

The Problems that English Cultural Centre Students (ECC) Students Face in Paragraph Writing

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Abstract:

This research is an attempt to assess the EFL for ECC learners in paragraph writing. The study is based on two hypotheses: the ECC learners do not know the elements of paragraph writing and they do not know how to use these elements to build a paragraph. The researcher adopted the descriptive analytical method (written test) to assess the sample students' performance in paragraph writing. 45 learners at the ECC institute are randomly chosen, learners are all majoring in English.

The researcher came up with the many results as follows: The ECC learners do not know the elements of paragraph writing. These learners do not know how to use these elements to build a paragraph, something which affirms the researcher's hypotheses. Finally, the researcher recommends the following:

Teachers of English should be given more training.

It is a must to make use of the revolution of technology in updating the teaching aids at the educational institutions.

Keywords: ECC (English Cultural Center), EFL (English as a Foreign Language), ELT (English Language Teaching)

INTRODUCTION

EFL ECC students face many problems, these problems spring from different sources.

Firstly, the Arabic language belongs to Semite family of language while the English belongs to the Indo-European. This fact results in other differences such as: The Arabic alphabet is different

from the English one. The former belongs to the Arabic alphabet while the latter belongs to the Latin one. The Arabic letters are written from right to left while the English ones are written from left to right. Phonetically some sounds in English are not there in Arabic language. E.g. (v) and (p). an ECC learner of English also faces a problem in pronouncing letters like letter (c) in English because its sometimes pronounced as (s), sometimes pronounced as (k) and sometimes as (ch) according to the letters that follow. Another example of pronunciation difficulty is exemplified by the letter (g): when it is combined with the letter (h) it is pronounced as an (f) when it is come at the end of the word and it is not pronounced when it comes at the middle of the word as in (night). The (ph) is pronounced (f) and the (th) is pronounced in two forms:

One like in (thin) and another like in (then). All the letter in Arabic language are pronounced and we don't have silent letters.

Contrastively English is full of examples when letters are silent e.g. the letter (k) in (know) and the letter (p) in (psychology).

As for gender e.g. the English doesn't differentiate between masculine and feminine when using the pronouns (you) and (they), moreover the pronoun (you) may be used with both singular and plural. In Arabic we have: a singular, dual and plural forms of nouns and pronouns but in English only two forms are exist, that is to singular and plural (more than one in considered plural in English).

In Arabic the verb precedes the noun but in English comes after the noun. In Arabic the adjective comes after the noun while the English it is comes before the noun (e.g. new book). Tenses in Arabic are three only, that it is to say present, past and future. While in English there are twelve: present simple, present progressive, present perfect, present perfect progressive. The past also consists of four types: past simple, past perfect, past progressive and past perfect progressive. The same applies to the future tense: future simple, future progressive, future perfect and future perfect progressive.

These differences are natural differences and they will cause problems to learners of English as a foreign language anywhere, but other problems are environmental as they are originated by the circumstances pertaining to the specific area e.g. problems caused by the education system of the specific country like those related to syllabi, education ladder, means of instruction etc....

All these factors whether natural or Man-made have got their impact on the standard off the ECC students of (EFL) and all It's aspects: listening, reading, speaking, and writing.

Statement of the problem

Learning a second language means learning to communicate with other people, to understand them, talk to them, read what they have written and write to them.

Writing in specific, is a complex process even in first language, let alone it be in foreign language and teachers of English need more effort in order to teach writing. To write well, one has to master a complex set of abilities and many Sub-skills like the orthography, punctuations, lexis, grammar, cohesion, etc.

In the light of difficulty of writing in the light of status of ECC students, the teachers have observed that the students of ECC have difficulties in writing a paragraph. Moreover, although writing is very important skill.

The ECC students' needs for to assessment the first level in writing a paragraph using the proper elements of paragraph writing.

The Study questions

This study is an attempt to find answers to the following questions:
Do ECC students know the characteristics of writing a good paragraph?
Can they write a paragraph with the characteristics of a good Paragraph?

Hypotheses of the study

This study will be based on two hypotheses and as follows:

1. The ECC students are unaware of the paragraph writing elements.
2. That ECC Students don't know how to write a paragraph and its building elements.

Methodology

The study follows the descriptive analytical method. This section describes the methods used for data collection.

Sample

40 students out of the total of 50 students, were randomly chosen for testing. They are in different levels at the ECC institute moreover, because they are ECC students, it means that they have scored good enough marks which enable them to attend the university. In a sense this study also reflects the standard of writing at both the tertiary and secondary school level since students have just come from finishing their secondary school study.

Instrument (Tool) of Data Collection

The method used in the research is the descriptive one, Students performance is tested through a written test.

The researcher uses an observation check list for data collection it consists of one question it asks students to write a paragraph about one of different topics.

Procedure

Students were given a test of four choices and they were required to choose one subject and to write one paragraph on the subjects they have chosen. Two of the subjects were narrative while the other two were descriptive.

It is noteworthy that these kinds of writing, narrative and descriptive, are familiar to the students because they have come across them during their study at the secondary level.

The researcher explained to the students the techniques of writing a good paragraph, after which students were given one hour to write the required paragraph. The data collected from the students are analyzed through the (SPSS) program “Statistical Package for Social Science” The total of the scores will be (100) marks divided over ten factors of writing a good paragraph.

Writing and grammar

Grammar is the rules of language. English grammar is the “English way of saying anything” (Show, Harry: 1973: 51).

Grammar is a vast area but due to the nature of research, I will give a brief of some items that the students assume most know, that is to say the punctuation part of speech, the sentence structure patterns and sentence function.

Punctuations

Punctuations originally developed because without them the writing language was unable to indicate or reproduce certain, definite and clear to qualities of speech.

Here is a synopsis of the most important punctuations necessary for carrying-out a good writing task.

End stop or terminal marks

They include the period, the exclamation marks and the question marks.

The period

It appears at the end of declaratives sentences e.g. Ali prefers summer to winter vacation. A period is also used after abbreviation e.g. Mr. Johnson, M.D. Oct.25.

The Exclamation mark

It indicates a command, an expression of strong emotion, or an emphatic phrase, E.g. Do it! What a horse attention!

The question mark

It indicates the end of a direct question e.g. Is he really a champion?

The comma

It indicates separation of sentence elements for purpose of clarify e.g. I went to the market, school, hospital and finally to the mosque.

The colon

It introduces words, phrase or clauses that explain, exemplify or summarize the adjacent independent clauses. E.g. He eats mostly grains wheat, Dura and com.

The apostrophe

It indicates the possessive case of nouns and the omission of letters and numbers in a contraction. E.g. In the 60's era, they always been playing in the moonlight and he was always putting on his father's turban for joking.

The parenthesis

They enclose material that is identical to a sentence and that is not grammatically part of the sentence e.g. Joyce's writings (gloomy of course) were very pessimistic.

The question marks

They enclose direct quotations, whether of speech or writing. It may also enclose words or phrases used in a special way, i.e. ironically e.g. Mr. Kumalo was "famous" for saying "Hello, I am Mr. Kumalo."

The Dash

It indicates a sudden or abrupt change in continuity, sometimes in the form of an interruption. A dash consists of hyphens e.g. Hassan was famous for--what was it?--oh, yes nothing.

The Ellipses

They indicate the omission of words or sentences in quoted material.

The Hyphen (-)

It joins the elements of some compound words and adjectives e.g. talking-machine.

Parts of speech

Parts of speech are the basic of words that English has most grammar books say that there are eight of speech: noun, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronoun, conjunctions, prepositions, and interjections.

The Noun

It is a naming word. It names a person, a place a thing an idea, a living creature, a quality or an action.

Examples: cowboy, theatre, box, tree, kindness, arrival.

The verb

It is a word that describe an action (doing something) or a state (being something).

Examples: walk, talk, think, went.

The adjective

It is a word that describe a noun, it tells you something about the noun.

Examples: big, yellow, thin, a mazing, quick.

The adverb

It is a word which usually describe a verb. It is tells you who something is done. It is may tell you who or where something happened.

Examples: slowly, well, yesterday, here, everywhere.

The pronouns

It is used instead of noun, to a void repetition the noun.

Examples: I, you, we, they, he, she, it.

The conjunction

It is joins words, phrases or sentences together.

Examples: but, so, and, because, or.....etc.

The prepositions

It is usually comes before a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase. It joins the noun to some other part of noun.

Examples: on, in, by, with, under, through, at.

The interjection

It is a word added to a sentence to convey emotion. It is followed

By an exclamation mark.

Examples: oh, it hurts!, hey, put that down!.

Sentence structure

Sentence structure are common only divided into four types:

Simple sentence

A sentence with one independent clause and no dependent clause.

Examples: my brother works.

Compound sentence

A sentence with multiple independent clauses but no dependent clause.

Examples: the lion fright tend the children, and they run off

Complex sentence

A sentence with one independent clauses and at least one dependent clauses.

Examples: after Ali finished his drills, he discovered that one pen was missing.

Complex compound sentence

A sentence with multiple independent clauses and at least one dependent clauses.

Example: when I entered house, Ali was watching TV and Ahmed was sleeping.

Paragraph writing

Show, Harry (1973:22) defines the paragraph as “a sequence of related sentences, a logical unit developing one thought or a part thought. It is a group or a bundle of sentences tied together for the convenience of the readers”.

Types of paragraph

Paragraphs differ according to their function, content and style.

Following are some of the types of the paragraph (<http://www.longleaf.net/ggrow>).

Narration paragraph

Narration paragraphs are most distinctively used in fiction. As such they will contain all necessary components of development, setting, goal, climax and resolution. Writing a narration paragraph requires, consequently, sequential order and chronology. There are many descriptive elements that may be include in body of the narration.

Exposition paragraph

It is created in order to clarify or explain a problem or phenomenon. Writing Exposition paragraph requires strict focus on evidence and objective language. It may contain elements of comparison and contrast or cause and effect writing.

Persuasion paragraph

This kind of paragraph usually requires dynamic language. They are aimed at persuading others into taking a particular action or adopting a certain point of view. They should be devoid of descriptive content and instead. Rely on the imperative mode.

Examples paragraph

The example paragraph is a kind of list paragraph, in which example sentence closely support the topic sentence. It also contains a terminator sentence which links the conclusion with the main idea of the paragraph.

Comparison paragraph

A Comparison paragraph compares similar aspects or qualities of two subjects. In a Comparison paragraph a topic introducer may used besides the topic sentence; where the topic sentence states more specifically the basis of the Comparison.

Contrast paragraph

Unlike the Comparison paragraph, the contrast paragraph compares dissimilar aspects of two subject. like a comparison paragraph, however two procedures may be followed in writing the contrast paragraph : the first method alternates example of the subject . A with example subject B; the contrast may be the same sentence, or they may be in consecutive sentences. The other method presents all the subjects A example together, then all subject B examples together.

Space and time paragraph

This kind of paragraph is developed through space and time sequences e.g. the subject may require an organization of idea according to place or space relationship without referring to date e.g. if you speak about agriculture you may speak about issues on agriculture in India, Africa etc.

Cause and effect paragraph

It depends on stating and giving of reasons to explain why or how facts take place.

Previous related studies

- Locally Yonus (1990) conducted an M.A. thesis on the awareness of the medical students in the university of Khartoum of paragraph writing. He has chosen 40 students of faculty of medicine, university of Khartoum as a sample to be tasted. He concluded that students have got problems in the areas of topic sentence, cohesive devices, unity and communication strategies.

Though of different samplings, the two studies flow in the same vein of activity. The method used in both researches is the descriptive method (a written test).

In this study, Yonus concentrates on some paragraph writing elements like unity and cohesive devices; while the present study is more comprehensive because it concentrates on the elements necessary for paragraph writing.

- Attia (1990) conducted an M.A thesis on the description and analysis of the major errors in writing English composition of first years students, the university Khartoum. She found that the spelling and syntactic errors are the most problematic areas facing the sample students.

Through Attia's sampling is different from the sampling of the present study, the two studies are still in common; that is to say they tackle the same skill.

- Mohammed, Sayed (006) of the K.S.A carried out an M.A. thesis on the "frequently reported in essay of the writing of the Saudi university students", he concluded that the frequently reported errors in essay writing are due the inter-lingual factors, fossilization, habit formation, performance and competence errors.

The study has got different population and sampling from the study, but still it has got something to do with the presents study ; that to say the both studies deal with writing skill though from different perspectives, Sayed's study speak about inter-lingual,fossilization, habit formation etc.... which are influential element in the communication strategies when writing in a foreign language. An example of this can be found in our present research where students are translating from their mother tongue into the foreign language as communicative strategies.

- In 1990, Braima M. carried out an M.A thesis on cohesive devices in students' writing. His subjects were first and second years students' performance in cohesive devices the study come out with the results that the students' performance on reference and conjunction is better than their performance on ellipses and substitutionsas cohesive devices. The study is limited to cohesive devices while the present study is more comprehensive and it cover ten elements of paragraph writing including cohesive devices. The sampling of two studies are different: one

taking the university of Khartoum students as sample; and the present takes it's sample from the university of Khartoum while the present study takes it's sample from the ECC students.

Grading and Evaluation

Table 4.1. Overall performance of the students

Range	No. of students	Percentage
80-100	00	00%
60-79	03	06%
50-59	14	31%
31-49	18	40%
0-30	10	32%
Total	45	100%

According to this table, the majority of the students (63%) failed their test on how to write good paragraph using the ten factors of a good paragraph. No student has scored between 80-100. Only 6% (3) of the students scored between 60-70 and only 31% (14 students) scored between 50-23.40% (18) of the sample students scored between 31-49.23%(10) scored between 0-30.

The Percentages of the Subjects' Performance

The following table represents the students performance on the paragraph writing according to the factors of paragraph writing. Each factor is given 10 marks and all the number of students 45, thus making a total of 450 marks for each factor for all students. The total mark for all the paragraph factor for all the students is therefore 4500 marks.

Table 4.2: Percentage of the Students' Performance

Element	Full mark	Students' mark	Performance
1- Indentation	450	440	98%
2- topic sentence	450	220	49%
3- cohesive devices	450	87	19%
4- unity	450	117	26%
5- length	450	282	63%
6- conclusion	450	170	38%
7- spelling	450	62	14%
8- punctuation	450	96	21%
9- capitalization	450	101	22%
10- grammar	450	20	4%
Total	4500	1595	35%

Discussion of the results

According to table 4.2. the overall performance of the students is weak the factors of grammar, spelling and cohesive devices are the weakest points in the students' performance , with scores of 4%,14% and 19% consecutively.

Though the researcher has attached all the students' performances (in the appendix) which all can serve as good examples of the students' weakness, the researcher will present samples from some of students' performance on all the ten elements of paragraph writing and as follows:

Indentation

Indentation receives the best mark of the students. An only one student failed his performance on the indentation. Indentation is the simplest mechanical element in paragraph writing, it is need only memorization and it is an element that start at the basic school...

Topic Sentence

It is a technical element. Student scored 220 marks out of 450(49%) on the topic sentence element. Here are two extracts from some of the students' performance on the topic sentence element.

Example No.3 (see the appendix).

(So my hoppy I'm lgoon for beuxfood and benes an leal.....)

Example (see the appendix).

(I'm goon for dunciny nay I lave the panlex)

Cohesive Devices

Students have scored 87 marks out of 450 marks on this element (19%)

It is the third weakest point in the students' performance after the grammar and spelling elements. Students did badly on this element because it is a technical element.

Most students limit themselves to using the coordinating conjunctions of (and, but). Here are examples from No.10 and 30 from the appendix

Example No.10 (see the appendix).

(the life in the village it's very nice life and it's easy life and very semple life firet sayt of the marrege and so buteful).

Unity

Students scored 117 marks out of the total 450 marks (26%). This shows that students are very weak in the unity element. Here are extracts from some of the students' performance on the element of unity

Example from No. 20. (see appendix)

(My name is B.A. I grandate frome S.A. University. And Iam studing in ECC to improw myself.....)

Length

Students did well this element because it is a mechanical one. Students received 282 marks out of 450 (63%). Here are extracts from some of the students' performance. The shortest paragraph written by the students in composed 4 lines and the longest paragraph is composed of 30 lines.

CONCLUSION

Students received 170 marks out of 450 marks (38%) on the element conclusion. Conclusion is a technical element that is why the students did badly in it. Here are some of the students' performance on element of conclusion

Example (see appendix)

(my hoppy is so fantastic as I've been belivemg since the day I born and it'll be like that for the rest of my life.....)

Spelling

Spelling is the second weakest point in the students' performance. Students received 62 marks out of 450 marks on the spelling element (14%).

Spelling is an mechanical skill depend on memorization and accumulation of knowledge, students did badly on it.

Here is extract from some of students' performance on the element of spelling.

Example (see the appendix).

(I am like to speak about hestray

It is great, It importen, it is better by the hestrey we have been knowing alt of think about life)

Capitalization

Students scored 101 marks (22%) on the element of capitalization. Here is example from the students' performance on the capitalization element.

Example (see appendix)

(i like English language speaking communication with people.
speacily like commuinction with ladies.
i lik liseting most and reading...)

Grammar

Grammar is the weakest point in the students' performance they scored only 20 marks out of 450 marks (4%) in grammar. The big majority failed their performance on this crucial aspect because grammar is the rules of the language. Here are example of the students' writing to illustrate their weakness in grammar.

Example (see appendix)

(its me from child I hope to a chives any thing I needed.....
Its me I grow up in this velge with my family my pearnce
Its I don't gave up for any thing.....)

The Result in Terms of the Hypotheses

According to the finding of the research, the researcher may conclude that all the hypotheses of the study could be answered "NO" the sample students are not aware of the elements of writing a paragraph and they do not know how to use these element in building a paragraph.

Summary

This chapter assesses the performance of the ECC' students in paragraph writing where it is noticed that the majority (63%) of the sample students have failed their test on paragraph writing due to their unawareness of how to use both the technical and mechanical elements of paragraph writing.

The researcher has introduced sample of the students' performance in paragraph writing as evidence of the students' weak performance in paragraph writing. The researcher has also introduced an example of the best paragraph written by the students and it is only one paragraph.

Recommendations

- More attention should be given to the writing skill at both the secondary school the tertiary levels.
- Teachers of English should be given more training, the researcher as an old teacher has observed that graduate teachers of English are still weak and they need more training.
- We must make use of the revolution of technology in updating the teaching aids at the education institutions.

Suggestions for further studies

- The role of electronic technology in teaching and learning English.
- The role of English clubs and libraries in upgrading the students' standard of English.

This study is limited to the ECC students on paragraph writing in specific and the writing skill in general.

Though limited in scope, the researcher still hopes that this study may be of value to learners of EFL, teachers and syllabus designers of EFL and researchers for giving the necessary concern to the writing skill.

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Appendix (1)

Students' Test
English Cultural Center
Test on Paragraph writing
No.

Write one paragraph on one of the following topics:

- Q1. Write about yourself**
- Q2. Write about things you like most**
- Q3. Write about life in the village**
- Q4. Write about your hobby**