two distinct points of time, which gives 20 written papers meant for investigation. With the same criterion, the sample of written products of the (2004-2005) class was analysed, but differently: once they were in the third year (2003-2004) and once they were in the fourth year (2004-2005) which gives 20 written papers for investigation, and within the latter fourth year in their 3rd and 4th years i.e. which gives another 20 written copies of the same class. Consequently, the total research corpus consists of 60 written products in terms of papers and 20 student-writers in terms of performers.

The selection of modules or the focus on a specific module in such a research inquiry did not constitute a problem since language accuracy and grammar rules are more particularly needed while performing a written activity whatever its context (meaning). Also, it is already motioned in chapter 1, that the research focused more on the form of the written material than on the content because it differs from one module to another. It is said that content is variable (and this is one of its natural features); whereas, form is approximately the same whoever the student is and whatever the exam-questions are because in every case, the student is required to use and respect the FL grammar and most of the writing conventions⁹.

For that reason, most of the performances in table **H** above were taken from any civilization modules (British or American) rather than literature ones simply because it was believed that the focus on "form" in evaluating students' writings (i.e. the writing targeted area) would be practical and easy and less difficult than the one on "content"¹⁰. Also, it was believed that the

⁸ - I tried to match the students' names from the official lists with the exam papers but it was impossible to find the complete whole corresponding to each of the four years of both classes under investigation. I ended up with only two years for the 2003-2004 class and two years for the 2004-2005 one.

⁹ - A point already indicated within this dissertation (cf. chapters 1, p: 12-16).

¹⁰ - As it is indicated theoretically in chapter 1 (cf. p: 31) and chapter 2 (cf. pp: 63-65).

answer to the exam-questions of these modules could be checked out in case of mistakes¹¹. On the other side, the choice of the written expression module of the second year was done on a purpose. Indeed, it was meant to know if 1) two years devoted to teach the FL writing elements (linguistic needs) are sufficient to allow students reach a high level of linguistic competence, and 2) if students have been taught the writing evaluation symbols (in the 1st or 2nd year) and whether they have learned through them to develop their capacity in writing English. Meanwhile, the timing of this module can be -as it was said- behind students' lack of mastery of the writing skill (i.e. a source of their frequent failure to achieve a good written production).

3.6.1.2 Error analysis's techniques and materials:

In order to investigate the action of teachers' responding and students' error frequency in the above indicated research corpus, a "descriptive-comparative" method was used. It is named so (i.e. descriptive-comparative not comparative-descriptive) because longitude, here, would demand what types of persistent errors these students have committed as well as what types of correction or feedback methods their teachers have used in both periods of time (the 1st and the 2nd academic years). Thus, a possibility to know whether this kind of correction, used in the second period of time, has helped these students to reduce the number of errors and to improve their FL writing or not. This means that the technique of "comparison" between the distinct points of time cannot be proceeded unless these errors' types and teachers' assessment methods are described initially. Furthermore, the aim of such a technique is to give a final description of the most influencing cause of students' error reappearance which might be due to the insufficient teachers' feedback while evaluating students' written products.

3.6.1.3 The description process of teachers' responses to students' writings:

The tool, by which the description of teachers' ways of correction of the research population can be done, is personal tables (cf. tables: I-1, I-2 and I-3, appendix 16). It was thought to be a better means for collecting data 1): on how teachers responded to the questioned students' written material, and 2): for determining the frequency of the identified responses in every paper of the same 20 students over the next academic year. During the construction of these tables on the basis of description and frequency, it was suggested to put the description items in the left part of this table whereas the right side was reserved for the frequency items of this description.

¹¹ - I thought I was able to verify the content of the written production since I was myself an EFL student and I have studied these modules. In addition, this could be possible in libraries and websites.

The items for describing how teachers respond or correct the students' written performances are designed according to the module examination, and to the most common teachers' ways of evaluation reviewed in the literature of chapter 1¹². The latter can be classified according to three heading items: 1) teachers' ways of identifying errors, 2) their ways of correcting errors and 3) their final decision. For instance, the first heading item can be either circling the erroneous form or underlining it or using one of the error symbols (such as: *p*, *sp*, *wo .etc*) or a combination of all. This procedure is used so as to indicate to the student the error he/she made either once or more.

The second heading denotes whether teachers respond by providing a direct written correction next to the location of an error. For example, if the error is an omission of a TL morpheme (such as the "s" of the plural or the present simple marker of the 3rd person singular), the teacher adds that absent morpheme. The same when it is the case of punctuation or capitals. Or, they may respond differently by just writing comments next to the erroneous form. Finally, in the third heading item, teachers may respond just quantitatively by providing a score –which is as it was mentioned before, an administrative requirement, and they may add qualitatively a final comment to the score.

The second part of the table (i.e. the right side) was elaborated according to the academic year of each class, to the numeration of every student as well as the two specific points of time of their papers i.e. when the two papers were written (cf. table I-1, appendix 16). It was elaborated so to be helpful in collecting data about the frequency of teachers' responses to every student's copy. For instance, the numeration of students was designed so: since the (2003-2004) class was named "A" class, its 10 students are designated as follows: "**student A1, student A2, student A3,...student A10**" and their papers correspond to the second year and to the fourth one. In this part of the table, the two different periods of times of the same class are designated by "2nd" and "4th"¹³.

Following the same technique, two other tables (I-2 and I-3 in appendix 16) are designed to collect data about the (2004-2005) class i.e. the "B" class. The only difference is in the module examination, but at the same two distinct points of time: once they passed one of the British civilization and American literature exams in the "3rd" year and the same module-exams in the

¹² - Cf . chapter 1 pp: 29-30.

¹³ - They are also written in the right corner of these tables for explanation.

“4th” year; abbreviations to their third year and their fourth year. Meanwhile, a total of three tables are collected and meant to be analysed later in chapter 4. The only procedure to group or match the data between the two objectives of this tool (the description of teachers’ ways and their frequency) is indicated by the following symbols: (+) when the item is available in every essay and (–) when it is absent. For the items of comments and scores, they are indicated as they are in every paper i.e. any found comment or score in the paper is meant to be written in the table.

3.6.1.4 The identification process of the error frequency in the students’ writings:

The identification of errors in every written product of the research population is designed to describe qualitatively and quantitatively these difficulties in writing on the basis of frequency. Meanwhile, reading every paper, by nature, will be part of this job. In terms of quality, errors are meant to be defined according to their nature (i.e. vis-à-vis the English language) and according to error-types’ terminology (i.e. error-names¹⁴). The need to indentify the types of errors these students produced will play an important role because if the types of errors which are detected at the first point of time are again detected in the second point of time with the same students (i.e. cross-sectionally), the cause behind this re-appearance is due to the students’ unawareness of them, and this may be inferred in their teachers’ correction methods. Therefore, the frequency of that identified quality of error will suggest itself as a complementary step to the description process.

In terms of quantity, the number of errors, produced by every student cross-sectionally –whether once or more will be counted. Therefore, relative frequency will suggest itself as a technique to calculate the total amount of errors¹⁵. The aim of this procedure is to show if the product of this population deserves more care and response than the actual one (i.e. the current ways of correction), and this has to be done once this technique shows that the number of errors of these students has increased in the second period of time (the following academic year). If this fact can be noticed with some of the students, not all, it will suggest that only that some students deserve further feedback.

On a practical level, to collect data about error frequency, it is suggested to work with the same proposed tool for describing the ways of teacher correction (i.e. the table), but with two slight

¹⁴ - Cf. appendix 10.

¹⁵ - Cf. chapter 2, p: 48-50.

differences. While keeping the same right part of that table (where students are numerated according to their academic year and periods of writings), the left part is reserved for the quality and quantity of errors instead of teachers' ways of correction (cf. tables J-1, J-2 and J-3, appendix 17). Indeed, three tables about the error frequency will be collected and submitted to analysis in chapter 4. Even the symbols (+) and (–) are used on purpose: the mark (+) indicates that the item exists; whereas, the mark (–) indicates the item's absence. The other difference is to give the total number of errors at the bottom of the table (at the end of every period of time for every student).

However, students' difficulties cannot be only manifested through the production of errors. Indeed, they can appear as the most visible formal features of English such as bad handwriting which can make the evaluator unable to complete his/her job of correction since reading may somehow become impossible and the message conveyed through it can be misunderstood. Or, they can consist in not respecting form of the essay layout such as the introduction, the development and the conclusion. Consequently, these items are also intended to be sought and qualified qualitatively and quantitatively since they are regarded as aspects relating more to the form of the written products than to the content.

To do so, language checklists are proposed to constitute tools for describing these difficulties. Their construction is based on items borrowed from different sources such as Hilsdon's (1998) report about formal features of English, including: grammar, spelling, punctuation and sentence structures as levels of assessment. Using the same tables in describing teachers' ways of correction, the checklists are kinds of tables organised upon these difficulties, put in the left part of these checklists and keeping the same students' written product numeration in the right part (cf. tables K-1, K-2 and K-3 in appendix 18). The only difference lies in the indicating symbols to describe these differences that are scaled as: (+), (\pm), (–), (0). They all indicate that the feature in the student's written performance of the chosen classes is either: present and correct (+), or present but half-correct (\pm) or present but incorrect (–) or absent (0). Therefore in calculating the data collection from the checklists, three tables are meant for analysis in chapter 4.

After the first task of investigation is undertaken (i.e. describing), the second part of the "descriptive-comparative" method (i.e. comparing) can be handled later for the analysis of the collected information obtained from the description procedure. Indeed, the data collected will be analysed by comparing the two distinct written performances for every student as well as for each

fourth year class (**A** and **B**) after identifying errors over the proposed periods of time and according to their types and frequency.

3.6.2 Interviewing EFL advanced students:

Interview, as an additional material for the current research, is suggested to collect data about whether the research population is aware of their frequent errors after the university written exams since this awareness (which is considered as one cause behind their deficiencies in writing) is absent in the students' questionnaire. Whether affirmative or negative their answers are, the factors that encourage their awareness or unawareness are the most needful aim. Furthermore, this tool can give other information about how the relationship between the learners and their evaluators is i.e. it would promote also the description of their teachers' evaluation methods.

Unlike the questions of category B proposed in the students' questionnaire and which are about students' attitudes before and during the exams, the questions of the interview are about the influence of their teachers' ways of correcting their written material after exams. The 1st three questions have been thought as sufficient to collect data about students' awareness vs. unawareness of their frequent errors (cf. appendix 19). However they are formulated directly about this fact to know the effects of their teachers' correction on their progress in writing, on whether their ways of corrections make them aware of their undesirable forms in writing or not. To avoid any kind of fear or hesitation on the part of the informants, it was planned to inform them previously about this interview and its objective, and that they would be interviewed for a couple of minutes only (i.e. a short interview). Furthermore, the interview would be anonymous in the record material.

The first question (**1**) was asked in order to open the topic with students. That is to say to welcome the discussion. It was about how their evaluators treated their written papers for the majority of exams i.e. how these informants describe this treatment through what they see or find in their corrected sheets of exams. For example, "do they find "only marks?" or "comments?" or "both?", or "do they receive any kind of assistance or feedback in classroom after examinations?" Since these questions can lead to different answers (they depend on what the informants could say), the answers were arranged alphabetically as: (**A.**) for the item "only marks?", (**B.**) for the item "marks and bearing comments?", and finally (**C.**) for the item "marked and correction in class?".

Similarly, question (1) suggested the following one (2) which was inevitable and important about “whether they understand these error indicating ways” i.e. whether after exams students understand these indication forms. Whereas question (3) was suggested about how errors were indicated by their teachers-evaluators in their written exams (inside their papers). For instance, was it through underlining, circling or providing any other indication forms (like writing symbols)?

The next questions (4) and (5) were just added for further research and recommendations. Indeed, they can be classified under the heading of seeking remediation to error frequency in the students’ written productions. For instance, it could happen that students find or see their errors indicated by symbols (such as the ones presented in appendix 16) and which are themselves one of the teachers’ ways of evaluation, but the focus is on whether students learn about their deficiencies in writings from these symbols. Therefore, it is reckoned to ask them (question 4) if they have studied these symbols in detail during lessons along their academic years. In the case where they did not, question (5) may constitute the remedial work or a part of it. It may be what the students really need to improve their weak performance. This remedial work seeks if students would consider writing as an important language faculty and which by consequence would push them to make more efforts to correct their errors once they know them through on-going courses on error symbols and how to treat errors. Of course within each item, a discussion might be opened about the influence of their teachers’ feedback on their progress to write good English.

3.7 Conclusion:

All the different materials and tools of investigation proposed and prepared along this chapter are designed to collect data about two main complementary headings of “why most advanced EFL students still produce the most persistent errors” (i.e. error-persistency phenomenon), and of “which of the suggested factors to that phenomenon can be the most explicative cause”. Particularly, the insufficient ways of teachers’ feedback after written exams is hypothesized to be that explicative cause. In addition, the total data will be collected differently from the research population’s opinions and their teachers’ opinions. Also, they will be taken from nine tables about describing their written performances and their teachers’ ways of responses. All in all, they are designed for interpretation and analysis in the next step (i.e. chapter 4).

4.1 Introduction:

In this chapter, the information collected from the research tools of investigating why advanced EFL students' still produce frequent errors are presented by order i.e. starting from the first proposed tool of investigation (questionnaires) to the last one (the interview). Also, they are described qualitatively and quantitatively. Throughout this chapter, all the pie-charts or the line-graphs or the tables display the amounts and the percentages of the students who feel that they have difficulties in writing in English. They may help well in interpreting the answers and the analysis of students' written performances cross-sectionally, and most interestingly, longitudinally. They may indicate the most influencing causes to their failure to achieve good writing, among which the effects of teachers' ways of evaluation or responding to the students' written productions may not promote their writing improvement.

4.2 The findings of the questionnaires

4.2.1 The results of the students' questionnaire:

The table below recalls the characteristics of the students' questionnaire in terms of categories, the number of questions and objectives.

| Category | Objective | Number of | |
|----------|---|-----------|------------|
| | | questions | informants |
| A | Students' knowledge of the existence of their difficulties in writing | 02 | 30 |
| B | Students' own strategies to overcome their difficulties and to improve their written production | 02 | |
| C | Students' attitudes during the assessment periods | 08 | |

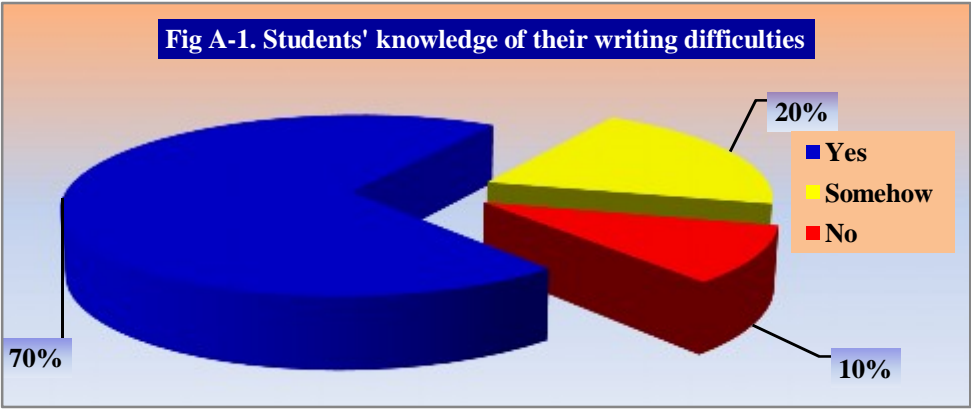
Table L. The features of students' questionnaire

4.2.1.1 Category A's findings:

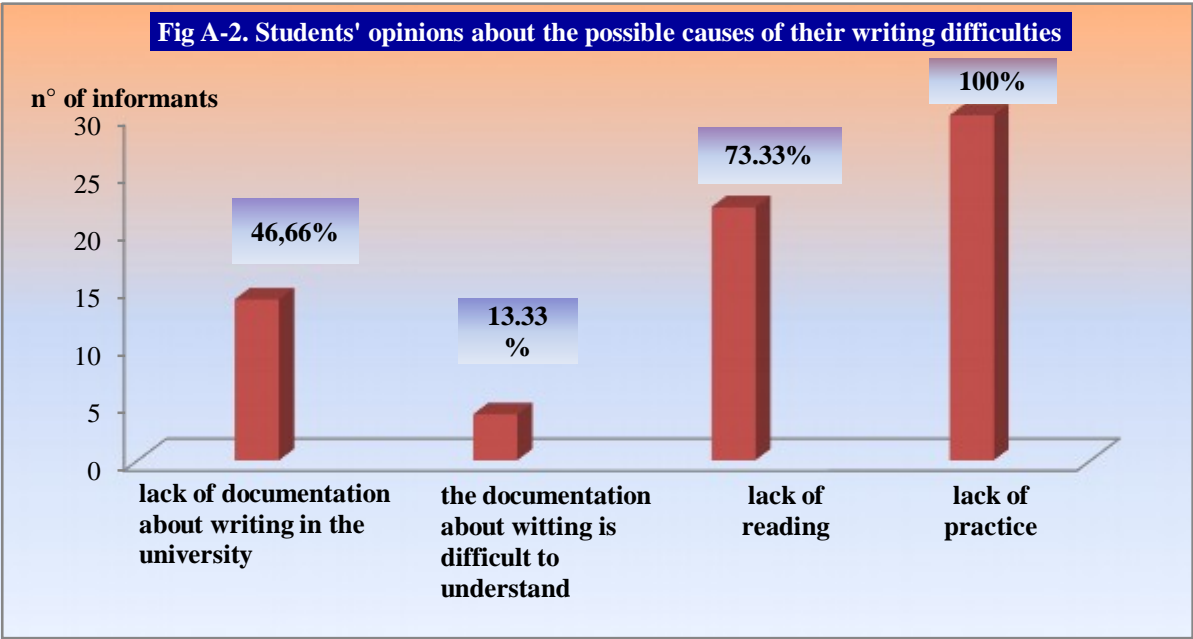
The objective of category A is an introductory or an initiative step to find out whether the informants are aware of the existence of their difficulties in writing. It was important to ask them in order to know if they have an idea about the causes to these difficulties; thus later on, they care for the writing faculty to the point that it impels them to solve these difficulties towards improving their writing.

The pie-chart of graph (A-1) displays the amount of the students who feel that they have difficulties in writing in English. Among the 30 informants, 70% of them confirm the existence of this difficulty; whereas, only 10% of them confirm the contrary. On the other side, 20% note

that they sometimes have that difficulty, which means that in other times they do not have it. Their feeling can be illustrated by two possible realities: it could be that there are probably some writing areas in English which they could master positively, and in other areas they do negatively. Or, they do not know this fact; the same explanation can hold for those who say they do not have difficulties.



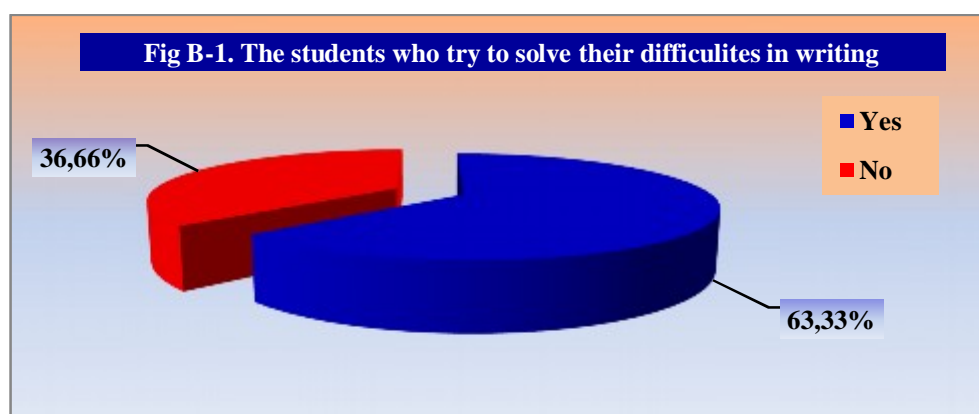
Since these answers are related to question 1 (in category A), which is about whether students generally know that they have difficulties in writing in English, it is found that most of them note that they know this fact. However, while interpreting the findings of the other questions, it is discovered that all the next questions were answered, even the ones who say they do not have difficulties; the sign-point which leads to confirm that all the informants know that they have difficulties while writing in English.



The second graph (A-2), which is made of bar-lines, displays the informants' personal opinions about what fosters their difficulties by choosing among the four suggested causes. Interestingly, all of them (i.e. 100%) say that they do not practise any language activity which demands from them a written performance (of course excluding their academic written exams). In addition, most of them, which constitute 73,33%, confirm that they do not read much. Also, about half of them mention that documentation about developing the writing skill is not sufficient. And when it is, only 13,33% of them find this documentation difficult to understand. The two latter causes do not really call for further investigation because they are quite explicative since these informants are already weak readers. Their lack of reading is translated into two aspects: their disability to search for books to increase their reading habit and their weak cognitive ability to understand what is written since it became passive, a fact already investigated or supported by Clay (in Isaacson: 1996), Harris (1993), Lindsay (2002) and Eisterhold (in Kroll: 1990).

4.2.1.2 Category B's findings:

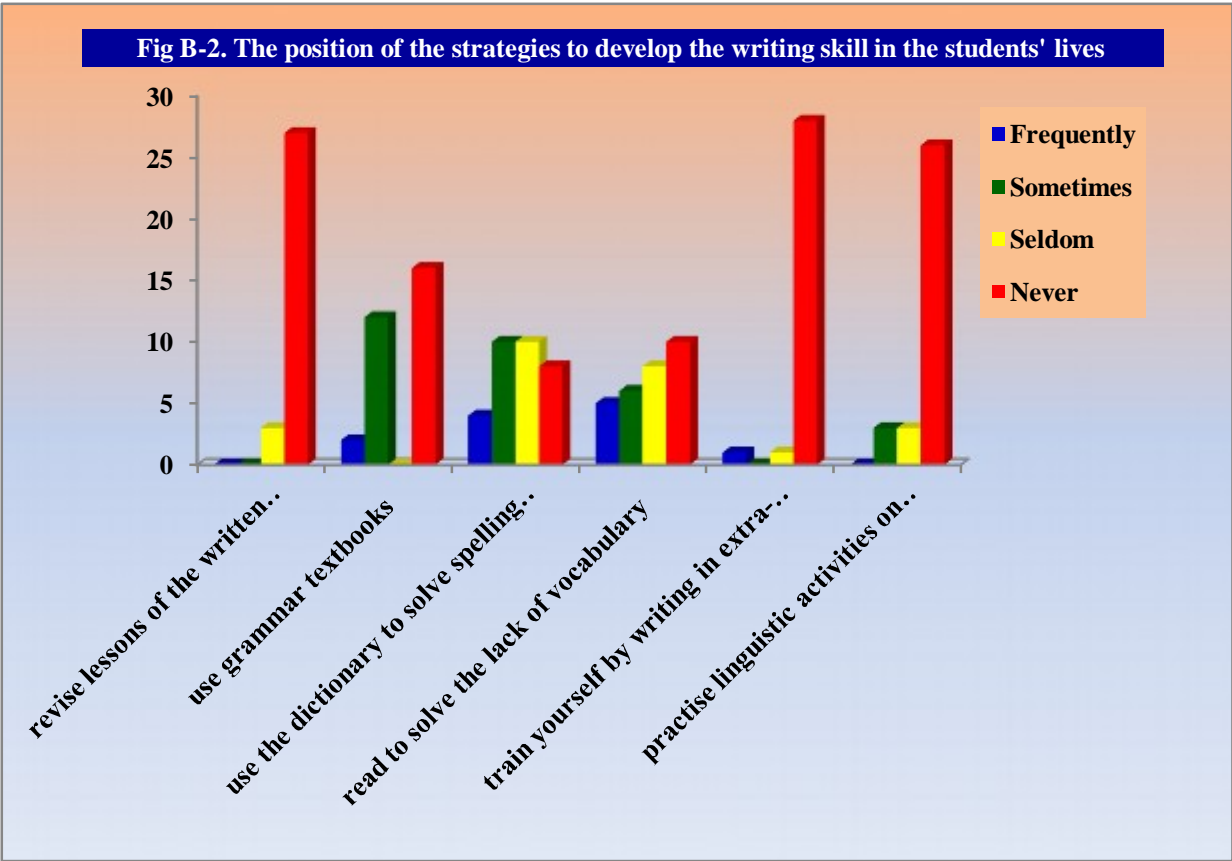
The objective of category **B** is a complementary step to the objective of category **A** which has revealed that the informants know about their problems in writing with the target language. This related objective aims at showing whether these informants try to overcome their difficulties or not, and also, while they try to solve their problems of writing, how they are doing it through the suggested strategies that are thought to be the most useful techniques to develop and improve the writing skill as well as the linguistic competence.



About ($\frac{2}{3}$) two thirds of the informants (i.e. 63,33%) in the graph (B-1) above try to solve their difficulties. This can be considered as a good sign which implies the two-thirds of the population' care about their writing and want to improve themselves.

Nevertheless, all the informants answered the next question which was about how far they use the proposed strategies to develop their linguistic competence. This would not contradict the findings of the above graph with reference to those who answered “No” because nearly all the proposed strategies can be generally used by any FL learner; therefore, even those who do not try to solve their difficulties have answered this question. Also, the findings of the next question would possibly be more significant about the informants’ behaviours since all of them have answered this question.

Graph (B-2) below presents the scale or the regular use of some proposed strategies (six strategies) that are meant for developing both the linguistic competence and the habit of writing. Their use is scaled according to four rates: frequently, sometimes, seldom and never to show a better acquisition of the target language, the scales “frequently” and “sometimes” (respectively blue and green) would be the most culminant points in the graph below.



However, the rate “never” (in red) stands outstandingly as the highest scale: more than 80% of the population never train themselves by writing in their free time, they never revise the lessons of the written expression module, and they never practise linguistic activities to maintain their learning. Also, within the same rate, more than a half of this population never uses grammar

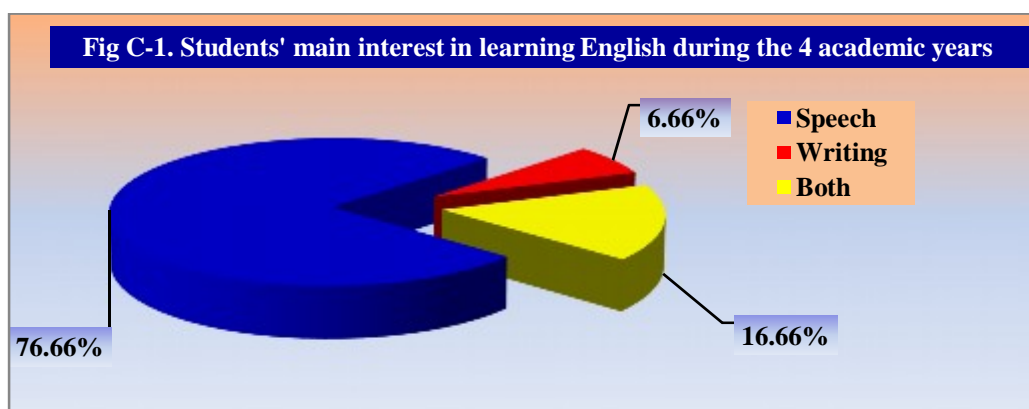
textbooks to enrich their grammar competence. This may explain the most recurrent grammar errors over the academic years since students have never undertaken any grammar feedback, a fact denoted by George (cf. p: 56-57). Nearly one third (between 16,66% and 26,66%) of them never read to enrich their vocabulary or linguistic repertoire and never use the dictionary to solve at least their spelling gaps.

The two latter strategies (i.e. using dictionaries and reading) show similar results in the graph above where they are either sometimes used or seldom used by this population and frequently used by a minority of them (less than 16,66%). This similarity can have an explanation. Indeed, the use of a dictionary requires the reading habit and since they do not read much, the rate of using dictionaries resembles the one of the reading strategy. In addition, there is no frequent revising of the lessons of the written expression module or of practising any free writing; whereas, there is less frequency in using the other remaining strategies.

4.2.1.3 Category C's findings:

The objective of category C is to have an idea about how these informants have felt and behaved during their 4 academic years, but specifically what their focused language area was during the learning process and the periods of assessments. Eight graphs present its findings after the collection of data about this category.

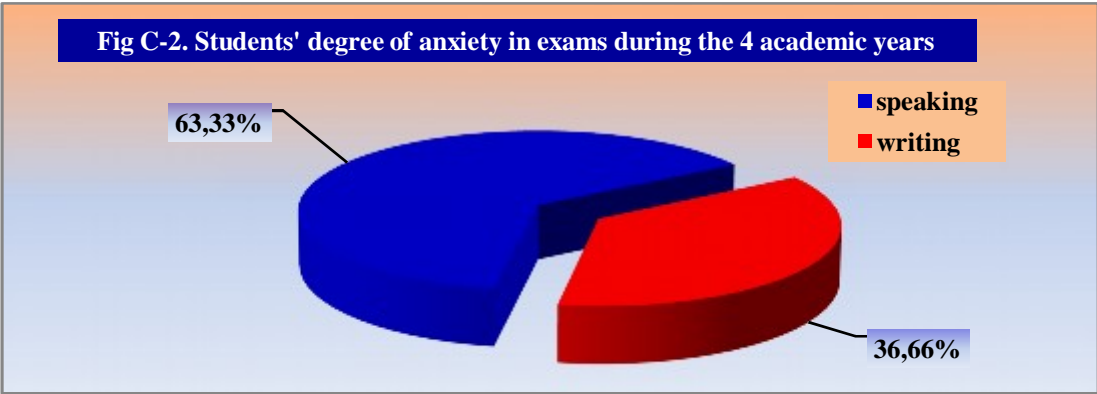
According to graph (C-1) below, 76,66% of the informants are more interested in speech; whereas and dramatically, 6,66% of them have a concern for writing. On the other side, 16,66% have been focussing on the two faculties of language. What was conventionally expected was that the item (Both) would reach the highest percentage as the students' main focus or interest while studying English, because for a conscious foreign language learner, the target language consists of both speaking and writing; therefore, a successful acquisition of it would ask him/her to focus on both.



The reason behind what the fact that speech has emerged as the students' main language point of study during their four academic years may be related to their tendency towards to speak in English; it could be their love for spoken English, or it could be explained by the amount of time devoted to speaking as compared to other skills. Even if later on while teaching this language, most of them find themselves teaching it through speaking more than writing, it is a fact that students tend to focus more on speaking and neglect the writing aspect of language.

Moreover, 6,66% in the pie-chart above manifests the students' care about writing which means that the majority of the informants do not care about this language faculty. What is more surprising is that all of them are aware that most of their academic examinations require a written performance on the basis of what they study in different modules. However, learning a foreign language may call from the learners insistently and consciously to be interested in the two faculties, speaking and writing. It is very important in an academic field, in the sense that the learner is trained for a further language target such as teaching; not only its successful acquisition. Yet the findings in the above pie-chart indicate how much the majority of the students of this case-study are unfortunately far from this concern.

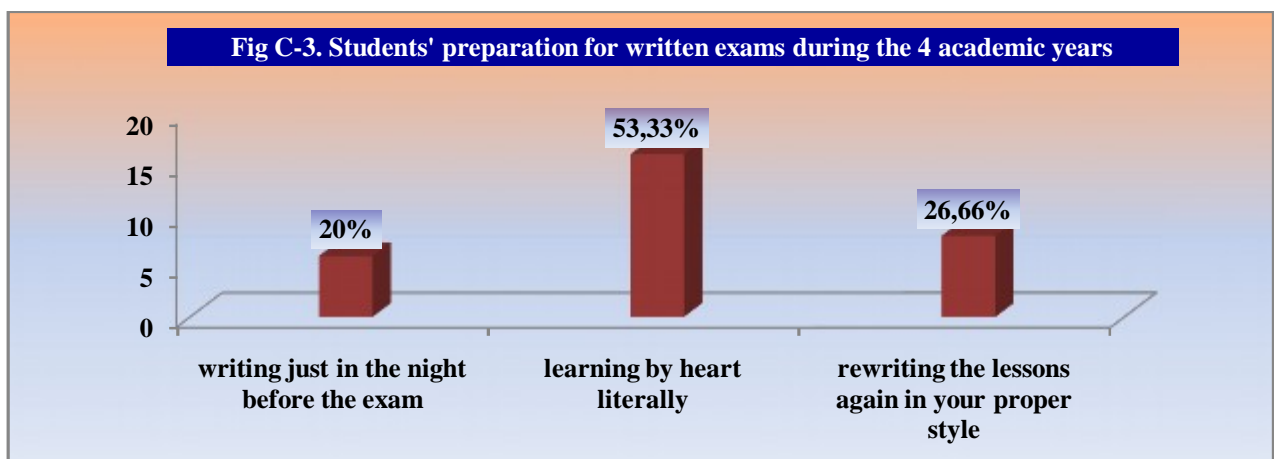
Graph (C-2) shows which language faculty (speech or writing) makes the informants more anxious during the period of the academic assessment/evaluation. Though it occurs rarely and constitutes their main interest, speaking (in oral examinations) appears to be the most stressful kind of language activity to 63,33% of the informants. On the other side, to 36,66% of them, it is in the written examinations that they find themselves more anxious. Of course, for nearly all EFL learners, students feel anxious whenever they have to take an exam in either of the language faculties. But, there is always a varying degree of stress from an exam to another, of which and according to the graph below, the oral examination constitutes the domain of much stress while the written one conveys less stress.



Probably, the reasons to the stressful side of oral examinations, is tied with the number of times this kind of tests academically occur (i.e. its frequency over their four years). It is so since the students do take more written tests than oral ones, which naturally makes those students accustomed to this language activity (i.e. as if they are psychologically prepared for any FL writing new circumstances). Despite of the frequency of academic oral examinations (which is less important than for the written ones in the Algerian departments), those informants might feel anxious because they have not experienced the former often.

In addition, the testing nature of each language faculty may also play a role in increasing/decreasing the students' tension. For instance, when they take an oral examination, they have to speak about the test's subject-matter before an audience (their teacher). Therefore, a certain kind of fear or stress is differently developed on the part of the students, even when they are given different topics to select or even when they are given 10-15 minutes to think about the chosen topic before speaking. This situation is probably not developed while taking a written exam since facing a piece of paper is not so stressful as facing an audience. Of course, anxiety is not absent but it has less influence on their behaviour. In addition, they feel less anxious because they know previously that they can answer freely without being interrupted or exposed to an oral discussion with their examiners right after their exams.

This last point reveals a further reality related to the influence of minor anxiety in written exams and the students' written performances. Less anxiety can psychologically make the examinees' writing behaviour and may affect positively the writing process as a whole (thinking, brainstorming, drafting, revising, etc) as it may also affect positively their final written performance (the writing product). Therefore, suggesting anxiety as one of the most explicative cause to students' difficulties in writing can be excluded since these informants themselves have not related it with their difficulties.



Another fact about the relationship of the informants' behaviour and the writing activity can be studied via graph (C-3) above. It is about how these informants prepare themselves for their academic written examinations. The three bar-lines present clearly three classes of students-behaviours. More than a half of this population (53,33%) learn by heart their modules' content, which may mean that they depend much on their teachers' written materials and on their memories. 26,66% of them rewrite the lessons in their own styles, which means that they are self-dependent and do not rely on their teachers' material only, but are used to revise and rewrite it again in their own way; a kind of language activity that takes time (days or weeks) before the examination period. It does not mean that they do not learn by heart as the previous population does; indeed they do but they do not feel satisfied if they did not use rewriting as well.

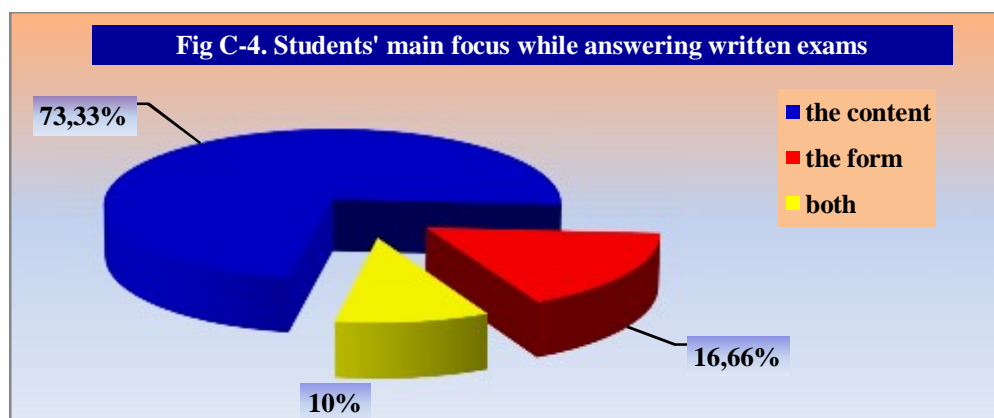
On the other side, less than one third ($\frac{1}{3}$) of the population (20%) writes the lessons just in the night that precedes their exam, which means that they meet somehow with the first population's way of preparation. The only difference in the latter ones is that instead of being completely dependent on the "learning by heart" way, they also write again what they have learnt by heart, a kind of language activity to check their memories. However, to do this during a long-term of learning (where a series of lessons have been taught in every module) seems impossible. Therefore, they do not probably write every learnt lesson but they write summaries instead.

In every way of the students' preparation for exams above, there is a common point. Learning by heart only, writing before the night of the exam (i.e. summarizing) or even rewriting in a proper style indicates practising a language activity. This does not harm the improvement of their written materials, but one may wonder which one can be the most workable to achieve a successful written performance. For instance, the way of learning by heart seems less workable in the sense that the informants take their teachers' written material and begin to learn every word by heart, a fact that keeps them focussing on the words and their arrangements in the sentences without taking into consideration their right spelling, how their teachers' material is written and how the topic is presented, even how punctuation is used. Besides, there is no concrete practice of writing (i.e. no writing physical behaviour). Meanwhile, it could be that while answering in exams, the "form" aspect of their teachers' material is neglected and only the content is respected and overwhelmingly treated.

The other way of students' preparation which is rewriting the teachers' written materials just before the night of exam seems half practical since the informants may not learn by heart every lesson's content of their teachers' materials, but instead they summarise them and then, learn by

heart their written summaries. This way might be helpful since they experience the spelling of words and the sentences' arrangement. Meanwhile the “form” and the “content” are both taken into consideration.

However, as it is mentioned above, to make the “form” as well as the “content” at a rate of a high linguistic competence in that short period of time (i.e. one night) and with a lot of lessons to revise seems difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, the negative points in the two previous ways are nearly best treated in the third way, since the time devoted for preparation can take days or weeks; a fact which it might be helpful and practical for those who chose this method where the form and the content could be equally respected.

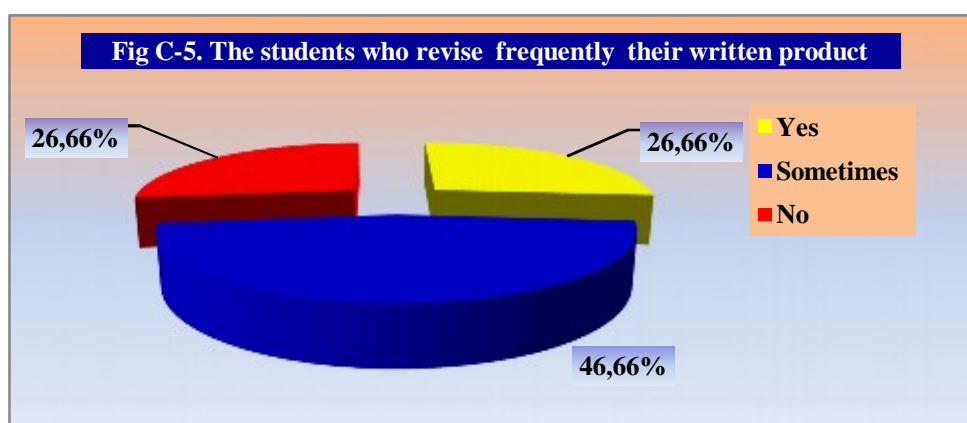


Graph (C-4) shows the students' main target language area of writing while answering a written exam. It has been indicated by graph (C-3) that more than a half of this population focuses more on the content of their teachers' written materials; that is why they probably learn them by heart. This has come to be a reality in the graph above, where 73,33% of them state that they effectively focus more on the content; whereas, 16,66% of them focus more on the form, and 10% of them focus on both. Indeed, the results of this graph match clearly with the ones found in the precedent graph about the informants' ways of preparation to exams as if they support the informants' first choice which is learning by heart the content of their modules.

In the two graphs, the “content” has effectively emerged as the objective from learning by heart the lessons and the main achievable target while answering exams; a fact that may tell that most of these informants bear in mind one thing which is that for their teachers (the examiners or the evaluators), the only aspect to be evaluated in their written performances is the “content”, and at the same time most of what is related with the “form” (grammar and orthography) has no part in the evaluation process. Therefore, this may exactly explain why their written performances over the four academic years have been poor at the level of “form”. Moreover, this cannot be a final

judgment unless it is proved also by the findings of the other dissertation's tool of investigation (i.e. the correction procedure).

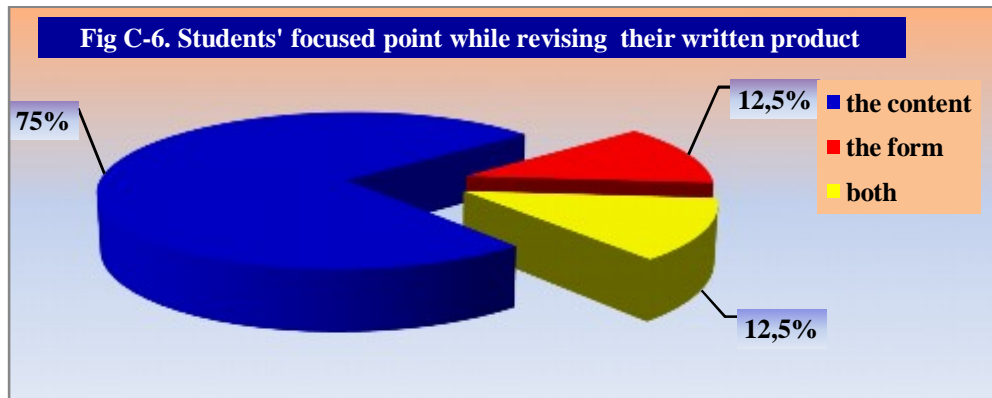
It is believed that one of the most fruitful stages in the writing process that may lead to a successful final written performance is the revision stage, even if the writers are under pressure. It is so in the sense that most aspects related to "form" as well as to "content" can be checked; therefore, any missed items can be added and wrong forms can be corrected. Unfortunately, graph (C-5) indicates that only 26,66% of the informants do really revise their written product before submitting it to the evaluators; whereas and seemingly, for another 26,66% of them, this stage is absent from their writing process. On the other hand, about half of them (46,66%) sometimes do it.



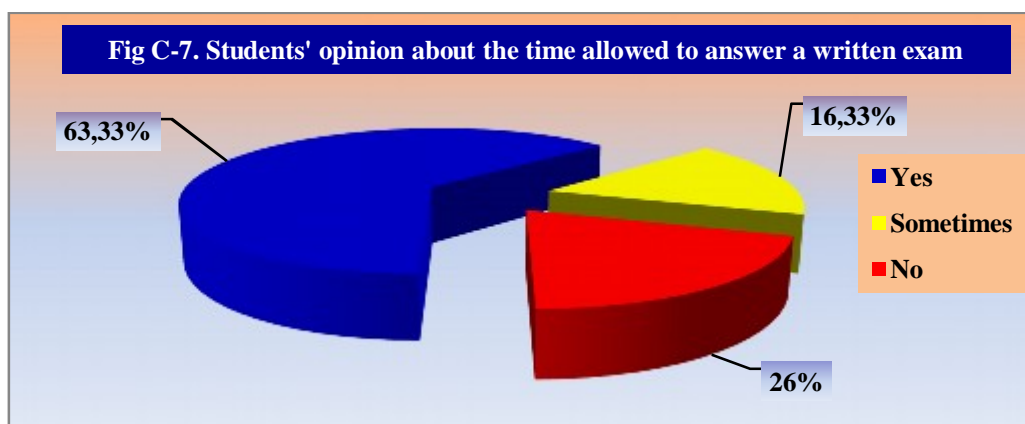
Satisfaction vs. non-satisfaction may stand as the factors behind the different degrees of the informants' revision to their written product. Those who say "yes" are not probably satisfied if they do not check their written content; at least to add or omit an item or correct it (such as: the morphemes: "-s", "-ed", capitals or punctuation, etc). Contrarily to this group, those who say "no" are certainly satisfied with their written work, so it is needless for them to have another look at what they wrote.

But, what makes the factor "satisfaction vs. non-satisfaction" involved here is the issue "awareness vs. unawareness". In fact, those who said "yes" are maybe aware of the importance of the revision stage in the writing process. That is why they do not become satisfied or fulfilled until they revise their written work. This is not the case of those who do not revise their work at all. Only the choice of "sometimes" in the graph above may be explained by different factors, among which the issue of "awareness vs. unawareness" as well as the factor of "satisfaction vs. non-satisfaction" can be included.

The fact could be explained by the amount of time available in the hand of every informant (the student-writer). For instance, those who say “sometimes” may have been aware of the necessity to revise their written performances before handing them in to their evaluators but when they do not have enough time or no time (i.e. the time of the examination is almost over or over for good), this revision is not done. This fact can disappear in another exam where they may have enough time (i.e. the revision can be done). That is why the issue of the amount of time has been included in this questionnaire.

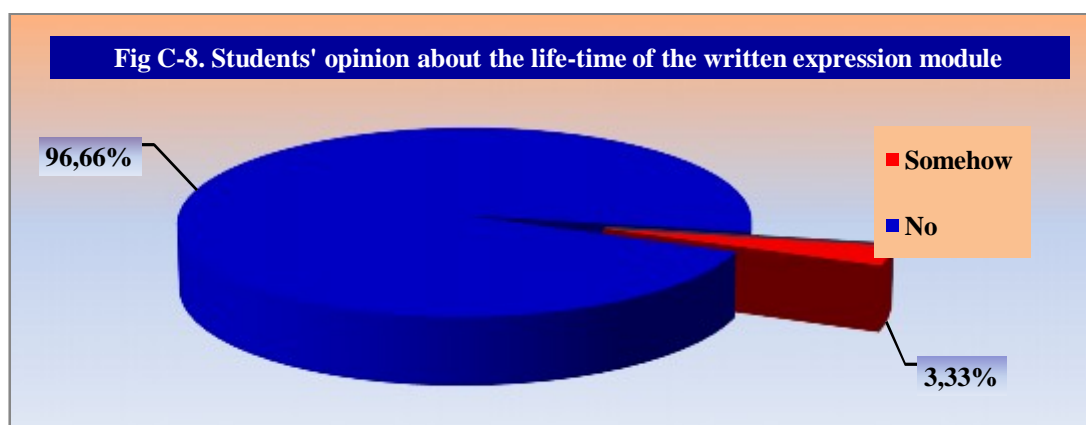


After finishing their first written product, 75% of those who revise their written work (i.e. the minority of this population: 26,66%) check the content, while 12,5% of them revise the form and another 12,5% revise both. Again graph (C-6) confirms that “content” appears to be the informants’ main point of revision similarly to what is found in the findings of graphs (C-3) and (C-4) above, where content appears to be their main objective while preparing their exams or while answering them. These results may also confirm the informants’ attitudes towards their evaluators, already noted earlier about their teachers’ most evaluated aspect in their written productions which seems definitely to be the “content”.



The informants are academically examined for one hour and a half. It was thought that maybe the amount of time given to complete their written forms is not enough and that they may need

extra time. Therefore, they were questioned about this and interestingly, graph (C-7)'s findings indicate that they probably do not need additional time. Indeed, 63,33% of them state that this amount of time is sufficient (i.e. nearly more than two thirds of the informants). On the other side, the time factor stands as totally insufficient for 26% of them, and sometimes insufficient for only 16,66% of them. Whatever the reason(s) could be for those who say “no” and “sometimes”, it/they may not be that meaningful compared to the largest part in the pie-chart above (i.e. 63,33%). Therefore, the time allowed for taking exams would not explain why most of the advanced learners still commit errors. As a matter of fact, this conclusion is similar to Kroll (1990)'s who experiences the time factor in students' written productions as an improbable cause behind the appearance of errors (cf. chapter 2, p: 53).



Another possible reason that stands behind the students' disabilities in writing is found in the insufficient FL language items designed for writing and developing its skill during the learning period. It is true that not all the target language can be taught in terms of inputs but it is reckoned that probably most of its useful material for writing is not taught to students. The matter here is not related to teachers or their ways of teaching but presumably to the academic programme, mainly with the curriculum. For this sake, graph (C-8) in this group of questions (i.e. category C) above shows the informants' view of point about the life-time of the written expression module (which is taught in the 1st and 2nd years), and more particularly their opinion was after four years of learning; on whether they believe that the two years of the written expression module were enough for them to acquire the basic skills in writing.

Remarkably, nearly all the informants (96,66%) share the same feeling that those two years during their four year academic life as students of English do not hinder their capacities to be good writers, a point which makes one wonders why their written products exhibit persistent errors such as the absence of some grammatical forms or structures. It could be that these

informants have not been taught these items, or if they have, they may have not practised them often in the written expression module sessions due to the lack of academic time. These findings meet partially with what Silva (1990)'s noted through his enquiry about whether academic programmes have showed effectiveness such as improving students' writing (cf. chapter 2, p: 55).

4.2.1.4 The summary of the students' opinions:

All the questions of the three categories have been investigating why the students still have difficulties in writing according to their beliefs and own experience. For instance, the findings of category **A** could determine that those students really encounter difficulties in writing with English and they implicitly explain them by their absence of reading and practice, which both constitute potential factors for learning even the simplest linguistic items of English not only for developing the writing skill. Yet, what is customary in learning a foreign language, is that reading and practising some FL linguistic activities constitute a habit for the FL learner especially during his/her academic stream. Therefore, since these two factors are nearly absent from their academic life of studying English, they probably play a role in their failure to achieve a successful written production.

In addition, the results of category **B** show effectively that a great portion of the informants share a similar behaviour or thinking. Though they are all aware of their problems in writing in the TL along their four academic streams (according to the findings of category A) and most of them try to solve these problems, they are still unaware of the importance of the strategies used to develop their cognitive capacities for a better TL learning. On the other side, if they are aware of them, they are still far from making a good profit of them since reviewing the TL grammar, the reading habit and practising writing are not a regular part of their lives as foreign language students; even the use of dictionaries is not habitual. This probably may explain the poor performance of their written productions.

On the other hand, the findings of category **C** are twofold: the first one eliminates "anxiety" and "time allowance" in the academic exams from the list of the assumed causes that might be responsible for the informants' disabilities in writing on the basis of their own perceptions and beliefs. The second finding indicates two significant reasons behind their weak written forms, especially on the level of form. Accordingly, the two years of the written expression module appear as the prior cause which affects their writing product since the academic programme

cannot be well assimilated over two academic years only. It can be considered as prior as no other suggested reason was mentioned by so many informants (96,66%).

Besides, the other significant cause lies in the relationship of these informants with the writing faculty. Indeed, the findings give a clear picture about the informants' language behaviour which has shown that these informants do not have a writing behaviour except for a minority of them. Most of them prefer to be speakers of English rather than writers. Even during examinations, their behaviour remains that of speakers rather than of writers, since most of them confess that they do not practise any writing activity that may promote their future production: they claim that the content of their modules is only their evaluators' unique concern and that through learning by heart and not through writing they can achieve a good production.

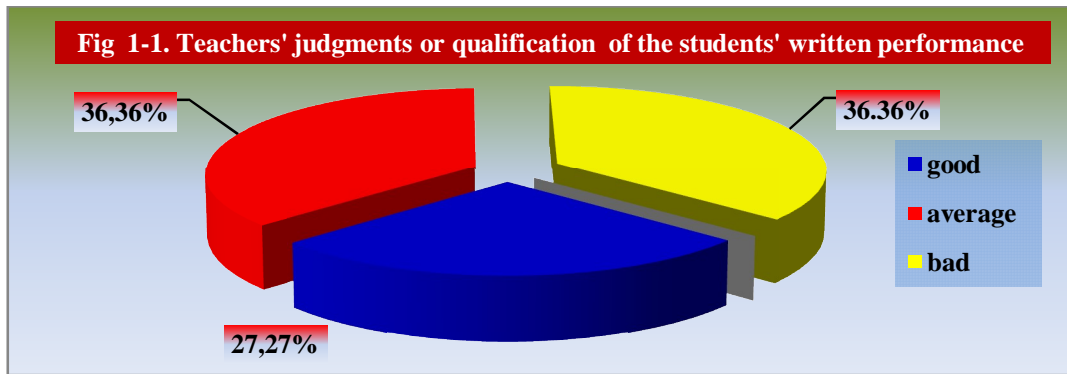
4.2.2 The results of the teachers' questionnaire:

The table below recalls the characteristics of the teachers' questionnaire. The main objective of this questionnaire turns around how the teachers of the research population describe and view the student-informants' TL language productions over the four academic streams, mainly during written exams. It also tries to point out what might be the causes behind their failure to write good English. Seven displays have been exposed below for interpretation and analysis after collecting data.

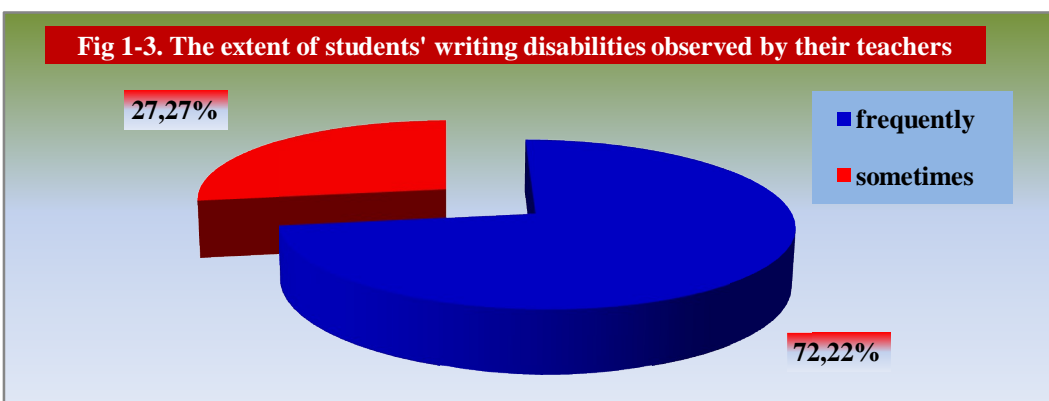
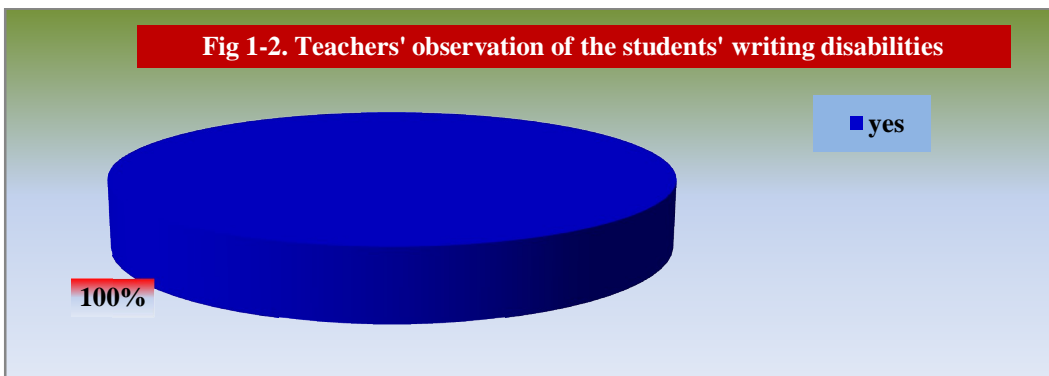
| Category | Number of | |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| | questions | informants |
| Evaluating students' exam-papers | 7 | 11 |

Table M. The features of teachers' questionnaire

Graph (1-1) presents the teachers' personal judgments on the students' written productions. Among the 11 teachers, 27,27% of them find the written performances "good" while 36,36% of them describe them as "average" and another 36,36% of them as "bad". In terms of description, it is observed that "average" and "bad" qualifications rise as equal parts in the pie-chart above, with a percentage of more than "good" qualification for each. This observation may alter the judgment on the students' productions scaled between being bad and average. However, the interpretation behind "average" may be that sometimes they are good and sometimes they are bad, a note which may allow adding the rate of "bad" of this average qualification –whatever its amount could be– to that of the bad one. Therefore, the students' written productions can be judged as bad, and one can be tempted to assign a large part of the average section to the bad one.

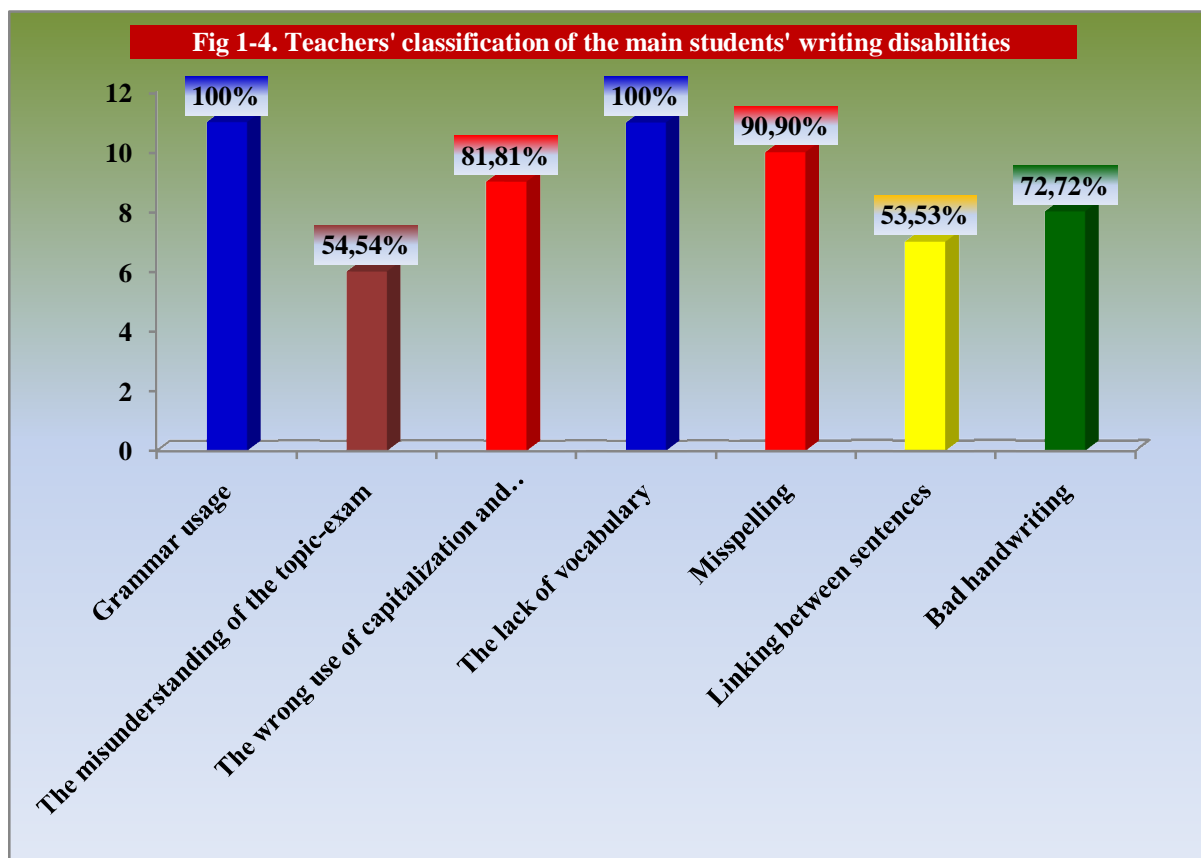


The population's difficulties in writing are not solely observed and understood from graph (1-1) above. They are also noticed by their teachers who have taught them along their four academic years, and where all of them (i.e. 100%) note this fact in graph (1-2) below and 72,22% of them in graph (1-3) below describe it as occurring frequently.



Graph (1-4) below exhibits this frequent “bad” qualification of the students’ difficulties or disabilities in writing in terms of types, according to their teachers who have been their evaluators along their academic stream. The first attractive point in this graph is that all the seven suggested items which constitute the students’ difficulty or the areas where these difficulties befall, share a common aspect. Indeed, all of them show a percentage of more than a half

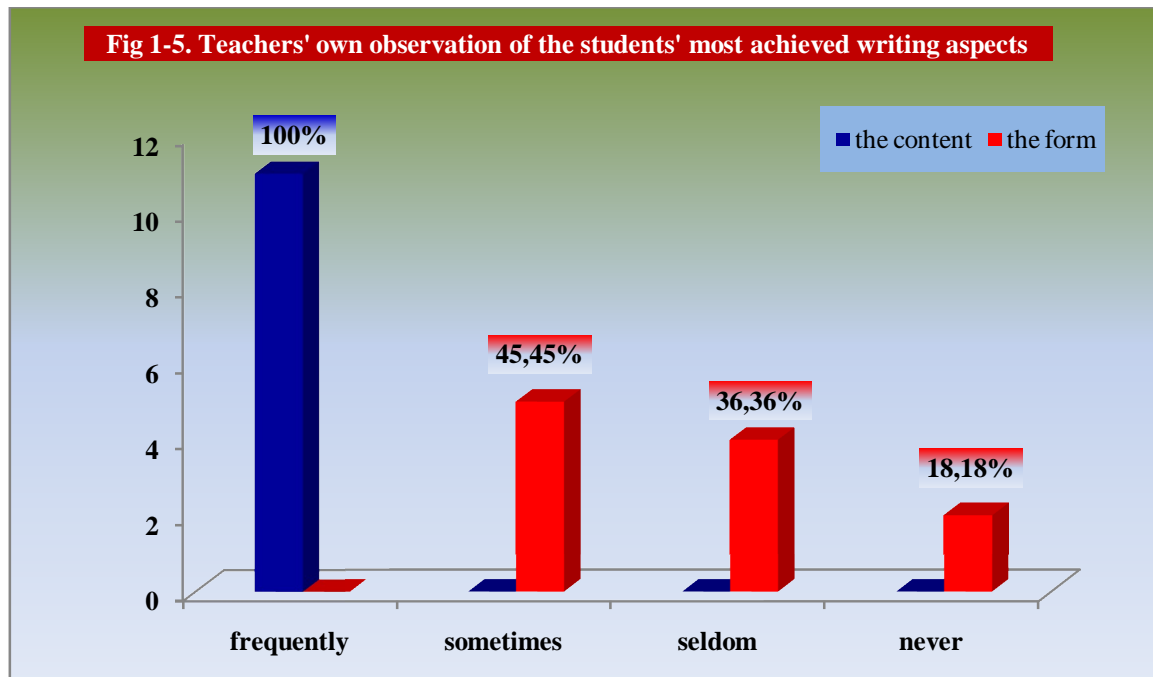
(<50%); meanwhile all the teachers have identified that the population under research has difficulties in all these areas.



Besides, the graph above allows the classification of these difficulties. Accordingly, among the seven difficulties suggested in the teachers' questionnaire, the TL grammar usage and the lack of vocabulary appear as the most highly frequent difficulties, noted by all the teachers (100%); whereas, 90,90% agree on misspelling, and 81,81% of them agree on the wrong use of English orthography (punctuation and capitals). About more than a half of them (54,54% – 53,53%) view the misunderstanding of the topic exam and the link between sentences as other obvious difficulties. Moreover, another striking fact is that 72,72% of the teachers have also noticed that the students have a serious problem in their handwriting, which may allow to say that the informants (i.e. the teachers) really encountered some difficulty during the evaluation process.

Henceforth, most of the high scaled frequent difficulties are related with the aspect “form” in the students' written performances. Therefore, most of the persistent errors may be grammatical, spelling-like orthographical and graphological. The lack of vocabulary and the misspelling have presumably occurred due to the absence of reading and using dictionaries, a fact already shown

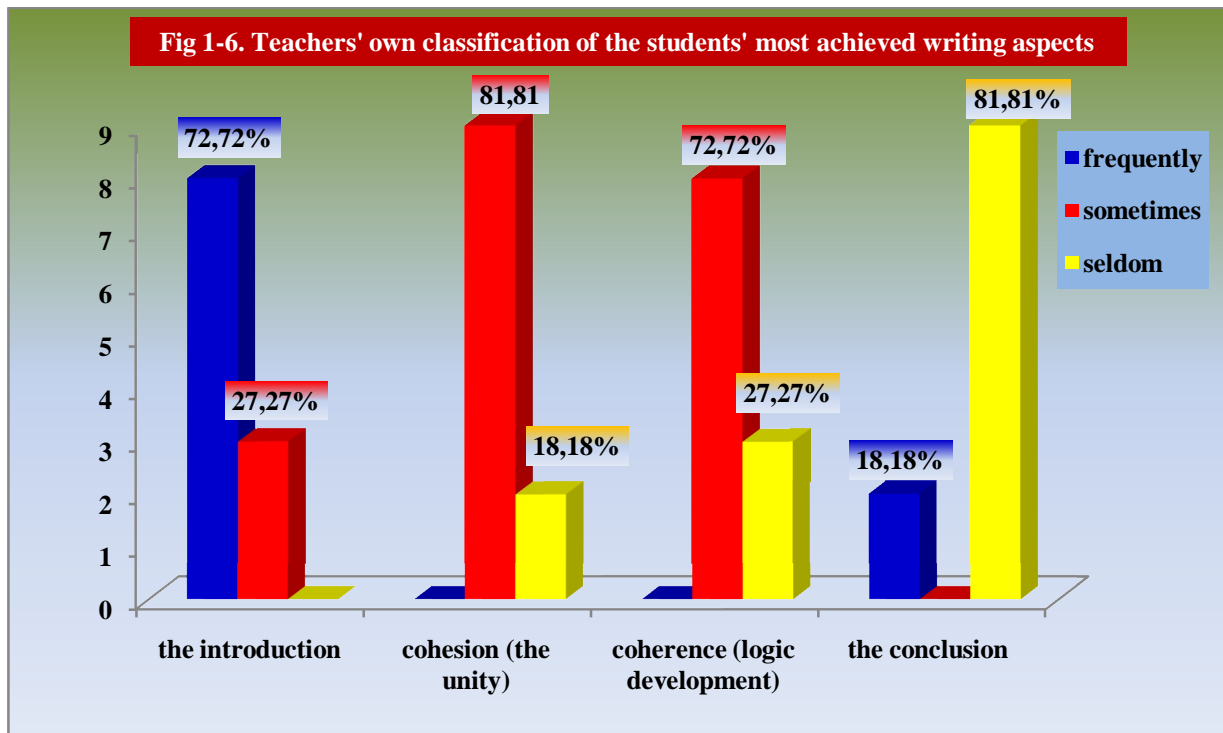
while interpreting the data gathered from the students' questionnaire which has revealed that they do not read and use dictionaries much.



Graph (1-5) determines how far the aspects of the written performance are achieved by students, observed by their teachers during correction. According to their evaluation, the two general aspects (the content and the form) are achieved, but with a big difference. All the teachers (100%) have observed that students always achieve the content; whereas, the form is sometimes achieved for 45,45%, seldom achieved for 36,36% of them and never achieved for 18,18% of them. Meanwhile, less than half of the informants have noticed that the form is not totally ignored but it is differently respected; which it can imply that the form is less respected by the student-writers. If this can be explained, it may be extremely knotted with the findings of the students' questionnaire where it was found that most students care much about the content than the form because it is their teachers' prior point of evaluation. This graph also supports the analysis of graph (1-4) where it was found that most of the students' difficulties are tied with the formal aspect as if it embeds why these difficulties reappear. They do so because students usually do achieve the content and sometimes or rarely they care for the form.

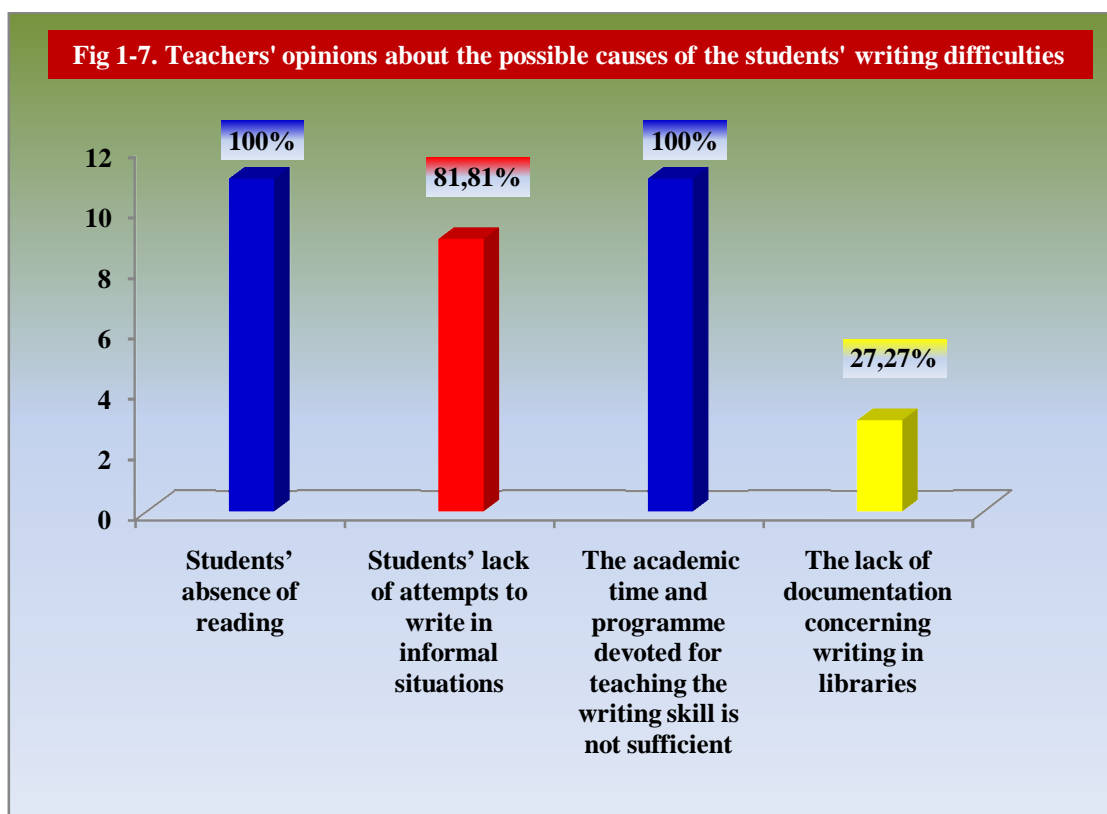
Nevertheless, the TL grammar and orthography may not be the only achievable features of the form in writing. In fact, other features of form such as the essay body (the introduction, cohesion, coherence and the conclusion) are also intended for achievement by students while answering an exam. For that reason, graph (1-6) below clarifies the student-writers' frequent

respect of performing these features as stated or attested by their teacher-evaluators. The teachers have noticed that the introduction is frequently achieved (72,72%) while the conclusion is seldom achieved (81,81%), and cohesion and coherence are sometimes achieved (81,81%-72,72%). Meanwhile the essay form in the students' written performances is not complete since many of them rarely have conclusions.



Relating this to the students' ignorance of the essay form (where the conclusion is a part of it) can be a further reason because they have been taught the essay' elements and its production over their first two academic years. In addition, this informants' observation, gathered from the graph below, can be also revised and compared while analyzing the data collected from the second investigative tool of the dissertation, which is the correction of their written materials. It is also at this stage of analysis that this observation can be matched with the findings of the questionnaires.

Graph (1-7) in the teachers' questionnaire displays the informants' opinions about the possible causes behind the poor forms in most of the students' written productions. All the teachers (100%) relate the students' disabilities in writing to the insufficient academic time and programme devoted to teaching the writing skill. It can be that they observe that there are many missing TL items in the students' writings because students' have not studied them due to the uncompleted programmes in the written expression and grammar modules.



In addition, the informants believe that the reasons are also linked to students themselves. Indeed, all of them (100%) think that the absence of reading by students explains their poor vocabulary as one of their main difficulty, misspelling as an interesting 90,90% difficulty (signed up in graph 1-4) and the incomplete form of their essays (signed up in graph 1-6); whereas, most of them (81,81%) believe that the lack of practising free writing (at home or in the university library or in any study room) is behind their poor forms: their spelling and probably their bad handwriting. On the other side, 27,27% suggest that the lack of documentation concerning writing in the university library can also be another reason. However, it might not be such an important reason since most of the informants have not indicated it as so. This can be meaningfully accepted because the informants (the teachers) seem to agree on the existence of documentation on writing in the university library, which they believe is satisfactory.

4.2.2.1 The summary of the teachers' opinions:

The findings of the teachers' questionnaire have demonstrated that the forms of the students' written performances are judged as frequently lacking many important features of the target language. The main frequent deficiencies emerge in vocabulary, in grammar control, in spelling, in essay form and even in handwriting. This reoccurs due to two main reasons: one is academic (the official programme and timing may not be very helpful for the improvement of the writing

skill) and the second is psycholinguistic, related to the students themselves who most of the time tend to achieve the content and neglect the form aspect and who, on the other hand, do not read or do some free writing to improve their capacity of writing and maintain their linguistic competence as well.

4.2.3 The meeting ground of the two opinions:

To sum up, all the analyses and the interpretations of the data collected from the two questionnaires have been so informative that they could explain why the written performances of the advanced EFL students have known a kind of writing degradation especially at the level of form (i.e. the research' s first enquiry). Accordingly, most of the asked questions in each questionnaire hold implicitly a reason, suggested to underlie this continuous degradation.

Among all the suggested reasons, the insufficient academic timing and programme of the written expression module appear as the main cause of the students' failure to achieve good performance with correct forms and few errors. Indeed, both questionnaires agree about this academic cause. Therefore, students might not be blamed for their weak written performance which reflects their poor linguistic competence. It is rather worth suggesting that the actual official timing and programme instituted for teaching the written expression and grammar modules should be revised and adjusted so as to be more fruitful in terms of teaching students as many as TL writing skills as possible, and more practical in terms of training students to do more TL writing activities.

The other meeting point of the two questionnaires is the psycholinguistic reason related to the students' language behavior, who do not seem to have acquired writing habits along their four academic stream. This reason is both outstandingly confessed by the students themselves and observed by their teachers. In fact, nearly all of them admit that they do not write during their free time to better their written expression and their handwriting, they do not learn the writing ability from reading simply because they do not have the habit of reading; even the dictionaries are not of a usual use as if they were not important. All what they care for is first speaking the TL, which is not a bad thing but it is not enough for a good TL acquisition, and second learning by heart the content of their modules because it is the most evaluated aspect by their teachers. Even during examinations, the form is progressively abandoned from the drafting or the revision stage.

Consequently, it can be seriously declared that there is no real evidence of students' motivation towards the act of writing itself as if the students do not like the writing faculty despite the fact that they are aware of two inevitable realities: they know that most of their academic tests require the act of writing and they know that they do really encounter difficulties in this language faculty, but this knowledge does not stimulate them to become writers, too. That is why this kind of awareness has been labelled as an incomplete consciousness, and for which accordingly, the students are blamed and considered as responsible for their poor written productions.

4.3 The findings of the evaluation/correction tools:

Evaluating the students' performance as an inquisitive research material has been additionally proceeded to collect other data about the reason(s) behind the students' degradation of their writings. These data have been collected along three criteria 1) describing the students written performances, 2) identifying their frequent errors and 3) describing their teachers' ways of evaluation. These data, furthermore, may meet or object the findings of the first two inquisitive research materials i.e. they would probably ascertain or take for granted the two discovered causes of the students' failure to write good English or they would have other reasons, of which students' unawareness of their weaknesses in writing is believed to be most important cause due to the insufficient ways of responding to their productions.

4.3.1 The descriptive features of the research population's writings:

The data presented in the three tables below are organised upon information collected from the research first three tables: K-1, K-2 and K-3 (cf. appendix 18), suggested as additional research tools such as the questionnaires. Their findings are exposed in tables K-4, K-5 and K-6 (cf. appendix 18). The percentages in the tables below are calculated on the basis of the total number of students of each class (i.e. 10 students). They show the scale of achievements for every aspect in both the essay format/layout and the English orthography in the students' writings.

The achievements are also observed and classified in these tables as present and good (+), present and half-correct (\pm), present but incorrect (-) and absent (0). Of course, the item not available at all cannot be assigned or attributed to the aspects of handwriting and spelling in every student's achievement because there must be handwriting and spelling. Therefore, as they are conventionally available, the blanks attached to them in the column (0) are grey (i.e. unfilled).

In addition, the highest percentages for every aspect are cross-sectional and differently coloured, where the blue indicates the foremost percentages in the first point of time and the light-blue indicates the foremost one in the second one. They are proposed as so to help making the comparison between the two distinct points of time; thus, to seek any improvement or degradation. In analysing and interpreting the gathered data, it is believed that most of the achievements would be found between bad and average scales, as their performers (i.e. the students) were in the 2nd year (simply because they were still in their first years of learning and practising the TL writing) and between good and average scales as they were advanced (4th year).

4.3.1.1 The longitudinal description of class A's written performance:

In **table N** (in the next page), when they were in the 2nd year, the ten students of class A could achieve well two aspects only, the handwriting (80% of them) and the introduction (40% of them); however, the two other aspects were achieved but half-correct. Indeed, on an average level, all of them (100%) could achieve the development¹ and 40% of them could end their stories (with conclusions). On the other side, 70% of them could achieve badly the English orthography.

During the 4th year, the handwriting was the only aspect well-achieved by half of this population (50%) and an average near to the half (i.e.40% of them) has a bad handwriting. On the other side, more than half (60%) has an average paragraphing. In addition, all of them (100%) could achieve average development² and a half of them (50%) and less than half (40%) introduce and conclude their performance on an average level. Still 60% to 70% of them could achieve bad English orthography.

Accordingly, through the two years, there is a clear degradation in some aspects of writing such as handwriting, the introduction, and the conclusion. Indeed, though it remained good, the handwriting shifted from being the best achieved aspect (80%) to an average achieved aspect by the half (50%). Also, the introductions which were well-performed before (i.e. in the 2nd year) became average at the advanced level (in the 4th year).

Despite this decline, this performance was acceptable since its items remained average. However, the other aspect which concerns the conclusions has known a serious development. In

¹ - which was about retailing a true personal story.

² - which was about the British policy toward the immigration waves.

fact, as they were achieved before, they nearly became absent in some of the written performances (40% of them did not have conclusions). Contrarily to the development of the first two aspects, this may harm the essay layout.

| | | 4 th year students: class A (2003-2004) | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|--|-----|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | | The scales | | + | | ± | | - | | 0 | |
| | | W. exp/Brit.civ | | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th |
| THE STUDENTS' WRITTEN PRODUCT | Essay layout | - Handwriting | 80% | 50% | 10% | 10% | 10% | 40% | | | |
| | | - Paragraphing | | 20% | | 60% | | 20% | | 10% | |
| | | - Introduction | 40% | 20% | 30% | 50% | 20% | 10% | 10% | 20% | |
| | | - Development | 0% | 0% | 100% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | |
| | | - Conclusion | 30% | 0% | 40% | 40% | 10% | 20% | 20% | 40% | |
| | English orthography | - Spelling. | 10% | 0% | 20% | 40% | 70% | 60% | | | |
| | | - Punctuation | 0% | 0% | 30% | 30% | 70% | 70% | 0% | 0% | |
| | | - Capitalisation | 0% | 0% | 30% | 30% | 70% | 70% | 0% | 0% | |

Table N. The writing formal features in class A

On the other hand, there is no development in the English orthography longitudinally; yet, there is a stability of achievement which in its turn indicates that this class had had great problems in dealing with the English orthography (i.e. it becomes the students' main target language difficulty).

4.3.1.2 The longitudinal description of class B's written performance:

In **table N-1** (in the next page), when they were in the 3rd year, half of class B (50%) could achieve one aspect well namely, the development³. Three aspects have been achieved on an average level; 80% of them had an average handwriting and half of them (50%) could introduce their essays and wrote through paragraphing. However, the conclusion was not available for 40% of them and most of them (between 60% and 80%) had bad English orthography.

³ - that is about criticizing the characters of the "Sister Carrie" novel; written by Dreiser Theodor.

| | | 4 th year students: class B (2004-2005) | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | | The scales | + | | ± | | - | | 0 | |
| | | Am.lit/Am.lit | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th |
| THE STUDENTS' WRITTEN PRODUCT | Essay layout | - Handwriting | 20% | 30% | 80% | 60% | 0% | 10% | | |
| | | - Paragraphing | 20% | 0% | 50% | 40% | 10% | 30% | 20% | 20% |
| | | - Introduction | 30% | 30% | 50% | 40% | 0% | 20% | 20% | 10% |
| | | - Development | 50% | 20% | 30% | 50% | 20% | 30% | 0% | 0% |
| | | - Conclusion | 30% | 30% | 20% | 30% | 10% | 10% | 40% | 30% |
| | English orthography | - Spelling. | 20% | 20% | 20% | 30% | 60% | 50% | | |
| | | - Punctuation | 10% | 10% | 20% | 20% | 70% | 70% | 0% | 0% |
| | | - Capitalisation | 10% | 10% | 10% | 20% | 80% | 70% | 0% | 0% |

Table N-1. The writing formal features in class B (in the 1st selection)

In the 4th year, just one aspect was achieved well and, surprisingly, it is the conclusion but unfortunately only by 30% of them (i.e. a minority). Five aspects were achieved on an average level, among which handwriting, paragraphing and the introduction remained so with a difference of 10% to 20% down the previous percentages, and with the appearance of the development⁴ and the conclusion as other average achievements (50% and 30% for each). With the same fact but bad, the English orthography appeared with a difference of 10% to 20% down the previous percentages. Therefore, there are two descriptive findings for this longitudinal collection; the first is that the aspect of conclusion was nearly absent. Even though it knew a kind of improvement cross-sectionally, it was not so for the majority of the students, a fact which was already described as harming the essay format. The other reality is that there is a kind of stable scaling with only a difference of 10% to 20% for the other aspects of the written performance. Yet, this difference indicates less improvement rather than the contrary.

In **table N-2** (in the next page), the students show no sign of a high or good achievement in writing in the 3rd year. Only handwriting is the averagely achieved; whereas, most of the remaining aspects are either badly achieved or never performed. Indeed half of the papers (50%)

⁴ - which was about revealing the use of symbols by F. Scott Fitzgerald in his novel : The Great Gatsby.

have bad paragraphing and 60% of them have a bad development⁵. Also, between 60% and 80% have bad English orthography, but surprisingly, most of them (70%) have no introductions and no conclusions.

| | | 4 th year students: class B (2004-2005) | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | | The scales | + | | ± | | - | | 0 | |
| | | Brit.civ | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th |
| THE STUDENTS' WRITTEN PRODUCT | Essay layout | - Handwriting | 30% | 50% | 40% | 30% | 30% | 20% | | |
| | | - Paragraphing | 0% | 30% | 40% | 20% | 50% | 50% | 10% | 0% |
| | | - Introduction | 10% | 80% | 10% | 10% | 10% | 10% | 70% | 0% |
| | | - Development | 30% | 40% | 10% | 30% | 60% | 30% | 0% | 0% |
| | | - Conclusion | 10% | 40% | 10% | 10% | 10% | 10% | 70% | 40% |
| | English orthography | - Spelling. | 10% | 60% | 30% | 30% | 60% | 10% | | |
| | | - Punctuation | 20% | 50% | 0% | 10% | 80% | 40% | 0% | 0% |
| | | - Capitalisation | 10% | 30% | 10% | 20% | 80% | 50% | 0% | 0% |

Table N-2. The writing formal features in class B (in the 2nd selection)

In the 4th year, most of the aspects were achieved well except for paragraphing and capitalisation. Most of the students (80%) could achieve nicely the introductions, 60% of them could achieve well the spelling, half of them could do it for the handwriting and the punctuation, and 40% of them for the development⁶. Handwriting was only average for 40% of them. Two aspects only have been performed badly: paragraphing and capitalisation by half of them for each. On the other side, there is one sign to unavailable aspect which is the conclusion by 40% of them.

Clearly, there is a big difference between the two academic year examinations. Interestingly, most of the aspects, which have been previously scaled as bad, have known improvement in the next year. Though there is a difference of 30% below the previous percentages for the aspects of conclusion and capitalization, it is an important improvement except for the conclusion which had no part in 40% of the students' writings.

⁵ - which was about the reign of George III in Great Britain.

⁶ - which was about describing the history of the Britain educational system.

4.3.2 The findings of the error analysis:

The four tables below summarise the frequency of errors in the students' written materials in different modules and exams, one for the class A (2003-2004) and the two others for the class B (2004-2005). The last one (the fourth one) groups all the data about errors frequency in both class (i.e. the 60 written products). Each table's data of the first three ones are extracted from the results of the three tables: J-1, J-2 and J-3 designed for evaluating students' written work (cf. appendix 17). Also, these tables have allowed the classification of the most frequent and persistent errors, produced by the research population. These are noted by percentages in the right corner of each table (cf. tables J-4, J-5 and J-6 in appendix 17).

4.3.2.1 Class A error frequency:

In **Table O**, 104 errors are identified in the 2nd year cross-section, where 2 of them are nonce errors (i.e. appeared once) and 102 of them are frequent at the same point of time. In the 4th year cross-section, 116 errors are counted where all of them are frequent. As a result, a total of 220 errors are cross-sectionally identified in the written materials of the students, among which 150 of them are longitudinally persistent. It is also noticed that the number of errors has increased between these two sections of time from 47,27% in the first appearance to 52,72% in the second appearance. This augmentation cannot be very important because the rate of error occurrence is found between below average (47,27%) and just above the average (52,72%). However, it may be so attentive since errors are more produced at the advanced academic level (i.e. the 4th year), a point which may confirm that improvement in the target language writing has been decreased.

| THE STUDENTS' ERROR FREQUENCY | | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------|--------|---|---------------|
| 4th year students: A class (2003-2004) | | | | | |
| Cross-sectional (220) | | | | Longitudinal (150) | |
| 2 nd (104) | | 4 th (116) | | in the 2 nd and the 4 th year | |
| W. exp/Brit.civ exam | Nonce | Frequent | Nonce | Frequent | Frequent |
| – The number of errors | 02 | 102 | 00 | 116 | 150 |
| – Percentages | 47,27% | | 52,72% | | 68,18% |
| – The type of errors; indicated by symbols | P and lc (100%) / T (80%) / cap, ?M and RO (70%) / ^ (50%) / WW and art (40%) / VF, s/pl and ref? (30%) / frag (20%) / om and prep (10%). | | | | |

Table O. Class A's frequent errors

In addition, the most striking and appealing points are the 150 longitudinal errors which have been detected as persistent or fossilized. They are so striking that they constitute more than half of the total number of produced errors (68,18%). Meanwhile, the students of class A tended to produce them twice. As an example, within this group of errors, **orthographical errors** in using English punctuation, capitalisation and lower cases are found to be one of the higher frequencies of errors.

Indeed, while reading the students' written performances, it was observed that punctuation and capitalization were not absent; however, their usage was somehow bizarre since students seemed to punctuate and capitalize wherever they liked. The wrong punctuation resulted into 70% run-on sentences, which made the meaning of some sentences difficult to be understood (?M); whereas, the different wrong use of capitalisation suggests that the lower case (lc) is needed in all the written products.

The other higher frequencies are the local errors which lie in one aspect of **grammatical errors**. It is the use of English tenses, especially in the use of the past simple and the past perfect. Indeed, it was found that their use was either uncontrolled or ignored since the topics of the two different exams were referring to something in the past: a short story (in the 2nd year) and a period of events from the British history (in the 4th year).

As it was also observed, within the same class of errors (i.e. the grammatical one), the misuse of articles, forms of verbs, reference (subject-verb and singular-plural agreement), and fragment sentences constitute the lower frequency of errors for these students. Also, part of this lower frequency concerns **morphological errors** where the '-s' and '-d' morphemes are not added. On the other hand, half of the students omitted words in their written productions, which led to fragment sentences (parts of speech or words from what they have learnt by heart for the British examination are omitted) and another part led to the wrong use of vocabulary. These can be regarded or classified as **lexical** or **interpretive errors** since they are related to the content aspect of the written performances and not to the formal aspect.

4.3.2.2 Class B error frequency:

In **Table O-1**, a total of 220 errors were cross-sectionally indentified in the 1st selection of the written materials of the class B, among which 162 errors were detected longitudinally. In the 3rd year cross-section, 109 errors were found where one error was a nonce one and the remaining were frequent. In the 4th year cross-section, there were 3 nonce errors and 108 frequent ones (i.e.

a total of 111 errors). It was observed that the number of errors increased very slowly between the two distinct periods of time, to the point of being very close (49,54% in the 3rd year and 50,54% in the 4th year). On the other side, the errors that were found over longitude detection were worth concentrating on. In fact, 73,63% of all errors found within this collection (162% from 220) were persistent.

| THE STUDENTS' ERROR FREQUENCY | | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------|--------|--|---------------|
| 4th year students: B class (2004-2005) | | | | | |
| Cross-sectional (220) | | | | Longitudinal (162) | |
| 3rd (109) | | 4th (111) | | in the 3rd and the 4th year | |
| Am.lit/Am.lit exam | Nonce | Frequent | Nonce | Frequent | Frequent |
| – The number of errors | 01 | 108 | 03 | 108 | 162 |
| – Percentages | 49,54% | | 50,45% | | 73,63% |
| – The type of errors; indicated by symbols | lc (100%) / T (90%) / WW, P, cap and ?M (80%) / ref? (50%) / ^, Rep and RO (40%) / Agr and s/pl (30%) / WO, Frag, om and Art (20%) / VF (10%). | | | | |

Table O-1. Class B's frequent errors (in the 1st selection)

For instance, the high frequency of errors was manifested in three aspects of **orthographical errors** (lower case, punctuation and capitalisation), in one aspect of **grammatical errors** (the English tenses) and in two aspects of global errors or **lexical errors** (wrong words used, and ambiguous meanings). On the other hand, the other remaining aspects of global errors create the lower frequency. They are mostly of grammar nature. The 50% of unknown reference was related to either the subject-agreement errors or to unfinished quotations or undetermined by who said them and also to untimed events (no exact year(s) is/are provided for some events in the British civilization exam.

In **Table O-2**, a total of 189 cross-sectional errors was counted. Within it, 122 errors were longitudinally detected. 100 errors were cross-sectionally found in the 3rd year where one was a nonce one and 99 errors were frequent in the same year; while, less than 100 errors (i.e. 89) were detected at the 4th year cross-section and all were frequent. Though the number of errors had decreased (from 52,91% to 47,08%) (i.e. contrarily to the previous selection: from 49,54% to 50,54%), and though the number of errors detected longitudinally also decreased i.e. from

73,63% (162 errors) to 64,55% (122 errors), still the number of the persistent errors for the same class over the average (i.e. <50%). This was insistently meant for analysis and explanation.

| THE STUDENTS' ERROR FREQUENCY | | | | | |
|--|---|----------------------|--------|---|---------------|
| 4 th year students: B class (2004-2005) | | | | | |
| Cross-sectional (189) | | | | Longitudinal (122) | |
| 3 rd (100) | | 4 th (89) | | in the 3 rd and the 4 th year | |
| Brit.civ exam | Nonce | Frequent | Nonce | Frequent | Frequent |
| – The number of errors | 01 | 99 | 00 | 89 | 122 |
| – Percentages | 52,91% | | 47,08% | | 64,55% |
| – The type of errors; indicated by symbols | RO (80%) / P, cap, s/pl and Art (60%) / ?M (50%) / T and Rep (40%) / WW and Agr (30%) / VF and lc (20%) / ^ , Frag and Ab (10%). | | | | |

Table O-2. Class B's frequent errors (in the 2nd selection)

Still the **orthographical errors** and their results (i.e. capitalization, punctuation and run-on sentences) constituted the higher error frequency. On the other side, the other remaining aspects constituted the lower frequency. They were **grammatical** except for the lower case and wrong abbreviations which were related to the first mentioned class (but with low rates). Also, the meaning in some parts of the paragraphs or the essays of the students was unclear due to inappropriate vocabulary.

In addition, the errors, which slightly diminished in the 4th year, could be considered as a good sign of a forward improvement in writing with the target language. It could be explained by the easiness of the topic of exam. For instance, at the 4th year, the question exam of the British module was about the importance of the British education and its history; whereas, the question at the 3rd year was about describing the reign of George III. Therefore, it seemed that the natural shift from a specific topic (the reign of George III) to a general one gave these students the opportunity to work better at the level of content and even in grammar. Only the English orthography did not know a lot of improvement. In the previous year (i.e. in the 3rd one), students tended to retell every event, whether important or not in the reign of George III, and successively without introducing or concluding their essays, or even conceiving the influence of events on George's reign. The fact led to a lot of run-on sentences and the incompleteness of the essay form.

According to **table O-3** below which groups all the data collected for the description of the research population's written materials, a total of 622 cross-sectional errors were counted, among which more than a half (59,69%) were longitudinal ones (434 fossils) related to the formal features of English writing. Contrarily to what was expected, the number of frequent errors increase cross-sectionally from one year to another, even in the advanced ones (from 16,39% in the first level to 33,27% in the next advanced level to 50,32% in the last advanced level). The same fact was noticed with the longitudinal detection where errors seemed to occur again and again.

| THE STUDENTS' ERROR FREQUENCY | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| All the 4th year students: A&B classes | | | | |
| | Cross-sectional (622) | | | Longitudinal (434) |
| | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | Over the academic years |
| – The number of errors | 102 | 207 | 313 | 434 |
| – Percentages | 16,39% | 33,27% | 50,32% | 59,69% |
| – The type of errors; indicated by symbols | P (100%; 80%) / lc (100%) / T (90%; 80%) / cap (80%; 70%; 60%) / ?M (80%; 70%; 50%) / RO (80%; 70%) / WW (80% ; 40%) / and Art (60%; 40%;) / ?M (50%) | | | |

Table O-3. The total frequent errors in the students' writing

The most fossilized errors have been consequently classified into three categories: **orthographical, grammatical** and **lexical errors**. Orthographical errors were manifested in **the misuse of punctuation, capitalization** and somehow **spelling**. This class of errors resulted into a series of **run-on sentences** and the need to write many words and letters with **the lower case**. Grammatical ones were tied with **the misuse of English tenses** and **articles**. Lexical errors were linked with the use of wrong or **strange vocabulary** due to bad handwriting, or **missing words**. These interpretive errors resulted into unclear meanings in different parts in the students' essays. Meanwhile, the first two categories were mostly related to the formal aspect in all the 60 written performances; whereas, the last one was tied with the content aspect. As a result, the formal aspect in the students' essays was highly ignored from their written achievements, a reality which has been concluded via the research tools such as the teachers' and students' questionnaires and the tool for describing these written products above.

Furthermore, the increasing number of fossilized aspects, whether related to the form of the research population's essays to the three categories of errors above, might be explained by one possible fact. It could be definitely related to the students' unawareness of their frequent deviant

forms. Indeed, this population might have been producing the same errors over their academic years simply because they did not know them; otherwise why do they still produce them? Therefore, the teachers' ways of correction (like circling, underlining, etc) have been thought to be insufficient to make students aware of their errors after summative examinations. And accordingly, they have been investigated through the third tool of this dissertation.

4.3.3 The findings of describing the teachers' ways of responding/evaluation:

| | | Responding to the written performances | | | | | | A&B classes The 60 performances |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|--|
| | | Class A | | Class B | | | | |
| | | 2 nd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | |
| | | W. | Brit.civ | Am.lit | | Brit.civ | | |
| Teachers' ways of correction | – Circling | 60% | 90% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 0% | 75% |
| | – Underlining | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 40% | 0% | 73,33% |
| | – Writing the error symbol | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 16,66% |
| | – Direct correction | 0% | 0% | 20% | 0% | 70% | 0% | 15% |
| | – Commenting on the paper | 50% | 0% | 70% | 0% | 20% | 0% | 23,33% |
| | – Scores | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| | – Final comments | 20% | 100% | 30% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 25% |

Table P. Teachers' ways of correcting the students' writing

Table P above describes in terms of frequency the teachers' ways of responding to the students' written products after academic exams. Its data are extracted and elaborated from the results of the three tables designed for describing the teachers' ways of assessment (cf. tables I-1, I-2 and I-3 in appendix 16). Also, the graph below (p: 118) shows the most used way of evaluation by the teachers during the periods of assessment, illustrated by percentages. The interpretation of these percentages is compared longitudinally, except for the scores for which no discussion is provided since they are an administrative requirement. The 0% figures in the table above do not mean that the method is not used because there are no errors. In fact, it has been proved through observation of the written products and counting errors that they exist. Therefore, the 0% figures for a specific way of correction would simply mean that the teachers have either never used this way or they have stopped using it.

4.3.3.1 Responding to class A' written performances:

The ways of responding to the written performances of this class have been changed between the 1st point of time (at the 2nd year) and the next one (at the 4th year), except for underlining the erroneous forms which were found longitudinal in all the 10 performances. Indeed, circling errors has been used increasingly (from 60% at the 2nd year to 90% at the 4th year). Giving final comments has also increased since it concerned 20% in the 2nd year to 100% papers in the final year. Examples on these final comments in the 2nd year are: “where is the conclusion?”, an aspect already observed in 30% of these performances (cf. table the students I-4, appendix 16) where were asked to narrate a personal story.

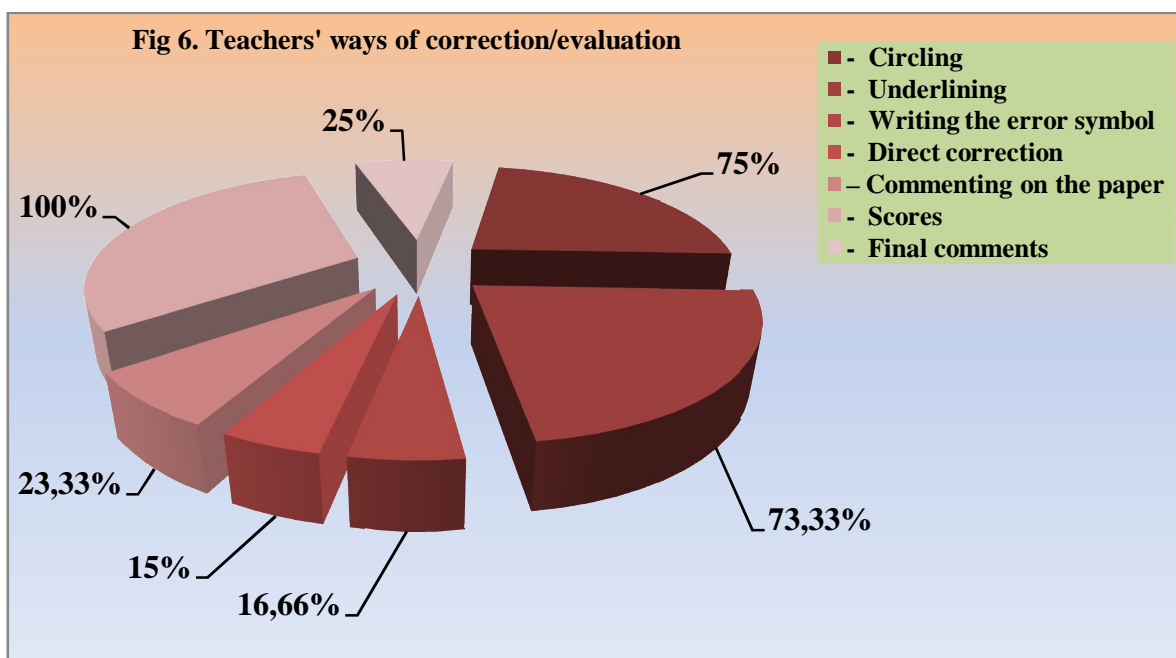
However, other ways of responding which have been used in the first cross-section of time, have totally disappeared at the second point of time; examples are: writing the error symbol above or down the errors and writing some comments on the papers. Giving direct correction to an error such as providing the missing morphemes, articles, punctuation, capitals, is neither cross-sectionally nor longitudinally used.

4.3.3.2 Responding to class B' written performances:

In the 1st selection, where the module is the same (the American literature), circling and underlining the erroneous forms are found longitudinally in all the ten performances. On the other hand, the way of indicating errors by symbols is never used (0%). All the remaining ways have been used differently once (i.e. cross-sectionally in the 3rd year), but all have disappeared in the 4th year, except for the scores (cf. table I-5, appendix 16).

In the 2nd selection, where the module is the same (British civilization), it is clearly found that responding to the written materials existed once and cross-sectionally (at the 3rd year only). Meanwhile, there was no response in the 4th year, except a quantitative one (i.e. the scores). This fact might be explained by the fact that the teachers-evaluators have adopted one way of correction which is reading only (i.e. part of the holistic scales) then he/she has provided final scores (cf. table I-6, appendix 16).

Therefore, **figure 6** below (illustrating teachers' ways of responding to all the 60 performances belonging to 20 students) shows that teachers always tend to respond through circling and underlining the erroneous forms. Sometimes they do it by commenting on the students' papers and they rarely do it through direct correction or final comments.



4.3.3.3 The impact of teachers' responses on the written performance:

Evaluation methods and techniques have been described as personal according the review of literature in this dissertation (cf. chapter 01: 28-31). In addition, there is no standard or official academic rule on how to assess or evaluate students' performances in reference to the target language (i.e. English). Yet, the issue is related to what their effects or influence (whether rare or frequent) on the improvement of the students' writings, or at least on reducing the persistent features, are.

The problem is that if they are not used at all, how can students be able to know their weaknesses? (cf. table above on p: 116 about the data found in responding to class B writings in the second selection where it was observed that there was no response to their materials). And once they are used, do they constitute the best ways to understand errors?

In general, using error symbols and giving final comments are recognized as workable methods of evaluation or correction for students. They are viewed as such because writing the error symbols and final comments can exactly specify the type of errors or the missing aspects in the form as well as the content of the written production, and final comments are statements about the strongest and the weakest points, observed by the evaluators. In addition, they can be regarded as a clear feedback and understood by the students. Furthermore, they can make students aware of their missing points as they may motivate them towards reducing them. Because it is believed that once a student receives back his/her copy with a clear feedback, not

only a score or one-word comment, he/she may feel positively about two facts that: there is a fair in evaluation and that there is a sign of the evaluators' care for his/her progress in learning the target language.

Nevertheless, according to the research on tools of describing and correcting the writing materials, errors occur again and again because the students are not able to understand them through methods like circling and underlining or even through one-word or two-words comments, even if the use of indicating errors by means of symbols has been used only in their 2nd year. It was used at that time may be because it was part of the course in their written expression academic programme, but it disappeared during the following academic years. Therefore, it can be said that the teachers' ways of correction are not sufficient in helping students to overcome most of the weakest points in writing which have been detected longitudinally, simply because their methods seem to be very relative ways. Also, the ways are not shared and explained with the students after the correction. In this perspective, the interview was designed for clarifying this point since it was not initially included in the previous tools of this dissertation.

4.4 The interview report:

As it was mentioned in chapter 3, the interview was added as an additional tool to complete some objectives not found in the previous research tools such as the students and teachers' questionnaires. Its main objective was to know whether students were aware of their frequent errors after summative examinations. In case they were aware, how did they become aware of them⁷? As it was suggested the easiest way to know about their progress in writing can be guessed through their teachers' ways of correction. Therefore, the first three questions in the interview were designed to elicit students opinions and own observations about what they notice in their exam papers after the period of correction. The last two questions were designed for seeking if the error symbols (which constitute one way of responding to a written production) can be used as a remediation or an appropriate feedback for developing the writing skills (cf. appendix 19). Also, the interviewees are EFL students from the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences in SBA. Ten students of English from different advanced levels (3rd year and 4th year) have been interviewed either in groups or individually⁸.

⁷ - The recorded material is available on a CD-Rom, attached to this dissertation.

⁸ - However, after checking the audio-tape of the interview, it was found that the sound with a group of four students was not quite clear and almost all the recorded part of the discussion with them was damaged. Therefore, the above

When students were asked the first question which was about what they notice in their corrected papers after exams, two of them said that they found “only marks” and “sometimes marks and comments” while 4 of them noted they saw “only marks”. For example, one of them said: *“sometimes we get marks only, and for other teachers we get marks and comments”*. Other group said: *“marks only”*, while others said: *“just marks”*. Since most answers are marks and comments, they were asked whether they felt or were satisfied by marks only as a correction, or whether marks helped them to know their weaknesses in writing. One of them said: *“sometimes we need to know what happens in our paper correction ...but sometimes they don’t explain what mistakes I do in my paper”*. Her friend mentioned: *“when I find a bad mark ...I want to know what my mistakes are?”* Another student from another interviewed group said: *sometimes we feel that we need more correction, we want to know where the problem is in our writings”* Her friend also shared this opinion or feeling.

When they were asked about the types of comments they read in their papers, one of the male students said: *“the most common ones [comments] are “average” and “you have done grammatical mistakes”*. The other boy noted: *“sometimes expressions like: “practice makes perfect”, “it’s a short essay”, “it is not well-analysed”*. He was asked then if he learnt from those comments, he replied by: *“sometimes we get some ideas about errors”*.

All the interviewees were asked then the second question which was around their teachers’ ways of correction. One of them mentioned: *“red lines, red sentences, small circles around words”*, while another one said: *“sometimes small circled words and red lines”*. One in the other group said: *“sometimes we find symbols, and we cannot define them in papers and sometimes they use many lines and don’t explain what these lines mean ... and which mistakes we need to correct next time”*. Her friend added: *“generally, I find a red line without any explanation”*. In the other last group, one of them said: *“small circles, words in the margins”*, whereas, her friend said: *“we find lines or long lines”*.

However, when they were asked the third question on whether they understood or could interpret the meanings of those ways of corrections, most of them shared the same answer. For instance, among the interviewed students, two already indicated that they did not understand the meaning of those ways, while another student shared this feeling and said: *“no...not at all”*. Only three students had expressed the same answer in a different way. Indeed, the latter said: *“sometimes*

report reviews the findings of this discussion with 6 informants only. Two students are male (one is a 3rd year student and the other one is a 4th year one), whereas, the other four students are all female and 4th year students.

they are clear, sometimes they are not"; whereas, the first interviewed student mentioned: *"yes, but sometimes for the majority of time ...it is useless to put red lines or small circles."*

Asking these informants the last questions was felt to be very significant because it was thought that this interview could be a good opportunity to ask about what helps students to improve their form of writing, and to identify at least the aspect of the remedial work or feedback that should be recommended later. For example, using the chart symbol of errors (cf. appendix 8) was suggested as one means for writing remediation or feedback that should be well-used and defined to students⁹.

Thus, when students were asked the fourth question whether they had any idea about these symbols, all of them said they had had just one lesson on them at the beginning of their licence (in the 1st or the 2nd year); however, that lesson was not well-defined or expanded. One of the interviewees mentioned: *"in the 1st year, we get some of these symbols, but we don't understand them."* Another one said: *"they use some symbolising just to show that you have mistakes and they don't encourage us to explain more in the written expression."* Her friend said: *"we have done this only in the 2nd year with some teachers and in a short time"*. Other interviewee added: *"in the 1st year... in the written expression module.... we have learned a table, but just in one lecture ...it was not sufficient"*.

On this basis, the interviewees were asked a fifth question on whether they could or would make any progress in their writing or at least reduce their frequent errors once they are given on-going and extra-lessons on these symbols. In fact, one of the informants said: *"of course, in order to avoid our mistakes, because language is better when it is written"*; whereas, her friend thought: *"for me, this explanation which you've showed us is very important to the students; they should take it as a basis to write good English ... a good written expression and all"*. Another interviewee said: *"yes, of course, it is necessary to know these kinds of symbols"*. One of the male students said: *"sure"*, but he believed into additional feedback, by adding: *"teachers must write the most common mistakes on the blackboard and correct them.... this is the best way to learn"*.

Moreover, two informants shared the same intent. Indeed, one female student said: *"it seems to me that if we learn these symbols in a prominent way to improve ourselves... it would better to do it in the 1st and the 2nd year, before being late in the 4th year"*. Seemingly, a male student said: *"yes, but this system must be done in the 1st year or the 2nd year... it is not for the 3rd year because it is too late to give students remarks about their writings"*. He believed that if this system were done in the first year of

⁹ - I have already shown these informants the chart symbols of errors of appendix 8.

any foreign language student's degree, he would *"succeed in analyzing essays or to avoid problems...grammatical problems...vocabulary problems... it is preferable to teach how to correct his errors"*.

What can be outstandingly deduced from the data of this interview concerns two points. The first one is the impact of the teachers' ways of correction on students' products; which is manifested or translated into students' anxiety and uneasiness about their evaluation state. Even correcting their errors by means of error symbols is not clear to them since they do not understand them. Normally those symbols should have had been explained to them before examination. The second fact or reality is that students feel that their written performances are not well responded to and that they need an extra writing feedback, one that helps them to learn how to correct their errors and work towards making or achieving progress in writing.

4.5 Comparing the findings of all the research tools of investigation:

Consequently, the findings of the research tool of describing these written performances and interviewing some students come to oppose the findings of the first research tool represented by the two questionnaires. Effectively, they do not consider students as responsible for their FL writing degradation because they prefer spoken English, or focus on the content of the modules, or fail to practise free writing. On the contrary, they suggest that before reaching such a judgment, one should check first if they have a clear picture of their weaknesses in writing and if they have been supported and motivated by a fruitful feedback. It is believed that, at this stage only (i.e. characterised by the presence of writing mediation, and guiding by the teacher-evaluators), students can be held responsible for their weak performance and linguistic competence. One can state this because they are supposed to have most of the means and opportunities to develop their capacities to write good English, but unfortunately they did not make an effort to benefit.

4.6 Conclusion:

All the tools used to investigate why advanced learners still produce frequent errors, do not link the cause of such a phenomenon to only one reality. Interestingly, the questionnaires have revealed that students' writing degradation especially at the formal aspect is related to two specific causes: one is the insufficient timing of the grammar and the written expressions modules, or if the timing is enough, their academic programme is not consistent enough to teach the learners most of what they need to avoid making errors. The other cause is a psycholinguistic

reason, bounded with the students' behaviours who tend to be more speakers of English rather than writers, and who do not like using frequently strategies such as reading, using dictionaries, revising grammar textbooks, practising free writing, to improve their capacities of writing; they do not care for writing as much as they care for speaking and the content of their modules.

In addition, it is thought that the students' absence of awareness and demotivation towards the act of writing itself are progressively stimulated by another factor which is their ignorance of their TL deviant forms due to an absence of a good writing mediation that should stand directly as a fruitful feedback after their summative examinations. Most of what they receive after examination constitutes unclear qualitative feedback manifested through their teachers' common ways of correction.

However, as all data of this thesis seem to relate this phenomenon to a number of reasons, they therefore, cannot relate it to any of these investigated causes in particular, simply because the data gathered from the entire set of tools have not been significant. Differently said, though the last cause (i.e. the lack of writing feedback due to the insufficient teachers' ways of responding to the students' written performances) has been outstandingly emerged as the main cause, this does not confirm that students will continue producing errors due to this cause unless a new designed writing feedback after summative examination is practically investigated with students.

Finally, the findings of the research tools do not consider the students' behaviour as well as the teachers' ways of correction as being the main causes of students' degradation in writing, but it is recommended that a new research must be held later to seek the type of feedback that can motivate and help students towards successful written production (i.e. a new type of writing mediation). Despite the fact that the research tools have not been very effective, they have probably confirmed one reality which is that students' written performances require more attention and deserve a lot of care as it was previously stated by some researchers such as Leki (cf. chapter 2, p: 69) .

5.1 Introduction:

The thesis' findings determine that the case-study of this research in particular and students in general need effectively a new writing theory of responding to their written performances. The basis of this theory is an additional feedback to the current ways of the teachers' ways of evaluating students' written productions. This theory does reject the teachers' ways of responding; on the contrary, it seeks to better them in view of helping students to achieve successful written productions with few errors and acceptable formal features of the target language. Also, the results of the first research tools (i.e. the questionnaires) have insistently shown two important emerging causes behind the students' failure to achieve successful written productions. The latter are the students' incomplete awareness and the current timing as well as the academic programme of the written expression and grammar modules.

Therefore, one would suggest further investigation on these two reasons. However, it is strongly believed, as it has been inferred within the parts of this dissertation, that the future research should be primarily devoted to feedback theory. Why? Simply because before attesting the students' responsibility for this kind of consciousness and doubting about the actual timing as well as the academic programme of the written expression and grammar modules, it is necessary to search for the factors that are responsible for the students' lack of awareness; effectively, since it has been noticed clearly that these factors are related to the influence of their teachers' current ways of feedback, studies are recommended to investigate a new theory of feedback in the future. Thus, when later on these studies infirm the findings (i.e. that the problematic is not tied with the nature of feedback the teachers use), the investigation will move towards the students' behaviour and/or writing academic programme as well as its timing.

Therefore, what will be developed in this chapter is but recommendations to describe briefly this new theory of writing feedback in terms of definition and characteristics. In terms of definition, this theory is recommended mostly and theoretically by one of the new visions and experiments on it. In terms of its characteristics, two features are important to recommend: the first is the nature of the writing meditational tools conceived in the teachers' new evaluative role and the other feature is the students' role as FL writers. They are all given in an abbreviated manner because, in fact, this new theory of writing feedback requires further research and is meant for investigation later.

5.2 Introducing new theory of responding to students' writings:

Most of what has been theoretically reviewed about the literature in chapter 1 and 2 of this dissertation and most of what has been practically or methodologically investigated and analysed, determines one important issue, namely that is about the effectiveness of adopting the Error Analysis approach. Indeed, it seems that depending on EA as one of the most appropriate approaches was not totally significant; EA has to be expanded to incorporate other pedagogical aims such as helping students to avoid their fossils and to make on-going improvements in writing with a target language like English.

Differently said, while using the EA approach, it seems unfruitful only to identify, to describe qualitatively as well as quantitatively errors or even to understand why EFL learners produce errors, simply because limiting the investigation to these methodological procedures only will never help students to be good FL writers unless the effects of these procedures reach further dimensions like “what after identifying, describing and counting errors as well as understanding their sources?”

Thus, it is recommended that studies should focus on what pushes students to improve their ill-formed performance, such as the type of correction or feedback that can be work as the most appropriate language communicative response to their writings. This perspective is not new. In fact, it has been expressed in different researches on the EA approach, among them, in Corder's (1989:164) who mentions that in spite of the fact that errors occur naturally: “*our ingenuity should be concentrated on techniques for dealing with errors after they have occurred.*”

In addition, Harris (1993:122) notes that though its complexity, writing remains essential for every FL personal achievements and developments in the educational system. He says: “*as teachers we need to strive continually to find the best ways to help our pupils' fulfilments as writers.*” He also reshapes the role of the teacher from that of an annotator to that of a mediator. In fact, he claims that the teacher's emphasis ought to be on the students' progress and language production, but he also confesses that this fact requires much care and attention as well as checking or controlling their progress. He (1993:98) said: “*in relation to writing, this means that teachers need to be able to do more than to assign a generalized grade (A, B, C, ... or “Good”, “Average”, and so on.*”

5.3 New visions and experiments of feedback in writing:

A number of perspectives and new visions have emerged to re-define the new theory of responding to students' writings (i.e. giving feedback). Among them, one is suggested in this section as just a new definition around the concept of correction. It is Costas's (2002) own perspective which figures this new theory on the basis of his cyclical FL teaching/learning framework. This teaching/learning framework comprises four stages. It includes: 1) awareness-raising, 2) support, 3) practice and 4) feedback.

In the first stage, students' awareness about their actual states of written performance must be raised. He suggests "homework", which is a periodic and an on-going testing pedagogical tool, as a "writing meditational tool", through which students can discover their frequent difficulties in writing after each correction or evaluation. Therefore, they become, at least, half aware of the actual states of their ill-writing performance such as the formal features (the handwritings, spelling and the essay body).

The second stage (i.e. support) is achieved by teachers who become themselves "the second meditational tool" in this new theory of feedback. They become so because they are the ones who can give explicit information and guidelines as well as illustrative examples on the organisation, layout styles of specific text as soon as they read the students' written productions with a great intention. Fruitfully, it is thought that by combining the two above meditational tools, students can complete unconsciously the second half of awareness especially, concerning their recurrent difficulties in their writings. How? Simply because it is reckoned that students will feel themselves as important to their teachers, they will feel that their teachers care for their own performance. As a consequence, this combination may first create a good relationship with students, and second, may influence the students' attitude in the sense that they take on progressively an English writer behaviour.

In the third stage, students are offered a direct chance to experiment writing according to the characteristics of a good written product, already discussed and raised in the first and the second stage. Its procedures can be divided into two steps; one based on the formal features and one on the content. This division, thus, made so that students do not feel bored or over-charged by the TL items. It can be achieved by giving on-going different FL writing tasks to be achieved by students.

Therefore, according to Costas (2002), the new perspective in giving feedback should be not limited to overt or explicit corrections of errors, or even to reshaping comments and grades by teachers only, but it should be viewed as the writing method that would better promote the TL learning experience, a fact that would provide the link between consecutive or continual writing lessons on discussing with students-writers the writing disabilities before examination, as stated below:

“During feedback, learners are invited to identify the merits and shortcomings of their writing performance, understand the reasons for these shortcomings and discuss possible improvements.”

The aim of Costas’s feedback conception is to help students improve their writing through the awareness of deficiencies in their performance. He concluded by saying: *“when learners have become familiar with feedback procedures, they may make a progress in writing.”* His point meets with this dissertation’s findings which revealed that students were not aware of their difficulties in writing in English due to the absence of feedback with their evaluators especially after summative exams. Indeed, it was noticed through the last research’s tool (i.e. the interview) that students feel different and uneasy about their written productions because of the insufficient ways of correction provided by their evaluators. Even the use of the writing symbols as a feedback procedure to correct their errors was not practical since most of them had never discussed these symbols explicitly with their teachers except in one course, and only for one or two hours.

In addition, Costas’ definition is just one example of a theoretical perspective for responding to students writing as indicated above. Other perspectives have been found reshaping the roles of the teachers from writing evaluators to writing mediators. They will be mentioned in the next part dealing with the role of the teacher as a FL writing evaluator.

5.4 The role of teachers as writing mediators:

This thesis has shown that teachers’ ways of evaluation like circling, underlining and commenting are insufficient means of correction to help students overcome most of their frequent difficulties, especially the formal features of English writing. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers reconsider their ways of responding to written productions by adopting a new role such as the mediational role. In this perspective, three experiments based on the new feedback theory are suggested by Costas (2002), Cozzens (2005), Mentello (1997) and Hortensia (2005). They are either theoretically put forward as propositions for responding to

students' productions, or experienced with students and have resulted into notable improvement in writing.

For example, Costas (2002) proposes theoretically that teachers need to be aware of three basic aspects of feedback procedures. The latter can be shown as answers to three important questions. The first is: "*who provides comments or correction?*" He said "*it doesn't necessarily have to be the teacher.*" Indeed, he considers that this role can be "alternative" by giving every student the chance to comment on his/her performance or his/her classmate's performance after revising the product. Therefore, this role is devoted to the responsibility of the teacher but it can either be "the teacher's", "the learner's him/herself" (self-correction) or "other learners' " (peer-correction). The second question is: "*what is the focus of feedback?*" He states that, though the issue is debatable, there can be alternative areas on:

- *spelling.*
- *grammar (accuracy and appropriateness).*
- *vocabulary (accuracy and appropriateness).*
- *linking expressions.*
- *layout*
- *organization.*
- *clarity of expressions.*
- *regard for readers (eg: levels of explicitness).*
- *the area(s) which the previous lesson(s) focussed on.*

While the third question is: "*how feedback is given?*", he advises teachers to use the most suitable ways to indicate and explain vocabulary and grammar mistakes/errors. He suggests some of these treatment ways as follows:

- *correct errors directly (i.e. cross out incorrect parts and write correct versions).*
- *underline, indicate the type of errors and refer learners to a reference book (e.g grammar textbook, or grammar section in the course book).*
- *Underline the error and indicate the types in the margins i.e. the teachers need to familiarize learners with the coding system that will be used (such as the chart symbols of errors).*
- *indicate in the margins the number of errors each time in the homework or exams.*

Another theoretical vision of writing feedback is presented by Cozzens (2005)'s theory of commenting students' writings. She suggests ten principles in writing comments as feedback, among which two are mentioned below. The first one is: "*address some frequently occurring writing problems in classroom.*" This can be realised, according to her, as follows: first the teachers should use a handout, containing a sample of sentences or paragraphs to explain the common problems that they notice in most of the students' papers. She believes that using handouts of fossils may stand as a preparatory stage for "a good approach to write paper comments". In this

preparatory stage the focus is on the target language grammar and punctuation usage, as well as specific elements of writing. Then, the second principle is to “*explain good work*”. This can be done by writing comments like “good”, “nice”, in order to let students know what they did right. Her approach, in fact, suggest the following principles for a good commentary:

1. *At least one comment (use complete sentences) on the content of the paper.*
2. *Questions (in the margins or at the end) that stimulate further thoughts.*
3. *Find something to praise.*
4. *Be explicit about problems of structures, agreement, reasoning, disciplinary, conventions, use of evidence.*
5. *Draw attention to patterns of errors; don't correct paper for student but make sure he/she knows that errors count.*

In fact, Cozzens’s conception of giving comments takes into consideration the student’s affect. She insists on the positive effects of comments on the students’ written performance whenever they get back their papers corrected. In the table below, she advises teachers to change their attitudes (while giving comments) from what she calls “the gate keeper thinking” to a “new way of teacher’s thinking”:

| Gate keeper thinking | → | New ways of teacher thinking |
|---|---|--|
| - mark, grade paper | → | - respond to ideas, arguments. |
| - expect good final product | → | - teach good writing in your discipline. |
| - find faults in students’ writings | → | - teach good habits and strategies for students writers. |
| - mark every error | → | - help the novice writer to learn, to carry out global or conceptual revisions. |
| - summative response “you can’t write”. | → | - formative response: “you can learn”, “writing is worth doing because you have something important to say”. |
| - react to the final work | → | - intervene while your efforts can do something. |
| - grading | → | - guiding |

Another experiment that can be suggested to teachers was tried by Mantello (1997). She conducted a study in her classroom. This study was about error correction. She decided to correct errors selectively rather than globally. Her approach involved correcting a limited number of language structures consistently “dense” or persistently “lasting” as she called them and over a period of time. She chose to address only one writing sample of one student during the error correction phase.

Her approach is based on two corrective procedures: “coded feedback” and “reformulation”. The former shows the students both the location and the nature of the specific error; whereas, the latter uses like-native target language compositions so that the FL student can compare his/her text with the new reformulated version (which probably can be written by the FL teacher). He/she can also note differences in the use of the target language corrected item. Interestingly, her feedback had positive effects i.e. students significantly improved this ability to produce correctly the missed target language item.

The last experiment is on fossilization. It is believed that teachers tend to neglect two types of fossils: “old” and “new” ones, especially in the use of the target language grammar (Hortensia: 2005). Hortensia’s way to deal with students’ fossils may be transformed into a new practical method to reduce fossils. It can be developed into a model of feedback, a self-control technique that helps every student to overcome progressively his/her fossils by identifying his/her strengths and weaknesses. It even makes the teacher able to act as “a facilitator or a mediator”. This model may start by asking every student to prepare a “fossil card”, which is a piece of paper on which the student writes down every produced error and also how many times he/she reproduced it.

At every stage, the teacher corrects explicitly the frequent item and makes students practise again a writing activity which requires the production of the wrong used items. At the same time, he/she asks them to cross out the fossils they have eradicated in every writing practice. So, whenever a learner notices that the number of his/her fossils is slowing down, a kind of satisfaction and improvement is felt by him/her. However, to avoid embarrassing students, Hortensia advises teachers to: *“joke without sarcasm about why errors occur, establishing a friendly, loving, competitive and cooperative classroom atmosphere.”* Indeed, when he includes this important psychological point in his experiment, he finds: *“that over time, the ones that produce the same mistakes develop an awareness and concentrate on improving”*, and he even observes a kind of students’ enjoyment while doing this self-control technique. He concludes that: *“to succeed in the eradication of errors, learners should first detect, then eliminate their fossils, while enjoying the process.”* In the same context, Myles (2002) concludes his article by stating that:

“We must accept the fact that L2 writing contains errors; it is our responsibility to help learners to develop strategies for self-correction and regulation. Indeed, L2 writers require and expect specific overt feedback from teachers not only on content, but also on the form and structure of writing. If this feedback is not part of the instructional process, then students will be disadvantaged in improving both writing and language skills.”

Consequently, it is suggested that teachers should rethink the currently used ways of correction which are circling, underlining, and try to adopt new ways that help students-writers to better their writing forms and promote their linguistic competence as well as their academic language communicative aspects. By this way, learners are really involved in this new theory of feedback which may result into good and successful TL written productions.

5.5 The role of students as English writers:

The role of students has been described in most of the data in accordance with every proposed teacher' experiment. Particularly, this role is manifested in the interaction and motivation aspects in every stage of the feedback theory. Concretely, students are invited implicitly to improve their writing, a fact which was not noticed with the case-study of this research where there was no sign of such an involvement after summative exams. Even when one of the research findings deplored in this population absence of reading, or the neglect of dictionaries and grammar texts, it could not prove that it was the students' own responsibility simply because this population was not taught explicitly about their frequent errors.

Nevertheless, whether this population was really informed about the nature of their difficulties or not, they confessed that they did not possess a writing behaviour since they do not read much or use dictionaries frequently, at least to solve their vocabulary and spelling mistakes (cf. chapter 04, p: 89-90). Even their awareness is limited to focussing on speaking rather than writing aspect along their curriculum. Their focus is also put exclusively on the content of their modules during the evaluation periods.

Therefore, it is recommended that EFL students should learn about the writing behaviour, i.e. they should be informed about the characteristics of writing and how to be a good writer of the target language, too. They should be informed about using the strategies of learning and writing regularly in their life as students, not only during exams. They should be told that grammar is stored provisionally in their brains and that they should reactivate the rules from time to time by revising. Also, they should be told about the importance of revising their drafts before submitting them to their evaluators while answering written exams. This can be done through organised seminars on how to be a good writer of English and how to correct one's written performance.

5.6 Conclusion:

Despite its shortness, chapter five expresses the immense need to introduce a new theory of giving feedback to students' writings. The recommendations particularly focus on the teachers' role as "an assessor/evaluator only", which needs to be changed from "an annotator" to "a writing mediator". They also show that this new task will not be very easy and manageable especially with great numbers of students at the university. The difficulty is, also, tied with teachers who can accept or reject this new theory (new responding to students' writing). Therefore, it is recommended to undertake a new investigative research on the most suitable aspects of this modern theory of giving feedback as well as trying to discover the best types of writing feedback that can both help teachers in doing their job of writing mediation and motivate EFL students to practise English writing, at least the writing product's manageable futures such as the formal aspects of their ill-written productions. This new investigation will be presented later as a personal model of responding to students' writing, no matter whether teachers accept it or not, since responding to students' written performance has become over the years a crucial question, and personally an issue of a great importance.

General conclusion

In this thesis, the issue of EFL students' disabilities in writing; inspired by the inquiry of "why advanced students still produce errors and still show frequent difficulties", has confirmed two realities: one is related to the findings of the research methodological or technical tools, and the other one is related to the issue itself. The former determined that both Algerian students and teachers cannot be held fully responsible for this phenomenon unless a different response or feedback from the present responding ways to the students' written performances is defined and experimented. On the other side, the latter asserts that this issue itself has become more and more an interesting theme meant for discussion and investigation.

The first research material (i.e. the students and teachers' questionnaires) has revealed in the first stage of interpretation that students are the only elements responsible for their English deviant forms, especially through the confession of students themselves. Indeed, students and teachers have evoked that most of the Algerian students of English do not have a writing behaviour which allows them, whether intentionally or unintentionally, to practise free writing or train themselves by writing, to have a reading habit, to use frequently dictionaries and also to revise grammar textbooks where it is necessary. They also revealed that these students prefer to be English speakers rather than English writers though they know that most of their examinations require written performances, not spoken ones; a point which led us to consider that they should not have excluded the writing skill from their competence since English, as a language, is naturally manifested through two faculties: speaking and writing.

Another crucial feature discovered through investigation opinions was that content was the main concern in their written performance whether during the preparation for their exams (i.e. before taking exams) or during their examinations simply because they believe that content is what their teachers evaluate or look for in their written productions; a point which made us say that they should not have neglected the formal aspect (i.e. the formal features of English) in their productions, because writing comprises, especially in the academic context, both form and content. These aspects of students' thinking, also mentioned by their teachers, have given us the opportunity to evaluate their consciousness, which has been qualified throughout chapter four to be somehow split or fractured and named as "incomplete awareness". We have been able to name it as so because for any EFL student, not only an Algerian one, English needs to be acquired skillfully with its two faculties speaking and writing.

In addition, the questionnaires have been able to relate students' disabilities in writing to the students themselves (i.e. their attitudes towards the writing activity), but they have also related this fact to another. Indeed, the academic timing and programmes of the written expression and grammar modules have been found as insufficient to allow students to become skillful writers, as most of the highest percentages in all the research findings demonstrate it. This reality suggests the possibility to revise the timing and programme of these two important modules, although this fact is not the only cause behind students' failure to write good English since the data gathered from the other research tools have evoked other revelations.

Nevertheless, though the questionnaires have been able to tie the causes of students' difficulties in writing to a number of suggested causes, they were also able to exclude some of them (mainly two causes). Indeed, the amount of time, devoted to answer the written exams (i.e. one hour and a half), as well as the students' anxiety, while taking their written exams, have never been a problem to the majority of students. Meanwhile, the questionnaires as investigative tools have been able to test partly the proposed causes of students' problems in writing.

More importantly and in fact paradoxically, though the questionnaires revealed students' unwillingness to study writing, they, at the same time, unveiled another reality which prevented us from taking the first aspect for granted. Students cannot be blamed because of their negative attitudes towards the act of writing simply because one needs to know which factors pushed them to behave so. It could be that they were not motivated to learn writing. Motivation, in this context, would mean that they did not feel that their writing forms as well as content matter for their teachers, because we would believe that if there had been any sign of consideration, they would have cared much about their writing. Also, we do not know if they have been given a chance by their teacher-evaluators to discuss their performance over their four academic years or if they have been asked to focus only on the content of their module (which would be improbable). This is exactly what has pushed us to not depend totally on the questionnaires, and elaborate new tools to investigate these particular aspects.

Effectively, the other investigative tools (i.e. the correction of some students' written productions as well as interviewing some of them) proved to be beneficial. For instance, to understand why advanced students still produce the same errors needs, from any researcher to analyse a sample of students' productions, not only cross-sectionally but also longitudinally. A cross-sectional study is very useful, but a longitudinal one is more beneficial. Indeed, whether through cross-

sectional or longitudinal sections of time, errors have been identified, described and classified, but their re-appearance has been more significant only through longitudinal study.

The findings of tools used to describe the Algerian students' difficulties in writing English from a formal perspective, used to specify both their error frequency and how they have been treated (i.e. their teachers' way of correction in through cross-sectional time) have confirmed two types of evidence. The former is related to the research hypothesis that students did make frequent errors because they were not aware of them and they were not told about them. Indeed, the number of fossilized or persistent errors; identified longitudinally in the students' written materials have determined this assumption. Most of the difficulties were manifested in the incompleteness of the essay layout where the aspect of 'paragraphing' was either mis-performed or absent at all, and the 'conclusion' part was approximately absent from the students' essays. Besides, grammatical errors, spelling errors, wrong, unclear or missed vocabulary and even bad handwriting also constituted other observed areas of difficulties.

The latter evidence is related to the teachers' ways of correcting the papers of the two selected 4th year classes. Indeed, it was found that teachers tend always to respond longitudinally with the same known ways like circling or underlining the erroneous forms and/or commenting using few words, a fact that did not make great sense to these student-writers since they neither helped them to know their exact difficulties nor they motivated them to take into consideration these errors and try hard to avoid them on further occasions.

This same fact brings two important points. The first is that teachers should change these ways of correction by ones that can help their students to determine clearly their weak points while writing in English. This suggestion is backed up by what was observed after interviewing some advanced students whose opinions pinpointed their strong anxiety over what happens in their exam-papers during the correction stage when they feel they are wrong. Therefore, it was recommended in chapter 5 that when responding to students' written materials, teachers should re-consider the type of response that can make students able to correct themselves after their summative exams as long as their products exhibit weaknesses.

However, the second point is that teachers cannot be blamed for the use of these correction ways simply because the issue of evaluation or assessment is conventionally a private theory. There is no standard or official academic rule on how to assess students' performance in reference to the target language (i.e. English). There is no such an evaluation model that unites both the native and the non-native speakers of English in identifying which aspects they should respond to and

how to do it. Otherwise, it could solve the disagreements between teachers on evaluation issues. If there existed one, the matter could be easily tackled and willingly accepted by both the teachers, and the students who would get rid of their worries about how their productions are evaluated.

Accordingly, exploring the reasons why advanced learners still commit the same errors cannot always be related to one specific cause. Indeed, it has been proved that every suggested cause, except anxiety and the amount of time devoted to answer a written exam, has influenced more or less the students' progress in writing in the target language. Yet, promoting correction and improvement in writing can be expected only if students are able to correct themselves, then can better their written performances. Hence, this would not be possible unless they know where they were wrong from their teacher-evaluators.

Finally, despite the incompleteness though usefulness of error analysis approaches as well as the research technical tools to determine the right cause behind the issue of EFL students' disabilities, we have come to the conclusion that students deserve a lot of care as long as they show problems in their performance. As it was mentioned throughout this material, even after achieving a simple task, people need information or estimation about it, and feedback is, by any means, a mediation which every EFL performer needs. As a result, the findings of this research do not consider students as well the teachers' ways of correction as being the main causes of students' writing weakness, but, it is hoped that a new research must be dealt with to create new conditions to make students first involved in the act of writing itself and be able to identify clearly their areas of weaknesses in writing, then, achieve successful written performances.

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Appendix 1: Punctuation and Mechanics:

Besides spelling, punctuation and mechanics are parts of English orthography. They are shaped in a kind of *symbols* or *marks* used for two main purposes: *separating units* and *specifying grammatical functions* (Gramley, S. and K-M. Pätzold, 1992: 115). In the former, the marks are indentation or free lines to mark paragraphs, spaces between words with addition to the full stop/period, the semi-colon, the comma, the dash...etc to mark a subordinated material. The latter includes the question mark, the exclamation point, the apostrophe in possessive cases; italics and underlining...etc. These marks are governed by conventions (many modern monolingual dictionaries of English such as *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* present the rules/conventions of the English punctuation. The symbols of punctuation and mechanics are exposed by the author in the following table:

| PUNCTUATION | Symbols | MECHANICS |
|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| • Period/full stop | . | • Capitals |
| • Question mark | ? | • Apostrophes (') |
| • Exclamation mark | ! | • Abbreviation |
| • Comma | , | • Italics |
| • Colon | : | • Hyphen |
| • Semi-colon | ; | • Underlines |
| • Dash | - | |
| • Quotation mark | “ ” | |
| • Ellipsis | ... | |
| • Parentheses | () | |
| • Brackets | [] | |
| • Slashes | / | |

- Symbols of Punctuation and Mechanics

Appendix 2: features of the academic writing

The characteristics of the academic English writing¹ mean that it:

has:

- 1- a clear structure; it is evident to the reader from the introduction that the writer has organised his or her thoughts and knows what he/she wants to communicate.
- 2- fewer clauses per sentence than spoken English, but more words per phrases.
- 3- more nouns (often abstract ones) than spoken English and fewer verbs.

It *avoids:*

- 1- colloquial vocabulary.
- 2- contractions (*do not* is used rather than *don't*).
- 3- words that have emotional or attitudinal connotations.
- 4- phrasal verbs, e g: *look into* preferring single words often polysyllabic verbs, eg: *investigate*.

It *makes:*

- 1- less use of coordination (joining clauses with '*and*' or '*but*' and greater use of subordination (joining clauses with words such as '*while*', '*because*') than spoken English.
- 2- limited use of personal pronouns for cohesion (*it*, *them*) preferring other ways of achieving cohesion.

It *uses:*

- 1- linguistic "hedges" ('*probably*' '*in most cases*', '*seems*',) might to qualify generalizations.
- 2- almost always the third person (*he*, *she*, *it*, *they*), rarely uses first person (*I*, *we*) and never uses the second person (*you*).

¹ A webpage (2003). Writing in Academic Style, <http://education.fce.unsw.edu.au>

Appendix 3: The text's components or textuality

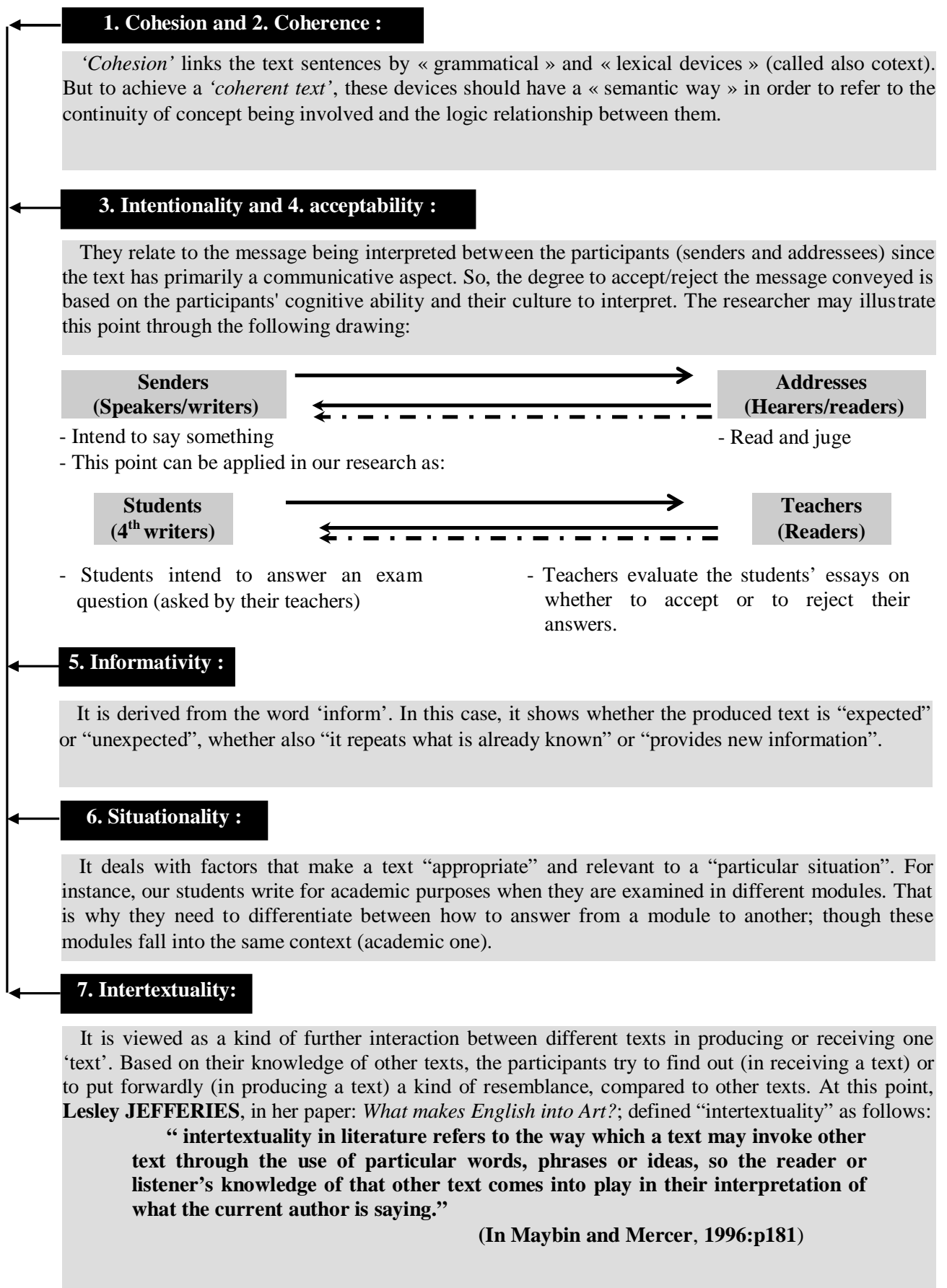


Fig 1. The text notion

Appendix 4: English grammatical features

A) the level of words:

Within the ‘descriptive approach’ in general and the ‘immediate constituent analysis’ in particular (Yule, 1985:74)¹, ‘nine’ classes of words have been determined in generating sentences. These are: *nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, articles, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections*; symbolized by: (*Ns*), (*Prons*), (*Vs*), (*Adv*s), (*Adj*s), (*Art*s), (*Preps*), (*Conj*), and (*Intejs*) respectively. These classes of words have a technical term, that is ‘parts of speech’. The following example demonstrate these small units of speech in a “produced” sentence :

“Oh! I sincerely thought you were under the red table and Wendy with you.”²

Interj Pron Adv V Pron V Prep Act Adj N Conj N Prep Pron

For a brief illustration of the English parts of speech, the research designs the following table:

| | | THE FORM | | |
|-----------|---|-----------------|--|------------|
| | | Linguistic item | Example | symbol |
| THE CLASS | 1 | Articles | A, an, the | Art (s) |
| | 2 | Adjectives | Good, clear, red , tall, passive, few, advocated, educated...etc. | Adj (s) |
| | 3 | Nouns | Peter, Nancy, Tunisia, France, Oxford, University, Pacific Ocean, window, table , love, friendship, Wendy ...etc | N (S) |
| | 4 | Pronouns | I , they, mine, you , ours, us, them selves, his, nobody, who, that, whose,...etc | Pro (s) |
| | 5 | Verbs | Read, were , makes, type, started, will go, thought , look around,...etc | Verb (s) |
| | 6 | Adverbs | Sincerely , frequently, yesterday, there, now, hopefully, fast, clearly,...etc | Adv (s) |
| | 7 | Propositions | To, in, under , at, on, besides, for, before, near, of, around, up, down, with ...etc | Pres (s) |
| | 8 | Conjunctions | And , but, so, then,...etc | Conj (s) |
| | 9 | Interjections | Oh! Ah! ...etc | Interj (s) |

- A Brief illustration of the English parts of speech

¹ Yule. G. (1985). The Study of Language. Chapter two: The development of writing. p: 08.

² An example taken from Robert. A. (1999)’s website : www.mdx.ac.uk/www/study/g/dan.htm

B) At the level of sentences :

Gradually, during a written production, producing only parts of speech is not enough. Naturally, they *are what* is produced and *with what* to produce. One of the issues that the learners should take into a consideration is the ‘order’ of these elements in order to produce a ‘sentence’. At this level, ‘syntax’ has a major role to play conventionally because each grammatical class has its grammatical function which is determined by its position within the sentence.

It is universally agreed that a ‘sentence’ has at least a ‘subject’ and a ‘verb’. In the following small group of words, ‘the beautiful woman’ (in which a degree of a meaningful unity is understood) is not a sentence; it is called a ‘phrase’, a ‘noun phrase’ (NP). However, ‘the beautiful woman reads poems’ is called a sentence. **Robert (1999)** showed basically how ‘parts of speech’ create a sentence:

“to be a sentence, it also has to make sense and express a complete thought... in the standard sentence; something (called the subject) does something (verb). As a general rule, a sentence must have both a subject and a verb to be complete.”

In addition, the ‘syntactic analysis’ of English sentences has classified the English sentence in terms of ‘structures’, ‘forms’, ‘types’ and ‘patterns’, where ‘phrases’ are not put in a random, but follow a ‘special ordering’ denoted by the ‘syntactical analysis’. Besides this analysis, it rises a certain kind of ‘writing conventions’, known as ‘**writing mechanics**’. Their presence helps better the reader to ‘understand’ the ‘flow of ideas’ being expressed in the generated sentences.

The other issue that FL students should be aware of is ‘sentence variability’ in terms of its ‘simplicity’ vs. its ‘complexity’. In fact, the production of a sentence can shift from a “simple” to a “compound” to a ‘complex’ one, and the combination of a “compound” with a “complex” sentence produces a “compound-complex” sentence³.

The simple sentence involves one idea; therefore, it consists of one predicate and one/more subject(s). “Coordination” helps to produce a “compound sentence” by linking ‘simple sentences’ through the use of conjunctions of coordination (*and, but, so, in addition,....etc*); whereas, “subordination” helps to produce ‘a complex sentence’ by connecting ‘main clauses’

³ Complexity lies with compound-complex sentences, yet it shows the best styles in writing. Hence, as teachers, we do not demand/force our learners to produce in a compound-complex way, but at least in a simple and a correct way. Moreover, if they could produce with that complexity, they would reach an academic success.

with their “dependent-clauses” through the use of its tools (relative pronouns; *who, whom, ...etc*, and subordinating conjunctions; *after, if, since, ...etc*). These structures of a sentence can be presented with examples in this diagram below:

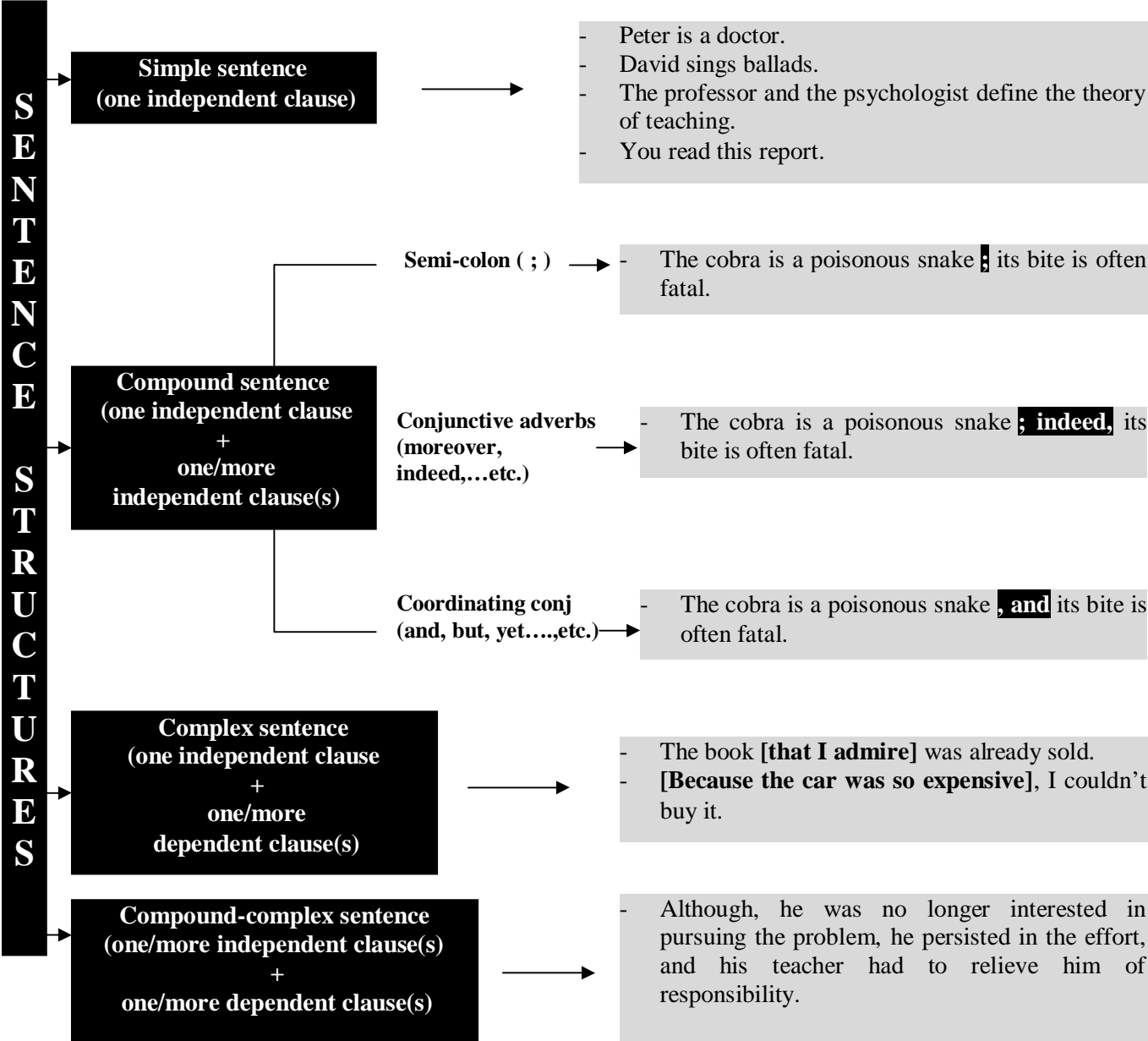


Fig 2. The sentence structures

C) The level of paragraphs :

Towards a written production based on a communicative goal, complicated thoughts cannot be “understood” or “well-interpreted” in one sentence or in a random-collection of sentences. It is commonly shared that when a ‘unity’, ‘cohesion’, and an ‘adequate development’ co-exist within a group of sentences may produce an ‘effective piece of writing’. Based on such criteria, “paragraphs” and “essays” have been produced, identified, analysed, and evaluated.

As a language product, the paragraph helps the readers to digest what the writer is saying. This importance is more recognized through “paragraphing” in order to form larger units of language such as “essays”. Along the essay, paragraphs are units of thoughts with one main idea, developed adequately through the length consistency. In paragraphing, paragraphs are set apart (separated) by a blank line or an indentation; a short space before a new paragraph. In addition, the number of ‘paragraph-developers’ can be exceeded (more than three); it depends on the writer’s strategy and the degree of thesis being discussed.

A paragraph is commonly defined as a set of related sentences dealing with the same idea or thought or with a single topic. These sentences do not have the same function. One of them introduces the topic of the paragraph; it is called the ‘topic-sentence’. Though it can occur anywhere in the paragraph (as the first, the last, or somewhere in the middle), it nearly works best at the beginning in an academic writing so that the reader knows what to expect **(Margaret Procter, 2001)**⁴. Within the topic sentence, two parts are identified: the topic and the controlling idea (which is the motivator for writing). The other sentences are called “continuity sentences”; stand for developing that topic **(EHLICH and Murphy, 1967: 70)**⁵. They are identified by three main features: unity, cohesion and coherence; where as far as the number of sentence-developers is, ‘they stick or refer to the paragraph starting point’ (controlling idea), and where cohesive devices and transitional words like connectors are used to “arrange” and “combine” these sentences in terms of “logic” and “importance”. The below diagram clears the paragraph components:

⁴ Procter, M. (2006). *Advice on Academic Writing*. A website on : <http://www.utoronto.ca/ucwriting/topic.html>.

⁵ EHLICH, E. and Murphy, D. (1967). *Basic Grammar for Writing : A step course in all the essentials of clear writing*.

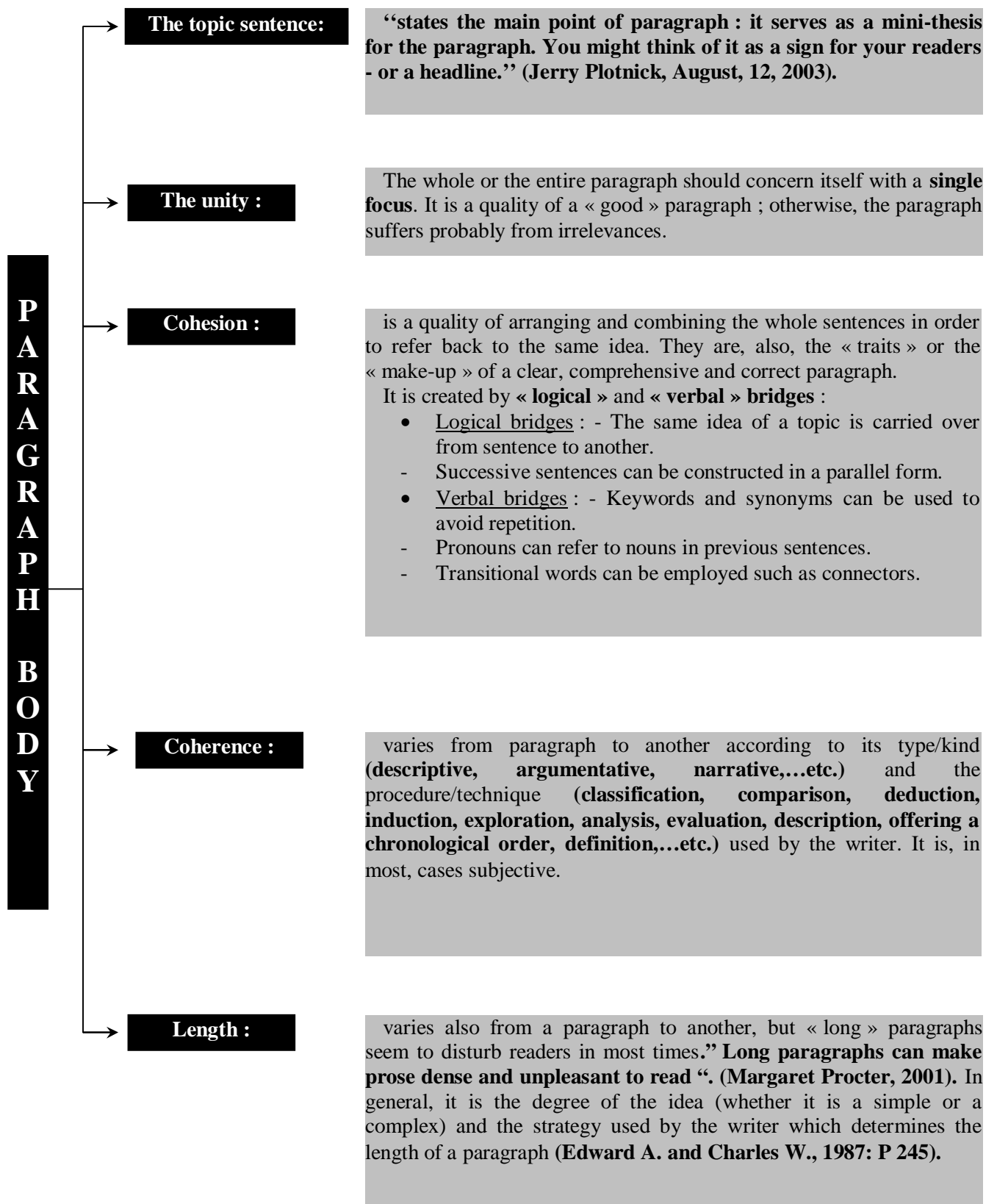


Fig 3. The paragraph body

Appendix 5: The assessment or evaluation types

| | Notion | Time of Occurrence | Characteristics | Purposes/Objectives |
|---------------------|------------------|--|---|---|
| COMMON TYPES | summative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After instruction. • It is given after a term, a chapter, a semester, or in the like. In general, it comes at the end of a teaching program of instruction. • Its time of allowance depends on the test construction, generally, it exceeds one hour and a half. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marked (graded, or scored, etc). • It could be standard or none. • Decisive: the individual's achievement is comparatively against the achievements of other students; ranked in relation to norms of achievement. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It helps the administrators to make academic decisions about a student's passing or failing and therefore to award a certificate of a success (in a case of good achievements). • It helps teacher to promote (advocate) / revise (criticize) the overall effectiveness of the teaching syllables. |
| | formative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within the instruction. • It takes place over a regularly period of time i.e. throughout a course or program of instruction. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unmarked. • Diagnostic • Informative • predictive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The individual's progress is observed and recorded by a variety of means. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It provides information about every learner at 3 levels; to see whether: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 – He/ She has understood or not a specific instruction. 2 - The previous level of this learner before the summative type. 3 - To modify instruction while the course is progressing by teachers, and to adjust the curriculum by instructors to meet the learner's needs. |

-Table A. Assessment common types

| | Notion | Time of occurrence | Characteristics | Objectives |
|----------------------|------------------------|---|---|---|
| TYPICAL TYPES | “Sizing-up” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Done at the beginning of a teaching course. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dealt for individuals in a form of short questions, a short task...etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher can at least, have an image about the learner's language ability. |
| | “Instructional” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Though daily tasks after giving courses. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dealt for both individuals and groups; given as written home works. (tasks are part of this type also). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To know whether the learner(s) has (ve) understood the specific input. |
| | “Official” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periodic. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dealt for individuals as well as for groups. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To award grades and to make reports on the final learner's language ability. |

-Table B. Assessment typical types adapted from the Airasian's model¹

¹ Isaacson, 1996.

Appendix 6: Examples on what and how to assess

Table C. the writing targeted areas for evaluation

| The assessor | What to assess | How to assess | Results/decisions |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p>Nancy B. Hyshop (1990)</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Effective and accurate usage of words (vocabulary). 2. The use of Standard English. 3. Appropriate punctuation. 4. Correct spelling. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving a mark, plus (+) a comment. • Each usage of the mentioned skill is ranked for each paper upon the following analytical scale: ' from 1=low to 6=high': 1= little or no presence of the characteristics. 2= some presence of these characteristics. 3= a half of their presence. 4= fairly successful communication. 5= highly presence of these characteristics. 6= highly inventive and mature presence of these characteristics. | <p>❖ The student is :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - greatly able (√). - somehow able (~). - not able (×). |
| <p>Costas Gabrielatos (2002)</p> | <p>- Writing categories: A, B, C and D:</p> <p><u>Category A: Language</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a correct and an effective spelling. 2. an accurate and an appropriate use of grammar and syntax. 3. an accurate and an appropriate use of vocabulary. <p><u>Category B: Layout and organization</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The layout is relevant to the text type (an essay layout is different from that of a poem, or a conversation and the like.) 2. a clear paragraphing. 3. a clear strategy/method of organization (eg: similarity/contrast, for/against, pause/effect, before/after ...etc). 4. a clear linking between each sections/paragraphs/sentences and the previous one. 5. Accurate punctuation. <p><u>Category C: Relevance to the task and regard to the reader</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. an appropriate explicitness, which is the exact amount of information [needed/required by the reader], and provided by the writer. 2. an appropriate and consis- | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no a defined method about scoring, but one might guess the method used over the categories (A, B, C and D) and which is based on a holistic approach. | <p>- decisions are made separately and they are written as comments on each production about:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. language accuracy vs. Inaccurate 2. Writing skills= effective text vs. inflective one. |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| | <p>tent style.</p> <p>3. an appropriate coverage and avoiding irrelevancies.</p> <p><u>Category D: Clarity</u></p> <p>1. If the written product is a <i>narrative</i>; the sequence of events in time, the characters and their relationship should be clear.</p> <p>2. If it is an <i>argumentation</i>, the writer's ideas should be stated clearly and supported by arguments and examples.</p> | | |
| <p>Stephen L. Isaacson (1996)</p> | <p>- writing categories: <i>fluency, content, conventions, syntax, and paragraphs.</i></p> <p><u>Category 1: Fluency:</u></p> <p>1. Translating one's thought into written words.</p> <p>2. Becoming more proficient at writing down words and sentences into compositions of gradually increasing length.</p> <p><u>Category 2: Content:</u></p> <p>1. the composition's organization:</p> <p>2. Cohesion:</p> <p>3. Accuracy and originality:</p> <p><u>Category C: Conventions:</u></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For each category there is a defined method explained below: • There is a way to assess fluency but only designed for kids and not for students at university levels. • Using questions (qualitative method): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. - Is there a good beginning sentence? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there a clear ending? - Is there a logical sequence of subtopics or events? 2. - Does the writer stick to the topic? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is it clear that words like <i>it, that, and they</i> refer to? - Does the writer use key words that cue the readers to the direction of the discourse (<i>first..., Then..., Therefore..., On the other hand...</i>)? 3. Does the writer use his own words? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The approach is an analytical scale and quantitative method based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1pt for the <i>existence</i> of the item. • 0pt to the <i>absence</i> that item. using a quantitative method like CWS: Correct Word Sequences as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Place a Caret (^) over every | <p>- giving the total score and comments on the paper.</p> |

| | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| | <p>1. Correct spelling.</p> <p>2. Punctuation.</p> <p>3. Capitalization.</p> <p>4. Grammar.</p> <p>5. Legible handwriting.</p> <p>Category 4: Syntax: - based on four levels: <i>level 1:</i> correct simple sentence. <i>level 2:</i> variety of simple sentence patterns. <i>level 3:</i> compound sentence. <i>level 4:</i> complex sentence.</p> <p>Category 5: Paragraphs: 1. Topic sentence. 2. Supporting sentences. 3. Clincher sentence.</p> | <p>correct sequence between the two words that forms the sequence.</p> <p>2. Place a large dot (o) between every incorrect sequence before and after misspelled words: eg: my dog chsad the ball. o my ^ dog o chsad o the ^ ball ^.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to the CWS, he used a diagnostic analysis of conventions <p>1. eg: I like my horse. I like my kitty. 2. eg: I have a new toy. It is big. It came in the mail. 3. eg: Our baby sitter sleeps all the time. To go faster, we push it. I ate the cookie and my brother ate the candy bar. 4. eg: The man wants to live where there is no pollution. Since John was late, we had to start without him.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using a scoring system : - 1pt for the existence of the item | |
|--|---|---|--|

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|---|--|
| <p>Dana Ferris (2003)</p> | <p>Categories: <i>1,2,3, and 4</i></p> <p>1. Development. 2. Organization.</p> <p>3. Grammar and beyond.</p> <p>4. Style.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using checklists: scoring based on the following: * For categories <i>1</i> and <i>2</i> the scoring is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (√) good: essay exhibits characteristics. - (~) half: essay halfway fulfils the characteristics. - (×) bad: essay lacks the characteristics. * For the category <i>3</i>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (√): exhibits the characteristics. - (×): contains this error. * For the category <i>4</i>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - too formal - too informal - appropriate. | <p>- comments are given at the end of the checklists</p> |
| <p>Donn Byrne (2001)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Errors in production (errors in general at the level of grammar (the form) and at the level of discourse (the content). (they are given without specifications). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various correction procedures: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. correcting all the mistakes, or b. correcting mistakes selective-ly, or c. indicating mistakes to be corrected by the students. • The means is using the chart symbols (made of 11 symbols) designed for evaluating the writing product. | <p>The result of such correction is not denoted in this article. Yet, it can be regarded as a way, among others, in responding students' written outcomes.</p> |

Appendix 7: examples on ways of correcting or identifying errors

I didn't want to speak about some thing real and personal but only for you, because I am very shy person, it is about the girls which I love, we were students in the second year of secondary school, the first time when I have seen here was in the recreation, in a same day at 10:00 she was going to the administration, here walking was like a flying bird she took my attention with her beauty, she was not weight like (a magic) and to with the (of) dark hair, she was not too short (with the) black eyes, and she was not tall and not small, when I spoke to her I say: "she is what I need?" she came to me then we met after we had a meeting in the class room, she was in the same class with me, I was very happy. I don't now how to explain my feeling in that time.

the lesson

His way of thinking about the others not to judge them but to inform them and give lessons of this life and how could we lived with its ability. He helped the pupils not for just for lessons but about their life and give them solutions a deal solutions. He succeed in his life in and out the school, all the pupils and the teacher respect him because he respected himself.

Finally, I think that the others people judge him before they didn't know who was he, for me is not

W.O

dreams because of the social and the cultural
decade. The American dream of being the superior
nation returned to a dream of getting wealthy.
It is similar to Gatsby's hopes of getting money to
attract his love Daisy, while no concerns about
the way of being wealthy. This was the message
of the mentality of the American society symbolized
by Gatsby as a person and also as different emotions
and desire.

These are other things which could be taken in
consideration, (among them)

The hope of using the past to make the future (this
was what Gatsby was trying to do when that he
wanted to revive his love in Daisy's past to bring
again happiness for the future)

Another theme which is the loss of the love when
losing our moral principals. This was what
happened with Gatsby, as he had lost his moral
quality when using crimes to have money and
by the loss of that quality he has couldn't
regain Daisy's love.

wealthy
Which
subject?

Topic 3

Theodor Dreiser's novel "Sister Carrie" could
be considered as a real model of the lifestyle in the
nineteenth century.

Dreiser was very clear in his objective, he wanted to show
the reader the situation women live in at that time.

How hardship they use to face in their daily life just because
they are women; and how was getting a sweet job with
good wages was a dream that could never be reached.

The hardship our novel talk about wasn't only that of
having a job but also the way women were treated by
men. They (women) had no chance to be independent because
of the nature of a woman denote that she is no thing without

Appendix 8: Symbolization of errors in writing

- Table D. The chart symbols/the correction symbols for writing

| Symbol | Meaning | Example | The correct form |
|------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| - S, Sp, Sp | = incorrect spelling, spelling error, or wrong spelling. | 1: "I recie <u>v</u> ed j <u>o</u> ur letter." 2: "Sarah lives in Man <u>a</u> ttan. | 1: I received your letter. 2: Sarah lives in Man <u>h</u> attan. |
| - W.O, Syntax, WO | = wrong word order or order in word sentence is incorrect. | 1: He knows <u>w</u> ell the city. 2: <u>a</u> lways I am happy here. 3: I like <u>F</u> ridays to eat fish. | 1: He knows the city <u>w</u> ell. 2: I am <u>a</u> lways happy here. 3: I like to eat fish on <u>F</u> ridays. |
| - W.F, F,W.F, NA, U— W/Dict, D, WW | = wrong form, form of the word used is incorrect or wrong word form, the usage in not appropriate, or wrong word usage, faulty diction or wrong word | 1: we want <u>t</u> hat you come. 2: I am <u>i</u> nteresting in acting. 3: Everything <u>s</u> eemed to <u>a</u> gainst me. 4: He <u>r</u> equested me to sit down. 5: They are <u>l</u> ack of courage. 6: Tall building <u>a</u> re <u>b</u> uilt along two sides of the harbour. 7: It <u>s</u> pent me one to two hours to get there. 8: My <u>c</u> areer in college was Human services. | 1: we want <u>y</u> ou to come. 2: I am <u>i</u> nterested in acting. 3: Everything <u>s</u> eemed <u>a</u> gainst me. 4: He asked me to sit down. 5: They are <u>u</u> ncourageous. (or : They <u>l</u> ack courage.) 6: Tall building <u>s</u> tretch along two sides of the harbour. 7: It <u>t</u> ook me one to two hours to get there. 8: My <u>m</u> ajor in college was Human services. |
| - P, P | = punctuation wrong or omitted or misused punctuation. | 1: what <u>s</u> your name? 2: He asked me what I wanted <u>?</u> 3: I said <u>W</u> hy is He so sad <u>,</u> | 1: What' <u>s</u> your name? 2: He asked me what I wanted. 3: I said: "Why is he so sad?" |
| - cap | = capitalization needed or faulty capitalization. | 1: I really liked <u>m</u> r. <u>j</u> ones. | 1: I really liked <u>M</u> r. <u>J</u> ones. |
| - λ, ^ | = something has been left out or word/words missing. | 1: They said <u>^</u> was wrong. 2: He hit me on <u>^</u> shoulder. 3: Whenever <u>^</u> buys cookies, she always buys chocolate chip. | 1: they said <u>i</u> t was wrong. 2: He hit me on <u>m</u> y shoulder. 3: Whenever <u>M</u> aria cookies, she always buys chocolate chip. |
| - V, VF | = wrong verb form or an improper verb form. | 1: It didn't <u>a</u> nnoyed to me. 2: Many pictures are <u>t</u> ook here. 3: They tried hard to <u>s</u> queezed themselves into the small space. 4: I <u>d</u> runk a lot of wine last time. | 1: It didn't <u>a</u> nnoy to me. 2: Many pictures are <u>t</u> aken here. 3: They tried hard to <u>s</u> queeze themselves into the small space. 4: I <u>d</u> runk a lot of wine last time. |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| - T, T, U-- S | = wrong tense, an improper verb tense or verb usage. | 1: If he <u>will come</u> , it will be too late. 2: I <u>remembered</u> when I was very young. | 1: If he comes , it will be too late. 2: I remember when I was very young. |
| - C, Agr | = concord subject and verb do not agree or faulty subject-verb agreement. | 1: Two policemen <u>has</u> come. 2: They <u>was</u> all very happy. 3: What is needed <u>is</u> : bread, jam and tea. | 1: Two policemen have come. 2: They were all very happy. 3: What is needed are : bread, jam and tea. |
| - S/P, Sing, Pl - noun (sing/plur) | = singular or plural form wrong or singular or plural form not used or misused. | 1: We need more <u>informations</u> . 2: The media <u>is</u> very important. 3: My favorite <u>foods</u> is avocado. 4: My favorite <u>city</u> are: Ravenna, Florence and New York. 5: Many tall <u>building</u> . 6: Many <u>year</u> ago. 7: a lot of <u>tree</u> . | 1: We need more information . 2: The media are very important. 3: My favorite food is avocado. 4: My favorite cities are: Ravenna, Florence and New York. 5: Many tall buildings . 6: Many years ago. 7: a lot of trees . |
| [] | = something is not necessary. | 1: It is <u>too [much]</u> difficult. | 1: It is too difficult . |
| ? M | = meaning is not clear | 1: Come and <u>rest</u> with us for a week. 2: The view from here is very <u>suggestive</u> . | 1: Come and stay with us for a week. 2: The view from here is very impressive . |
| - Frag | = sentence fragment | 1: <u>Because she is an actress</u> . | 1: I love her because she is an actress. |
| - lc, lc | = lower case needed or use lower case | 1: I went to <u>H</u> igh <u>S</u> chool when I was thirteen. | 1: I went to h igh s chool when I was thirteen. |
| - om / omit | = item should omitted | 1: My brother, <u>he went</u> home. | 1: My brother went home. |
| - Rep | = repetition | 1: Yesterday, I watched a nice film, and I liked <u>the film</u> . | 1: Yesterday, I watched a nice film, and I liked it . |
| - ref?, Ref | = unclear pronoun reference or confusing pronoun reference | 1: When John and Joe went out, <u>he</u> wore a coat. 2: The paper proposed to link cancers and secondary. <u>This</u> was established. | 1: When John and Joe went out, they wore a coat. 2: The paper proposed to link cancers and secondary smoke. This connection was establish-ed. |
| - RO | = run on sentence | 1: <u>I have a new dog his name is</u> | 1: I have a new dog. His name is |

| | | <u>Spot.</u> | Spot. |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|
| - Ab | = faulty abbreviation | <u>OWH</u> | 1: WHO : World Health Organization. |
| - DIV | = faulty word division | 1: ...natio- <u>nal</u> | 1: ...nation- al |
| - Fig | = inappropriate use of figurative language. | 1: Her hair is as dark as <u>muffin</u> . | 1: Her hair is as dark as a crow . |
| - ¶ | = No paragraph needed/ or paragraphing needed | | |
| - Art, Article (a/an) | = article missing or used incorrectly | 1: I like ^ dress with blue rib-bons. 2: <u>A</u> air condition / have <u>a</u> illusion / <u>a</u> 8 year old little girl. | 1: I like a dress with blue ribbons. 2: An air condition / have an illusion / an 8 year old little girl. |
| - prep, | = inappropriate use of prepositions | 1: I sit <u>in</u> this chair. 2: She goes <u>for</u> school. | 1: I sit on this chair. 2: She goes to school. |
| | | | |
| - adv | = inappropriate use of adverbs | 1: He <u>is rapidly</u> . | 1: He behaves rapidly . |
| - case , pron (ca) | =pronoun case | 1: I saw the <u>car's teacher</u> . 2: <u>Pedros</u> mother works at the bakery | 1: I saw the teacher's car . 2: Pedro's mother works at the bakery |
| - Apos | = omitted or misused apostrophe | 1: Dogs <u>dont</u> like milk. | 1: Dogs don't like milk. |
| - (contr) | = do not use contractions in formal writing) | | |
| - s/p | = shift in person | 1: As soon as a man goes steady with a woman, <u>you</u> start to see that she has many faults. | 1: As soon as a man goes steady with a woman, he starts to see that she has many faults. |

Appendix 9: types of evaluation scales: examples on analytic and holistic scales:

| Fig. 5.2 A Sample Analytic Scale | |
|--|---|
| <u>Relevance and Adequacy of Content</u> | |
| 0. | The answer bears almost no relation to the task set. Totally inadequate answer. |
| 1. | Answer of limited relevance to the task set. Possibly major gaps in treatment of topic and/or pointless repetition. |
| 2. | For the most answers the task set, though there may be some gaps or redundant information. |
| 3. | Relevance and adequate answer to the task set. |
| <u>Compositional Organization</u> | |
| 0. | No apparent organisation of content. |
| 1. | Very little organisation of content. Underlining structures not sufficiently apparent. |
| 2. | Some organisational skills in evidence but not adequately controlled. |
| 3. | Overall shape and internal pattern clear. Organisational skills adequately controlled. |
| <u>Cohesion</u> | |
| 0 | Cohesion almost totally absent. Writing is so fragmentary that comprehension of the intended communication is virtually impossible. |
| 1 | Unsatisfactory cohesion may cause difficulty in comprehension of most of the intended communication. |
| 2 | For the most part satisfactory cohesion though occasional deficiencies may mean that certain parts of the communication are not always effective. |
| 3 | Satisfactory use of cohesion resulting in effective communication. |
| <u>Adequacy of Vocabulary For Purpose</u> | |
| 0. | Vocabulary inadequate even for the most basic parts of the intended communication. |
| 1. | Frequent inadequacies in vocabulary for the task. Perhaps frequent lexical inappropriate and/or repetitions. |
| 2. | Some inadequacies in vocabulary for the task. Perhaps some lexical inappropriacies and/or circumlocution. |
| 3. | Almost no inadequacies in vocabulary of the task. Only rare inappropriacies ad/or circumlocution. |
| <u>Grammar</u> | |
| 0. | Almost all grammatical patterns inaccurate. |
| 1. | Frequent inaccurate inaccuracies. |
| 2. | Some grammatical inaccuracies. |
| 3. | Almost no grammatical inaccuracies. |
| <u>Mechanical Accuracy I (Punctuation)</u> | |
| 0. | Ignorance of conventions of punctuation. |
| 1. | Low standard of accuracy of punctuation. |
| 2. | Some inaccuracies of punctuation. |
| 3. | Almost no inaccuracies of punctuation. |
| <u>Mechanical Accuracy II (Spelling)</u> | |
| 0. | Almost all spelling inaccurate. |
| 1. | Low standard of accuracy in spelling. |
| 2. | Some inaccuracies in spelling. |
| 3. | Almost no inaccuracies in spelling. |

| Fig. 5.1 A Sample Holistic Scale | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------|--|
| 18–20 | Excellent | Natural English with minimal errors and complete realisation of the task set. |
| 16–17 | Very good | More than a collection of simple sentences, with good vocabulary and structures. Some non-basic errors. |
| 12–15 | Good | Simple but accurate realisation of the task set with sufficient naturalness of English and not many errors. |
| 8–11 | Pass | Reasonably correct but awkward and non-communicating OR fair and natural treatment of subject, with some serious errors. |
| 5–7 | Weak | Original vocabulary and grammar both inadequate to the subject. |
| 0–4 | Very poor | Incoherent. Errors show lack of basic knowledge of English. |

Form: *UCLES International Examinations in English as a foreign language General Handbook 1987.*

Appendix 10: Error nominalization or terminology

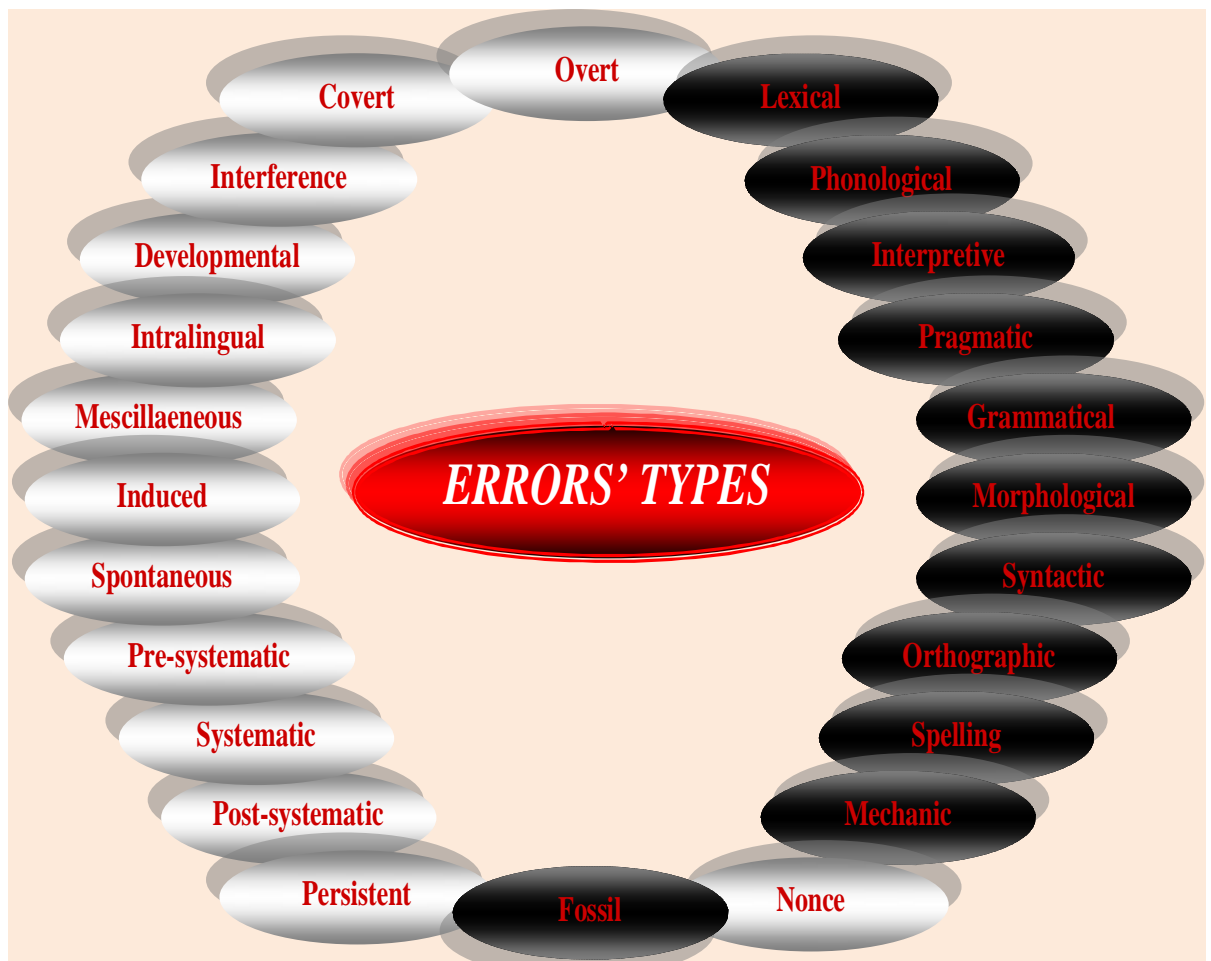


Fig 4. The types of errors produced by EFL learners

Appendix 11: Categorization of errors (an example)

| <i>Error Name</i> | <i>Percentage error in corpus</i> | |
|---|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| | <i>Class</i> | <i>Home</i> |
| <i>Sentence structure errors</i> | | |
| 1. Whole sentence or clause aberrant | 1.5 | 1.0 |
| 2. Subject formation | 1.0 | 1.3 |
| 3. Verb missing | .8 | .3 |
| 4. Verb complement/object complement | 2.1 | 1.7 |
| 5. Prep. Phrase/infinitive mixup | 1.0 | .5 |
| 6. Dangling/misplaced modifier | .4 | .4 |
| 7. Sentence fragment | 1.3 | 2.2 |
| 8. Run-on sentence | 3.1 | 2.1 |
| 9. Parallel structure | 1.0 | .9 |
| 10. Relative clause formation | .5 | .4 |
| 11. Word order | 3.0 | 1.8 |
| 12. Gapping error | 2.0 | 1.8 |
| 13. Extraneous words | 1.8 | .9 |
| 14. Awkward phrasing | 1.8 | 2.7 |
| Section totals | 21.3 | 18.0 |
| <i>Verb-centered errors</i> | | |
| 15. Tense | 7.1 | 4.5 |
| 16. Voice | .9 | .9 |
| 17. Verb formation | 3.6 | 2.9 |
| 18. Subject-verb formation | 3.8 | 3.6 |
| 19. Two-word verb | 1.4 | .4 |
| Section totals | 16.8 | 12.3 |
| <i>Reference errors</i> | | |
| 20. Noun-pronoun agreement | 2.3 | 1.7 |
| 21. Quantifier-noun agreement | .4 | .5 |
| 22. Epenthetic pronoun | .4 | .2 |
| 23. Ambiguous/unlocatable referent | 2.6 | 3.1 |
| 24. Voice shift | 1.2 | .4 |
| Section totals | 6.9 | 5.9 |
| <i>Word-level choice</i> | | |
| 25. Lexical/phrase choice | 11.7 | 11.7 |
| 26. Idiom | .6 | 1.3 |
| 27. Word form | 6.0 | 7.9 |
| 28. Singular for plural (except verbs) | 5.0 | 5.5 |
| 29. Plural for singular (except verbs) | 2.5 | 1.8 |
| 30. Quantity words | 1.2 | .9 |
| 31. Preposition | 6.2 | 7.5 |
| Section totals | 32.6 | 36.6 |
| <i>Article errors</i> | | |
| 32. Missing/extra/wrong article | 10.8 | 14.0 |
| <i>Punctuation</i> | | |
| 33. Missing/extra/wrong mark | 11.8 | 13.5 |
| Total number of errors | 1,142 | 1,165 |

SOURCE: TABLE I. ERRORS CATEGORIES AND PERCENTAGES (Kroll, 1990: 145-146)

Appendix 12: Error frequency (an example)

| | <i>Recurrent Systemic Errors</i> | | <i>Nonce Mistakes</i> | | <i>Total</i> |
|--------------------------|--|-------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------|
| | Abs. | Percent | Abs. | Percent | |
| Morphology | 166 | 92.3 | 14 | 7.7 | 180 |
| Model verbs | 16 | 94.2 | 1 | 5.8 | 17 |
| Tenses | 50 | 100.0 | — | — | 50 |
| Articles | 228 | 87.7 | 32 | 12.3 | 260 |
| Word order | 31 | 64.5 | 17 | 35.5 | 48 |
| Syntax | 54 | 78.3 | 15 | 21.7 | 69 |
| Construction, government | 54 | 58.1 | 39 | 41.9 | 93 |
| Prepositions | 19 | 33.4 | 38 | 66.6 | 57 |
| Lexis | 138 | 59.2 | 95 | 40.8 | 233 |
| Total | 756 | 75.1 | 251 | 24.9 | 1,007 |

*SOURCE: TABLE 1 (Dušková, 1989: 234)

Appendix 13: Errors causality or sources

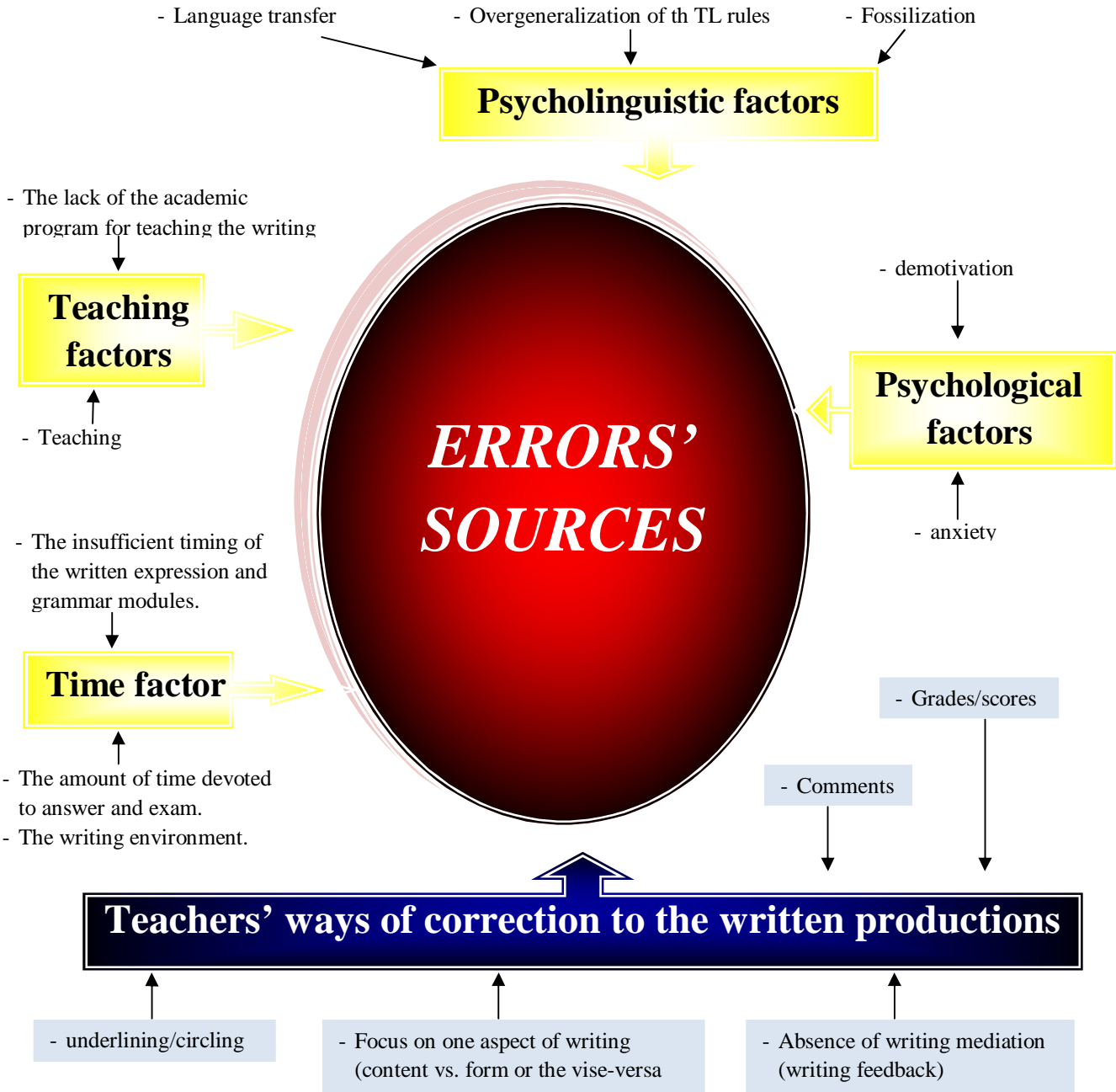


Fig 5. The causes of errors

The results of the students' questionnaire

Category A: Students' awareness of the existence of their difficulties in writing

1. Do you find difficulties when writing in English?
 - a. Yes 21
 - b. Somehow 06
 - c. No 03
2. Are your problems in writing due to:
 - a. The lack of documentation about writing in the university library? 14
 - b. The documentation about writing in the library is difficult to understand? 04
 - c. The lack of habit to read in English? 22
 - d. The lack of practicing free writing? 30

Category B: Students' own strategies to improve their written production

1. Do you try to solve these difficulties?
 - a. Yes 19
 - b. No 11

| 2. If yes, how do you solve these difficulties? Do you... | a. Frequently | b. Sometimes | c. Seldom | d. Never |
|--|---------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| 1) revise lessons of the written expression module? | 00 | 00 | 03 | 27 |
| 2) use grammar textbooks? | 02 | 12 | 00 | 16 |
| 3) use the dictionary to solve spelling mistakes? | 04 | 10 | 10 | 08 |
| 4) read to solve the lack of vocabulary? | 05 | 06 | 08 | 10 |
| 5) train yourself by writing after the courses in the university? | 01 | 00 | 01 | 28 |
| 6) practise linguistic activities on grammar, reading and writing during your holidays | 00 | 03 | 03 | 26 |

Category C: Students' attitudes during the assessment periods

1. During the years of learning English, were you more interested in:
 - a. speech? 23
 - b. writing? 02
 - c. both? 05
2. During exams, which skill makes you more anxious:
 - a. speaking? 19
 - b. writing? 11
3. Before exams, do you revise your lessons by:
 - a. writing just in the night before the exam? 06
 - b. learning by heart literally? 16
 - c. rewriting the lessons again in your proper style? 08
4. During the exam, which aspect do you focus more on:
 - a. the content? 22
 - b. the form? 05
 - c. both? 03
5. Do you always edit (revise) your product once you have finished writing?
 - a. Yes 08
 - b. Sometimes 14
 - c. No 08
6. If yes, do you revise:
 - a. the content? 06
 - b. the form? 01
 - c. both? 01
7. Is one hour and a half enough to write about the topic?
 - a. Yes 19
 - b. Sometimes 05
 - c. No 06
8. Do you think that two years (the 1st and the 2nd year) are enough to acquire the basic skills in writing?
 - a. Yes 00
 - b. Somehow 01
 - c. No 29

Appendix 15:

Teachers' questionnaire

Put a cross (x) where appropriate:

Object: Evaluating students' exam-papers:

1. How did you find the 4th year students' written performances during their academic years?

- a. very good b. good c. average d. bad e. very bad

2. Do they have difficulties in writing English correctly?

- a. yes b. no

3. If yes, how often do their difficulties occur?

- a. frequently b. sometimes c. seldom d. never

4. What is the nature of these difficulties?

- a. Grammar usage.
 b. The misunderstanding of the topic-exam.
 c. The wrong use of capitalization and punctuation.
 d. The lack of vocabulary.
 e. Misspelling.
 f. Linking between sentences.
 g. Bad handwriting.

5. In correcting students' papers, how often did you find their focus on:

| | a. frequently | b. sometimes | c. seldom | d. never |
|---|---------------|--------------|-----------|----------|
| 1. the content? | | | | |
| 2. the form (grammar, vocabulary, right spelling, punctuation and handwriting)? | | | | |

6. How often do the students respect each of the following items in their written product?

| | a. frequently | b. sometimes | c. seldom | d. never |
|------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|-----------|----------|
| 1. the introduction | | | | |
| 2. cohesion (unity) | | | | |
| 3. coherence (logical development) | | | | |
| 4. the conclusion | | | | |

7. In your opinion, what could be the main reason of students' failure to write good English?

- a. Students' lack of reading.
 b. Students' lack of attempts to write in informal situations.
 c. The academic time and programme devoted for teaching the writing skill are not sufficient.
 d. The lack of documentation concerning writing in the libraries.

| | | 4 th year students: class A (2003-2004) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | | Student A1 | | Student A2 | | Student A3 | | Student A4 | | Student A5 | | Student A6 | | Student A7 | | Student A8 | | Student A9 | | Student A10 | |
| W. exp exam /Brit. civ exam | | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th |
| TEACHERS' ASSESSEMENT WAYS | Identifying errors | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ways of correcting errors | - direct correction of the erroneous form. | Eg:- adding '-s' to a needed plural / a verb of the 3 rd person of the present simple. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - adding punctuation. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - adding capitalization. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - correcting misspelling words | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | - commenting inside the copy above or under the erroneous form. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Final decision | - giving a score /a mark | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | - giving a final comment. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

2nd: the students' papers when they were 3rd year student (2001 - 2002)

4th: the **same** students' papers when they were 4th year student (2003 - 2004)

(+): available ;

(-): not available

Table I-1. Ways of responding to class A

| | | 4 th year students: class B (2004-2005) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|--|
| | | Student B1 | | Student B2 | | Student B3 | | Student B4 | | Student B5 | | Student B6 | | Student B7 | | Student B8 | | Student B9 | | Student B10 | | |
| Am. lit /Am. lit | | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | |
| TEACHERS' ASSESSMENT METHODS | Identifying errors | - circling the erroneous form. (a word/a sentence) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - underlying the erroneous form (a word/a sentence) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - writing the error symbol. (eg: <i>sp, p, w.c, ect</i>) above or under the erroneous form. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | correcting errors | - direct correction of the erroneous form. | Eg:- adding '-s' to a needed plural / a verb of the 3 rd person of the present simple. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | - adding punctuation. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | - adding capitalization. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | - correcting misspelling words | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | - commenting inside the copy above or under the erroneous form. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Final decision | - giving a score /a mark | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - giving a final comment. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

3rd: the students' papers when they were 3rd year students (2003 - 2004)

4th: the **same** students' papers when they were 4th year student (2004 - 2005)

(+): available

(-): not available

Table I-2. Ways of responding to class B (the 1st selection)

| | | 4 th year students: class B (2004-2005) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|--|--|--|--|
| | | Student B1 | | Student B2 | | Student B3 | | Student B4 | | Student B5 | | Student B6 | | Student B7 | | Student B8 | | Student B9 | | Student B10 | | | | | |
| | | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | | | | |
| British civilization | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| TEACHERS' ASSESSEMENT WAYS | Identifying errors | - circling the erroneous form. (a word/a sentence) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - underlying the erroneous form (a word/a sentence) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - writing the error symbol. (eg: <i>sp, p, w.c, ect</i>) above or under the erroneous form. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | correcting errors | - direct correction of the erroneous form. Eg: - adding '-s' to a needed plural / a verb of the 3 rd person of the present simple. - adding punctuation. - adding capitalization. - correcting misspelling words | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - commenting inside the copy above or under the erroneous form. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Final decision | - giving a score /a mark | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - giving a final comment. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

3rd: the students' papers when they were 3rd year students (2003 - 2004)

4th: the **same** students' papers when they were 4th year student (2004 - 2005)

(+): available;

(-): not available

Table I-3. Ways of responding to class B (the 2nd selection)

| | | 4 th year students: class A (2003-2004) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | | Student A1 | | Student A2 | | Student A3 | | Student A4 | | Student A5 | | Student A6 | | Student A7 | | Student A8 | | Student A9 | | Student A10 | |
| W. exp exam /Brit. civ exam | | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th | 2 nd | 4 th |
| TEACHERS' ASSESSEMENT WAYS | identifying errors | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | - circling the erroneous form. (a word/a sentence) | - | - | + | + | + | + | + | + | - | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | - | + | - | + |
| | - underlying the erroneous form (a word/a sentence) | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| | - writing the error symbol. (eg: <i>sp, p, w.c, ect</i>) above or under the erroneous form. | + | - | + | - | - | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | + | - |
| Ways of correcting errors | - direct correction of the erroneous form. | Eg:- adding '-s' to a needed plural / a verb of the 3 rd person of the present simple. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | - adding punctuation. | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| | - adding capitalization. | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| | - correcting spelling words | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| | - commenting inside the copy above or under the erroneous form. | + | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - |
| Final decision | - giving a score /a mark | 07 | 07 | 13 | 08 | 12 | 9.5 | 07 | 8.5 | 08 | 10.5 | 08 | 09 | 10 | 11.5 | 09 | 8.5 | 09 | 9.5 | 10 | 09 |
| | - giving a final comment. | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - |

2nd: the students' papers when they were 3rd year student (2001 - 2002)

4th: the **same** students' papers when they were 4th year student (2003 - 2004)

(+): available ;

(-): not available

Table I-4. Responding to class A's writings

| | | 4 th year students: class B (2004-2005) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|---|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----|---|
| | | Student B1 | | Student B2 | | Student B3 | | Student B4 | | Student B5 | | Student B6 | | Student B7 | | Student B8 | | Student B9 | | Student B10 | | | |
| | | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | | |
| Am. lit /Am. lit | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| TEACHERS' ASSESSEMENT METHODS | Identifying errors | - circling the erroneous form. (a word/a sentence) | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | | |
| | | - underlying the erroneous form (a word/a sentence) | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | |
| | | - writing the error symbol. (eg: <i>sp, p, w.c, ect</i>) above or under the erroneous form. | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| | correcting errors | - direct correction of the erroneous form. Eg:- adding '-s' to a needed plural / a verb of the 3 rd person of the present simple. | - adding punctuation. | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| | | | - adding capitalization. | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| | | | - correcting misspelling words | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| | | | - commenting inside the copy above or under the erroneous form. | + | - | - | - | - | + | + | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | - | - |
| | Final decision | - giving a score /a mark | 10.5 | 12 | 12 | 12.5 | 12.5 | 14 | 7.5 | 10 | 07 | 08 | 10 | 12 | 10.5 | 10 | 10 | 9.5 | 08 | 11 | 11.5 | 11 | |
| | | - giving a final comment. | - | - | + | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |

3rd: the students' papers when they were 3rd year students (2003 - 2004)

4th: the **same** students' papers when they were 4th year student (2004 - 2005)

(+): available

(-): not available

Table I-5. Responding to class B's writings (the 1st selection)

| | | 4 th year students: class B (2004-2005) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | | Student B1 | | Student B2 | | Student B3 | | Student B4 | | Student B5 | | Student B6 | | Student B7 | | Student B8 | | Student B9 | | Student B10 | |
| | | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th | 3 rd | 4 th |
| Identifying errors | | Brit. civ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - circling the erroneous form. (a word/a sentence) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - underlying the erroneous form (a word/a sentence) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - writing the error symbol. (eg: <i>sp, p, w.c, ect</i>) above or under the erroneous form. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| correcting errors | | - direct correction of the erroneous form. Eg: - adding '-s' to a needed plural / a verb of the 3 rd person of the present simple. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - adding punctuation. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - adding capitalization. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - correcting misspelling words | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - commenting inside the copy above or under the erroneous form. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Final decision | | - giving a score /a mark | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | - giving a final comment. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

3rd: the students' papers when they were 3rd year students (2003 - 2004)

4th: the **same** students' papers when they were 4th year student (2004 - 2005)

(+): available;

(-): not available

Table I-6. Responding to class B's writings (the 2nd selection)

GLOSSARY

Glossary

Anxiety: a human behaviour, generally viewed as a painful or apprehensive uneasiness of mind; usually as a fearful concern or interest. It is also defined as an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physiological signs (as tension, and increased pulse), by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one's capacity to cope with care.

Assessment: nearly understood by evaluation or testing. It is the act of introducing forms of tests organized by time and questions to judge the abilities of people.

Competence: An abstract or internal language factor or a mass of knowledge related uniquely to language system. It is at the same time a quality or a measurement that tells us how a person speaks and understands a language.

Constructive Analysis Approach: one of the famous theories in dealing with errors but which focusses on the relationship between the systems of languages.

Content: is one of the two aspects of a language output. It deals with around the topic or the theme of the written or spoken performance. It studies mainly the use of vocabulary and coherence.

Cross-sectional: it refers to the time factor in collecting errors (from a sample of language outcomes), but at a single point of time.

Error Analysis Approach: one of the famous theories which deals with studying errors methodologically over pre-organized plans and techniques.

Errors: are deviant forms from the system of language. They can appear in different forms and types.

Feedback: is generally accepted as the return to the input of a part of the output of a machine, system, or process (as for producing changes in an electronic circuit that improve performance or in an automatic control device that provides self-corrective action).

Form: is the one of the two aspects of a language output. It is manifested in the handwriting, the text layout, the respect of language norms and rules.

Formative evaluation: a type of on-going or continuous tests; performed in very short period of time. It is also called diagnostic evaluation.

Fossils: called also persistent errors; are types of errors which are kept or remain forever in the human brain due to some mental or psycholinguistic factors. They are viewed as un-eliminated.

Interlanguage: is a term generally understood as a kind of language resulting while learning a foreign language. It is a language which differs from both the mother tongue and the foreign one; but at the same time it may have qualities from each one of them.

Language transfer: it is a natural human language behaviour manifested by the interference of the mother tongue while performing with the second or the foreign language.

Longitudinal: it refers to the time factor in collecting errors (from a sample of language outcomes), but over short or long many distinct points of time.

Mediation: an actual or frequent intervention between the variables of a social activity. It has forms and objectives. Its main aim is to facilitate the achievement or the acquisition of this social activity's aims.

Mistakes: are one type of errors but generally understood as the ones the performer can correct. They are also called non-systematic errors.

Motivation: a human force, a stimulus or desire to do things.

Nonce error: a type of errors which occurs only once either cross-sectionally or detected once longitudinally.

Performance: the visible execution of the knowledge or the system of language (an external feature of language).

Process approach: it is a mental theory which explains how final language outputs have been realized. For instance, writing requires a number of mental operations while production such as thinking, brainstorming, organizing ideas and etc.

Product approach: it is a language theory which views any language output (spoken or written) as a final realization and concrete one i.e. a visible language outcomes. For instance, writing from such a perspective is known by texts components and layouts.

Recurrent errors: also called frequent errors; they are errors which are found repetitive in a sample of language product.

Relative frequency: it can be viewed as a calculator by which the number of errors produced by performers (detected in their language samples) is defined. It is mainly used by the error analysts.

Summative evaluation: a type of tests characterized mainly by its time of occurrence which is at the end of learning sessions or terms or annuals (performed after long period of time).

Systematic errors: are errors related to the system of language. They denote problems in competence.

Targeted writing areas: are issues designed for evaluation. They constitute what evaluators look for while doing their corrective role. They differ from a language output to another, for instance (spoken versus written outcomes).

Writing symbols: small marks or drawings used as abbreviations of the type of mistakes a language performer makes, for example: (p) for punctuation errors.

وزارة التعليم العالي و البحث العلمي
جامعة وهران
كلية الآداب و اللغات و الفنون
قسم اللغات الأنجلوساكسونية

ملخص المذكرة:

هذه الأطروحة الأكاديمية تستكشف مشكل الطلبة مع التعبير الكتابي في اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية و ذلك على مستوى الشكل و ليس المضمون. هذا العمل يقيم المظاهر النحوية و الإملائية للغة الانجليزية في الأداء الكتابي للطلبة. الموضوع الأساسي الذي يدور حوله التحقيق يتمحور حول السؤال الآتي: 'لماذا يستمر طلبة هذه اللغة و حتى المتقدمين منهم في إنتاج الأخطاء النحوية و الإملائية بصفة متكررة و دائمة في أدائهم الكتابي بعد امتحاناتهم الفصلية أو النهائية؟'

هذا البحث العلمي المعنون ب: 'تأثير طرق و أساليب تقييم أو تصحيح التعبير الكتابي على مستوى الشكل'، هو محاولة لإيجاد الأسباب التي تشجع على تكرار هذه الأخطاء بالرغم من اجتياز أربع سنوات دراسة أو تعلم هذه اللغة. و في نفس الوقت، يعتقد أن 'جهل الطلبة بأخطائهم المتكررة بعد كل امتحان نهائي' هو السبب الرئيسي لهذه الظاهرة.

ما جعل هذه الفرضية تأتي في مقدمة كل الأسباب هو عدم كفاية الطرق المتبعة من طرف الأساتذة في تقييم أو تصحيح التعبير الكتابي و التي أغلبها تظهر في صورة تسطير أو وضع دائرة حول الخطأ أو تقديم ملاحظة أو تعليق بكلمة أو كلمتين. هذه الصور أو الطرق تبقى مهمة في أغلب الأحيان للعديد من الطلبة إذ أنها لا تبين لهم بوضوح مواطن الضعف في تعابيرهم الكتابية، مما يجعلهم بعيدين كل البعد عن الكفاءة اللغوية المرجوة.

تم عرض و مناقشة هذه الإشكالية من الناحية النظرية في فصلين 01 و 02. يركز الباب الأول على تعريف المنتج الأدبي الكتابي للغة الانجليزية و كذا كيفية تقييمه. بينما الباب الثاني يعالج منهجية تحليل الأخطاء و كذا تأثير أساليب التقييم.

يحدد عمليا الباب 03 أدوات التحقيق الموضوعية لجمع البيانات قدر ممكن حول هذه المسألة و يدرس طلبة سنة رابعة ليسانس لغة انجليزية من جامعة سيدي بلعباس. أما الفصل 04 فيقدم و يفسر البيانات المحصل عليها. هذه النتائج موضحة في جداول و رسومات بيانية.

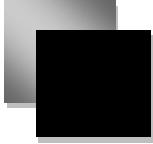
أخيرا، يشير الفصل 05 إلى رؤى و تجارب جديدة للرد على الأداء الكتابي للطلاب و التي يرجى منها مساعدتهم للحد و التغلب على هذه الظاهرة من أجل إنتاج تعبير كتابي ناجح وفق المقاييس النحوية و الإملائية للغة الانجليزية و كذلك الوصول إلى مستوى عال من الكفاءة اللغوية.

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Résumé de la thèse :

Cette thèse explore le problème de l'expression écrite chez les étudiants d'anglais comme une langue étrangère au niveau de la forme de leur message écrit. Elle évalue théoriquement et pratiquement les aspects de la grammaire et l'orthographe dans leur performance. Son enquête principale tourne autour « pourquoi ces étudiants, même ceux qui ont un niveau avancé d'acquisition de cette langue, produisent toujours les mêmes erreurs récurrentes après leurs examens finales ou terminales ».

Cette recherche académique, intitulée «**les effets de l'évaluation de l'écrit : coté du forme de message**», est une tentative de trouver les causes les plus provocantes de cette fréquence d'erreur, dont une des ces hypothèse est l'inconscience des étudiants de leur mal formes fréquentes dans leurs productions écrites. On pense que cette hypothèse est la plus explicite à ce phénomène en raison de l'insuffisance des méthodes d'évaluation des professeurs de leurs écritures.

La problématique est présentée et discutée théoriquement dans les chapitres 1 et 2. Le premier chapitre base sur la définition du produit d'écriture et son évaluation, tandis que le deuxième a affaire avec des approches d'analyse d'erreur et l'influence des façons des professeurs de répondre aux productions écrites de leurs étudiants.

Le chapitre 3 définit pratiquement les outils d'investigation élaborés pour collecter tant de données que possible de cette question. Il étudie exactement le cas des étudiants de 4^{ème} année License anglais de l'université de Sidi Belabbes. Le chapitre 4 analyse et interprète ces données rassemblées et illustre les découvertes par des figures et pourcentages et des tables.

Finalement, le chapitre 5 suggère de nouvelles visions et les expériences de répondre au fonctionnement écrit des étudiants qui peuvent aider ces derniers à surmonter les problèmes en écrivant en anglais, pour réaliser des productions écrites réussies aussi bien qu'atteindre un haut niveau de compétence linguistique.

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