

Exploring the Landscape of EFL Writing Research in Iraq: A Comprehensive Analysis of Scope, Limitations, and Strengths

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Abstract

Objectives: The purpose of this paper is to systematically review the existing EFL writing studies in Iraq, focusing on their methodologies, findings, and contributions, while analysing the implications for teaching practice.

Methods: This study analyses 46 studies published from 2010 onwards, categorizing them into five primary domains: teaching strategies and interventions, writing challenges faced by learners, error analysis, factors influencing writing performance, and written corrective feedback. A rigorous inclusion criterion was applied to ensure diverse methodological approaches.

Findings: The analysis reveals that the predominant focus is on teaching strategies, with 18 studies contributing to this area, followed by challenges encountered by learners (9 studies) and error analysis (8 studies). Limitations include small sample sizes, reliance on self-reported data, and methodological constraints.

Research implications: The findings suggest that there is a need for future research to address these limitations and expand upon the areas of writing challenges and corrective feedback, which remain underexplored.

Keywords: EFL writing; Iraq; pedagogical strategies; error analysis; research domains; systematic review.

1 Introduction

The growing prominence of second language (L2) writing has emerged due to the global spread of English as the primary language for academic and professional discourse (Matsuda et al., 2009). Over the past two to three decades, second and foreign language (FL) writing has significantly gained importance. Writing is now considered a crucial skill in our text- and data-driven world (Hyland, 2003).

Historically, research on L2 writing has predominantly focused on applied linguistics, as most L2 learners are still developing their syntactic and lexical skills. Recently, applied linguistics has incorporated insights from cognitive psychology to examine discourse organisation and text construction processes. Krashen (1984) lamented that "studies of second language writing are sadly lacking", (p. 41). Consequently, the need for research in L2 writing has become more pressing. Over the past thirty years, the demand for strong writing skills has grown significantly, essential for preparing L2 writers to succeed in the globalised economy (Matsuda et al., 2009).

Learning FL like English is an on-going endeavour that demands consistent effort and sustained interest from EFL learners to acquire and utilise the language proficiently (Myles, 2002). Developing proficient writing skills in EFL is crucial for academic and professional success in today's globalised world (Raimes, 1983; Hyland, 2004). In Iraq, where English is taught as FL, enhancing EFL writing teaching has become a priority for teachers and policymakers (Al-Hamash & Younis, 1985). However, research on EFL writing in Iraq has been relatively limited and fragmented (Al-Samarrai et al. 2018).

In the last decade, there has been an increase in concern in enhancing the skill of teaching and supporting the EFL writing of Iraqi learners. Additionally, subsequent research has discussed numerous approaches regarding teaching and learning problems in Iraqi EFL learners. This has resulted in policies like the development of the 'English for Iraq' text book series and teacher education programs (Al-Hamash & Younis 2015). Scholars have also started researching on different aspects of EFL writing in Iraq, including the challenges faced by learners (Al-Samarrai & Hasan, 2018), teaching efficiency of Learning strategies (Al-Khasawneh, 2010) and the contribution of factors such as motivation and self-efficacy (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011). However, as pointed out by Hyland (2016), various

studies suggest that understanding EFL learners' writing requirements and context-specific challenges is crucial for constructing of the adequate educational frameworks.

However, there are still many shortcomings in the present research scenario. A lot of research is conducted on one or another restriction. For example, scholars study just a few learners or introduce limited educational settings, thus limiting the possibility to extend results to the general context of the Iraqi EFL learner population. Moreover, there is a lack of research that can identify qualitatively the ways in which different approaches to teaching affect students' writing skills and how these results evolve over time. According to Halliday (2006) it is imperative to analysis the language of a given context for academic writing when translating into teaching interventions.

This study seeks to fill these gaps by reviewing related literature and presenting a comprehensive review of the EFL writing research in Iraq, with regard to the research strengths and limitations of equal importance. This study aims at providing useful insights that can help teachers, researchers, as well as policymakers come up with better teaching strategies and environment that can improve the writing abilities of learners with in the Iraqi EFL class. Through a rigorous and systematic approach, the current study will further the understanding of and enhance EFL writing education and research in Iraq. This will provide insights into identifying, understanding, and positively addressing the writing deficiencies of Iraqi EFL learners. To achieve these aims, the study sets out to address the following questions:

- What are the main domains of existing research on EFL writing in Iraq, in terms of the methodologies employed, populations studied, and specific aspects of writing investigated?
- What are the strengths, limitations, and characteristics of the existing research on EFL writing in Iraq, in terms of empirical findings, methodological rigor, theoretical contributions, and contextual considerations?

2 Writing and L2 Acquisition: A Literature Review

Writing in L2 involves complex cognitive processes, including planning, drafting, revising, and editing. These processes require the integration of linguistic knowledge, cognitive

skills, and metacognitive strategies (Kormos & Smith, 2023; Archibald & Jeffery, 2000). According to Hyland (2004), writing is a complex cognitive and linguistic process that plays a crucial role in L2 acquisition, involving negotiating disciplinary conventions and discourses. Ferris (2010) Highlights that writing is a form of language production, and the ability to write effectively in L2 is part of communicative competence for many learners. This, he opines, makes it possible to find connections between L2 writing studies and L2 acquisition. According to Silva and Brice (2004), Matsuda 2001a provides historical overview of the first findings of reading and writing in L2, proposing links between L2 writing and L2 acquisition research.

Additionally, Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis that holds the impression that learners acquire a language when they are subjected to comprehensible input which is slightly beyond his/her reading level. In summary, this theory advocates for presenting learners with reading materials and writing tasks that are challenging yet manageable. However, Halliday's (2006) theory of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) appears to be the best theory of choice when studying the link between language, context and meaning making in academic writing. To SFL, language is used to build and represent the world, while writing is a meaning creation process whereby the writer selects meanings from the semiotic resources in order to meet certain purpose.

Raimes (1983) has also underlined the necessity to take into consideration specific L2 writing problems which can be connected with the first language, the cultural and academic background of the writer. She argues for procedural approach whereby the learner is taken through the process of planning, composing, revising and editing. Hyland (2016) too stresses the imperative for understanding the variety of EFL learners' writing demands and contexts, adding to the fact that there is no single way of planning such teaching. He also calls for an appropriate instructional approach recognizing socio cultural and disciplinary differences in writing practices in academic settings.

In the context of teaching and learning EFL writing in Iraq, these theoretical standpoints emphasise the need for consideration of the particularities of Iraq learners' situations. Any future work on teaching and research in this area should take into account more than linguistic and cognitive factors but also sociocultural and

disciplinary influences on academic writing practices. According to these theoretical frameworks, this study aims to advance a systematic review of the previous research works about EFL writing in Iraq, recognizing the gaps and the potentials of the current literature. It will guide researchers' directions in more studies and in contributing useful teaching and learning strategies, policies and methods for Iraqi EFL learners.

3 Methodology

Based on the current literature on EFL writing in Iraq, this study adopts a systematic review and research synthesis method of research design. Systematic review is, therefore, a disciplined and explicit method of capturing, appraising and assembling all the evidence regarding a particular research inquiry (Gough et al., 2017). Therefore, after deriving the guidelines from Boland et al., (2017) on conducting systematic reviews, the following steps are followed; Firstly, it identifies the research questions for the systematic review part of the study. Subsequently, the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the review are specified in a protocol. Only studies available online database and published after 2010 are presented in this paper. Questionnaires, interviews, observations, pre-tests and post-test, and research focused on the efficacy of certain approaches are all included. Third, the major databases are searched through systematic and comprehensive manner in order to identify relevant studies. The retrieved studies are then screened based on inclusion and exclusion criteria set down in the present protocol. As the present literature review aimed at identifying the scope of the studies, the collected data are summarised and analysed narratively. This makes it easier to determine the primary theme, or areas of focus, of the existing research, which are presented in tables for each domain. Last, the results of the systematic review and research synthesis are presented by studying the included studies.

4 Selection Criteria and Data Extraction

To ensure a comprehensive and relevant review of the existing literature on EFL writing in Iraq, a systematic search for relevant studies is conducted across multiple databases, including ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Research Gate, and Iraqi Academic Scientific Journals. A predefined search strategy is employed, combining keywords and subject headings related to 'EFL

writing', 'EFL writing research in Iraq' and other relevant terms. The selected studies undergo screening based on abstracts, findings, and conclusions to pinpoint their strengths and limitations.

Concerning inclusion criteria, the study includes any research focusing on EFL writing in Iraq irrespective of their research design, methodology, and targeted participants. However, studies published before 2010 and not available online, as well as studies involving writing along with other language skills, are excluded. For the studies meeting the inclusion criteria, relevant data is extracted based on the year of publication, study design and methodology, participant characteristics (sample size, educational level, demographic information), intervention details (if applicable), outcome measures related to EFL writing, key findings and conclusions, and strengths and limitations of the study.

5 Data Analysis and Synthesis

The data analysis primarily employed a narrative synthesis approach as outlined by Popay et al. (2006). Initially, the main domains across the selected studies were identified. Subsequently, the coded data underwent deductive analysis (Dudovskiy, 2024) to discern codes spanning the included studies. After the data collection phase, a total of 46 studies were selected for review. The analysis investigated the relationships between study characteristics. The synthesis's robustness and reliability were assessed by considering the methodological quality of the included studies, the

consistency of findings across studies, and the potential for publication bias (Dudovskiy, 2024). In the following subsections, the narrative synthesis findings will be presented systematically and coherently, utilising tables and textual descriptions to summarise the main domains of existing research. The codes within each domain will be discussed accordingly.

6 Research Domains

The final corpus included 46 studies, which were categorised based on their objectives and focus areas. These studies were grouped into five primary domains: teaching strategies (approaches) and interventions, writing challenges and difficulties faced by Iraqi EFL learners, error analysis and common writing errors, factors influencing writing performance (e.g., motivation, self-efficacy), and written corrective feedback.

6.1 Domain One: Teaching Strategies (Approaches) and Interventions

A total of 18 studies have explored teaching strategies and interventions for enhancing EFL writing in Iraq, forming the largest portion of the corpus, with the oldest dating back to 2015. These studies have examined various teaching strategies, methods, and strategies to enhance the writing ability of Iraqi EFL learners. The strategies and the interventions followed are shown by the following table as well as their effectiveness in handling the challenges faced by Iraqi EFL students in developing their writing skills.

Table 1: Teaching strategies and intervention

Author(s)	Year	Participants	Sample size	Intervention	Research design	Effectiveness	Duration	Data collection method
Muhamad, N.M.	2015	University students	115	Utilizing concept mapping	Experimental	Positive	Ten weeks	Pre-test/post-test
Abbas, S. H.	2016	University students	88	Reflection-supported process-based approach	Experimental	Positive	15 weeks	Pre-test/post-test
Al-Noori, B. S. & Rashid, B. N.	2017	School students	100	Slip Writing Strategy	Experimental	Positive	Unmentioned	Pre-test/ post-test
Bala, E.	2017	University students	18	Story map graphic organizers	No-experimental	Positive	Unmentioned	Writing assignments
Abbas, S. H.	2018	University students	78	Pair writing	Experimental	Positive	15 weeks	Pre-test/post-test

				technique				
and Al-bakri, S. A.								
Qader, R. O. and Arslan, F. Y.	2019	University students	66	Flipped classroom instruction	Quasi-experimental	Positive	Unmentioned	Pre-test/post-test, questionnaire, interviews
Mohammed, I. J. & Hamied, D. T.	2019	University students	103	Jigsaw strategy	Experimental	Positive	12 weeks	post-test
Ali, D. B., & Dehham, S. H., & Hasan, A. N.	2019	School students	64	Index Cards Games Technique	Experimental	Positive	Two months	Pre-test/ post test
Dehham, S. H.	2020	School students	65	Focus strategy	Experimental	Positive	Two months	Pre-test/post-test
Khidhir, E. A. & Abbas, N. J.	2020	school teachers	153	Repeated writing, timed writing, story circle, diary writing, and peer editing strategies	Descriptive survey	Positive	Unmentioned	Questionnaire
Mohammed, M. A. & Sadoon, B.	2020	Postgraduate students	60	Brainstorming strategy	Experimental and descriptive	Negative	Unmentioned	Pre-test, the instruction, the post-test and a questionnaire
Saeed, S. A. & Mohammed, A. A.	2020	University students	56	Online discussion boards	Action research	Positive	12 weeks	Tests (exam formats)
Mekki, T. A.	2021	University students	24	Reflective teaching strategies	Experimental	Positive	10 sessions	Pre-tests/ post-tests and observations
Mohammed, I.	2021	University students	103	PLEASE strategy	Experimental	Positive	12 weeks	Pre-test/ post test
Al-Khazaali, H. M. K.	2022	University students	80	Vocabulary-based approach	Experimental	Positive	8 weeks	Pre-test/post test
Al-Furaiji, W. L. F.	2022	University students	30	Writing Process Approach	Experimental	Positive	Unmentioned	Pre-test/post test
Sakran, R. E. & Dakhil, T. K.	2023	secondary school and tertiary level learners	60	Interactive games	Experimental	Positive	Unmentioned	Pre- post-intervention surveys, writing samples, and interviews
Abbas, J. A. & Amirian, Z. & Youhan aee, M.	2024	University students	60	Web-based pre-task activities	Experimental	Positive	12 weeks	Pre-test/post test

6.2 Domain Two: Writing Challenges and Difficulties Faced by Iraqi EFL Learners

The second largest domain in the corpus is focuses on writing challenges and difficulties Iraqi EFL learners encounter. In this domain, nine studies

were included, of which the most recent one was conducted in 2014. The following is a brief survey

of their major characteristics in relation to the demographic information and methodology.

Table 2: Writing challenges and difficulties

Author(s)	Year	Participants	Sample size	Data collection method
Abdul-Kareem, N. T.	2014	School students	259	Questionnaire
Keong, Y. C. & Mussa, I. H.	2015	Postgraduate students	30	Questionnaire, interview
Yahya, D. H.	2016	University students	100	Questionnaire
Nasser, S. M.	2018	University students	30	Pre-test, post test
Ahmed, P. H.	2019	University students	32	Students' questionnaire, and a collection analysis of essays.
Shnein, A. A.	2020	Graduate applicants	49	Questionnaire, interview and writing essays
Mohammad, A. R. & Al-Mofti, K. W. & Hussein, J.Q.	2020	University students	80	Questionnaire
Al-Majdawi, A. M. & Shamkhi, M.C.	2022	School students	60	Self- research test
Hammed, G.R. & Salman, A. R. & Hasan, A. N.	2022	School students	150 students and 150 teachers	Questionnaire

6.3 Domain Three: Error Analysis and Common Writing Errors

The third largest domain of the corpus includes 8 studies, the oldest of which was published in 2015. In this domain, error analysis and the most

frequent writing errors of Iraqi EFL learners are discussed. The following is a detailed analysis of characteristics that define them.

Table 3: Error analysis and common writing errors

Author(s)	Year	Participants	Sample size	Data collection method
Mohammed, M. S. & Abdulhussein, H. F.	2015	Postgraduate students	15	Content analysis
Jasim, L. F.	2016	University students	94	Content analysis
Al-Shujairi, Y. B. & Tan, H.	2017	School students	112	Content analysis and interview
Hussein, Z. L. & Hassan, A. Y.	2019	University students	40	Essay analysis
Abdulhafud, B. A.	2020	Postgraduate students	60	Content analysis and questionnaire
Al-shammery, D. F. & Huesiani, A. & Shahriari, H.	2020	Iraqi EFL learners aged (25-33)	10	descriptive essay, a T-unit analysis, and a study analysis framework
Al-Majdawi, A. M. & Shamkhi, M. C.	2022	School students	60	Questionnaire
Ali, I. M.	2024	Postgraduate students	32	Content analysis

6.4 Domain Four: Factors Influencing Writing Performance (e.g., motivation, self-efficacy)

Overall, eight studies were found in the fourth domain, concerning factors that affect writing achievement, like motivational belief and writing

self-efficacy with the earliest study conducted in 2016. A detailed account of the all studies in this domain is presented below.

Table 4: Factors influencing writing performance

Author(s)	Year	Participants	Sample size	Data collection method
Abbas, S. H.	2016	University students	160	EFL Writing Apprehension Scale, Academic Locus of Control Scale, writing performance test.
Sabti, A. A. & Rashid, S. M.	2019	University students	100	Questionnaires, descriptive writing task.
Abid, A. K.	2019	School students	25	Composition prompt test
Hasan, N. A. & Dehham, S. H. & Hasoon, N. H.	2021	School students	240	Questionnaire
Nasser, A. J. & Mohammed, B. S.	2021	School students	200	Questionnaire
Sharrad, A. & Faravani, A.	2021	University students	200	Test, questionnaire, written task
Hameed, Y. A. & Al-Bakri, S. A.	2022	School students	377	Oxford's (1990) classification of language leaning strategies types, and emotive writing test
Miri, B. A. & Kareem, M. K. & Al-Ghazawi, M. N.	2024	University students	120	Questionnaire and semi-structured interviews

6.5 Domain Five: Written Corrective Feedback

In this domain, only three studies were found examining written corrective feedback (WCF), the oldest study is dated back to 2018. This shows a recent trend in the area of research interest to this

phase of language teaching and learning in Iraq. The following table offers a discussion of the main characteristics of these studies.

Table 5: Written corrective feedback

Author(s)	Year	Participants	Sample size	Data collection method
Cinkara, E. & Galaly, F. J.	2018	School teachers and students	100 teachers and 200 students	Questionnaire
Mahmood, R. Q.	2021	University students	60	Questionnaire
Al Khafaji, H. F.	2023	University students	80	Questionnaire

7 Scope of EFL Writing Research in Iraq

7.1 Teaching Strategies, Interventions and Technological Integration in EFL Writing

This domain of the study seeks to understand effective pedagogical practices for Iraqi EFL students. Several studies have been done to determine the efficiency of different teaching methods and approaches and learning intervention in EFL writing performance. A brief description of these writing strategies and interventions are described below.

Innovative Teaching Techniques: Muhammad (2015) employed concept mapping to expand university students' writing skills proving that visuals are valuable for creating and managing immature ideas. In the Bala's study conducted in 2017 on students' writing ability, the researcher used story map graphic organisers to assist students in organising writing content and also

established that graphic organisers lead to improved writing coherence and creativity.

Collaborative Learning Approaches: Specifically, Abbas and Al-bakri (2018) documented the effects of pair writing on university students pointing out that the performance of pair writing boosts writing skills. On the other hand, Mohammed and Hamied (2019) applied the jigsaw strategy for enhancing the cooperative learning teaching strategy for an improvement in the writing assignment where task division of groups will enhance the achievement of learning objectives.

Reflective and Process-Based Approaches: Abbas (2016) used the process-based approach supported by reflection, including writing and reflection to enhance the writing results. Reflective teaching

approaches were used by Mekki (2021) to enhance the students' writing skills, Therefore, self-assessment and reflection are key aspects in the teaching of writing.

Technology-Enhanced Learning: Qader & Arslan (2019) explored the flipped classroom model where students learn the content which is normally taught in the class online and in return, they practice more writing activities in the class. Saaed and Mohammed (2020) also incorporated using online discussion boards for writing practice and peer feedback which proved the effectiveness of digital platforms in enhancing writing skills.

Game-Based and Interactive Learning: Sakran and Dakhil (2023) discussed how facilitation of the interactive games can decrease the writing anxiety and enhance the perception of writing which reveal that learning through games is motivating. Index cards games which were used by Ali, Dehham, and Hasan (2019) apparently facilitated writing practice for school students by adding fun and interest.

Specific Writing Strategies: Research has also focused on the impact of specific writing strategies and language learning strategies on EFL writing performance. Al-Noori and Rashid (2017) used the slip writing strategy to help students organise their thoughts and improve their writing composition. Dehham (2020) implemented a focus strategy to enhance students' attention to detail and writing accuracy. Hameed and Al-Bakri (2022) examined the relationship between language learning strategies and writing performance among school students, utilising Oxford's (1990) classification of language learning strategies and an emotive writing test. This line of research investigates how different strategies can enhance EFL writing skills.

Process-Oriented Approaches: Al-Furaiji (2022) focused on the writing process approach, emphasising the stages of writing (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing) to improve writing quality. Mohammed (2021) used the PLEASE strategy (Pick, List, Evaluate, Activate, Supply, End) to guide students through a structured writing process.

Pre-Task and Preparatory Activities: Abbas, Amirian, and Youhanaee (2024) explored the use of web-based pre-task activities to prepare students for writing tasks, highlighting the role of preparatory activities in enhancing writing performance.

Self-Efficacy and Motivation: Khidhir and Abbas (2020) investigated various strategies (Repeated Writing, Timed Writing, Story Circle, Diary

Writing, and Peer Editing) to improve writing fluency and self-efficacy, showing how different approaches can boost students' confidence and writing abilities.

Technological Integration in EFL Writing: The integration of technology in EFL writing teaching has also been a focus of research. Al Khafaji (2023) used questionnaires to explore university students' perspectives on the use of technology in EFL writing. This study highlights the potential benefits and challenges of incorporating digital tools and platforms in writing teaching.

7.2 Focus on Learner Attitudes, Perceptions, and Challenges

Studies have also investigated the attitudes, perceptions, and challenges faced by Iraqi EFL learners at various educational levels (school, university, postgraduate) concerning writing skills. Research by Keong and Mussa (2015), Yahya (2016), Ahmed (2019), and Al-Majdawi and Shamkhi (2022) has highlighted that Iraqi EFL learners encounter both language and organisational issues. In the language aspect, the difficulties include the problems with a limited number of words, frequent slips in grammar, problems with formulation of the text using an adequate vocabulary, and incorrect use of tenses, articles, and prepositions. At the organisational level of analysing student's performance there are issues to do with referencing and structuring of the tasks, lack of expression of ideas and qualitative impairment of words order. Yahya (2016) and Ahmed (2019) found that limited English writing practice and L1 interference are primary challenges for L2 writing students. Moreover, Mohammad et al. (2020) categorized other factors that affected the challenges encountered by the Iraqi EFL learners, such as the absence of assessment rubrics and marking schemes, lack of teacher support, inadequate consulting material, no appropriate teaching methods, unsuitable writing topics, and time constraints.

7.3 Investigating Writing Performance and Proficiency

Many studies have investigated the performance and the writing skills of Iraqi EFL learners through pre and post tests and self-research tests (Abbas, 2016; Abid, 2019; Hasan et al., 2021). These studies are rich resources of information on the performance of learners and help to identify areas for improvement. In his study, Abid (2019) established that the level of proficiency in English

or Arabic had no correlation between them. Therefore, the study concludes that incorporation of writing teaching of both languages in textbooks is irrelevant to enhancing learners' writing abilities in EFL. Hasan et al., (2021) explored teachers' perceptions of using creative writing in order to develop the writing ability of Iraqi EFL preparatory school students. Their research showed that creative writing significantly impacted the growth of students' writing skills.

7.4 Exploring Factors Influencing Writing Development

Other aspects have been examined to explain EFL writing skills including motivation for writing, self- efficiency, and writing anxiety using questionnaires and interviews to the participants. Sabti and Rashid (2019) intended to examine the relationship between writing anxiety, writing achievement motivation and writing self-efficacy in relation to performance. Their conclusion showed that as the level of writing anxiety increased, so did the poor writing performance. On the other hand, writing self-efficacy and writing achievement motivation were positively related to writing performance. Nasser and Mohammed (2021) conducted a study on the correlation between Iraqi EFL students' self-esteem and writing performance. They found a high positive correlation between self- esteem and writing with no gender differential. Conversely, Sharrad and Faravani, (2021) investigated the relationship between individual differences such as attitude towards writing and personality, and writing proficiency of university language learners. As noted by their findings, the willingness expressed by students to write moderate correlates with this writing skills. Furthermore, Miri et al. (2024) investigated the awareness among Iraqi EFL learners regarding the effects of reading literature on increasing their creative writing abilities. In their experiments, they proved that reading such texts as literature increases the level of creative writing. These studies suggest that proper focus should be taken to the emotion and psychology since they affect writing results.

7.5 Error Analysis and Writing Challenges

There are a vast number of researches that examined the grammatical and structural errors among Iraqi EFL learners. For instance, Al-Shujairi and Tan (2017) employed content analysis and interview in examining some of the most prevalent grammatical errors found in writing samples of

school students and gave details of the most recurrent errors involving verb tense, articles, and prepositions. In the same way, Hussein and Hassan (2019) used essay responses to establish the exact nature of writing difficulties encountered by university learners. Mohammed and Abdulhussein (2015) and Al-Shammery et al. (2020) also pointed out that there are such errors made by the Iraqi students as tenses, prepositions, articles, active and passive voice, verbs, and morphological structures. In the same way, Abdulhafud, (2020) noted that students' errors were found on various linguistic levels, including syntax, lexis and semantics.

7.6 Preferences Towards Written Corrective Feedback

In fact, numerous research investigations have been conducted to determine EFL teachers and students' attitude toward WCF. For instance, Cinkara and Galaly (2018) obtained data from a total of 100 school teachers and 200 students by administering questionnaires to both with a view of making some findings on teachers' and students' attitude to written feedback in writing classes. Their studies showed that the written feedback given to students helps them to improve their performance in writing. Further, the study provided a hint that students have the motivation to improve and are capable of doing it if English teachers give them positive as well as constructive written remarks. In the same regard, Mahmood (2021) undertook a cross-sectional survey among the university students with the aim of determining their perception towards WCF. Overall, it was concluded that majority of the EFL students were not well informed of WCF and its efficiency as a learning aid. Despite this lack of awareness, students still expected their writing teachers to offer WCF on their writing tasks. Al Khafaji (2023) found that participants' preferences varied regarding the amount of error correction. Many preferred their teachers to correct all errors except minor ones, while others wanted all errors to be addressed. Additionally, most participants favoured receiving WCF on repeated errors.

8 Limitations of EFL Writing Research in Iraq

8.1 Contextual and Demographic Limitations

Existing studies on EFL writing in Iraq often focus on specific educational levels, such as secondary school, university, and postgraduate studies, or particular regions. This narrow scope may not

adequately reflect the diverse experiences and challenges faced by EFL learners across different contexts. Notably, there has been no research on primary school pupils or university students specialising in non-English disciplines. Additionally, all studies have been concentrated in urban or semi-urban areas, neglecting remote and rural regions. Larsen-Freeman and Long (2014) argue that a combination of context-specific and cross-contextual research can provide valuable insights into the universality or variability of linguistic phenomena. Similarly, there is a call by Fulcher (2015) to avoid overgeneralisation and to acknowledge the limits of contextual evidence. Research by Cinkara and Galaly's (2018) included school teachers and students, while Mahmood (2021) and Al Khafaji (2023) focused on university students only. In the light of the above findings, there is a need at conducting research on EFL writing in Iraq across a wider population of learners and educational settings to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of EFL writing in Iraq.

8.2 Methodological Limitations

The findings of the study show that there are doubts on the methodological soundness and the quality of some of the EFL writing research in Iraq. While some research investigated pre- and post-tests, none of the scholars employed immediate or delayed post-tests to measure the efficacy of the applied instructional practices. Besides, except for Mekki (2021) who included a method of classroom observation, none of the 46 studies reviewed employed other forms of data collection technique like focus group or observations. In order to overcome some of these limitations, researchers have suggested the use of multiple methods and triangulation. As Dörnyei (2007) supports the idea, integrated application of various methods, for example classroom observation, think-aloud protocols, and case studies can yield a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of language learning and usage.

8.3 Theoretical and Conceptual Limitations

Yahya (2016), Abdul-Kareem (2014), Bala (2017), Abbas & Amirian (2024), Hussein & Hassan (2019), and Al-Shammery et al (2020) are some of the studies we surveyed earlier that have no clear reference to an applicable theoretical framework. This gap may reduce the extent of analysis and interpretation of their findings that they develop. As Widdowson (2000) pointed out there are risks when the theories are limiting and the research

efforts could more or less focus only on the narrow area of concern of a language phenomenon. One of the conceptual limitations (Montgomery, 2023) is that the results cannot necessarily be generalized to a larger population. That is why if the focus is made only on one or several theoretical concepts, the studies themselves can be relevant only for the analysed context or population. Hence, adopting appropriate theories and models could enhance the theoretical support of EFL writing research in Iraq.

8.4 Sample Size and Generalizability Concerns

A number of investigations have reported issues that are associated with the sample size, which limits their external validity. For example, Al-Shammery et al. (2020) included only 10 participants, while Mohammed and Abdulhussein (2015) had 15 participants. Similarly, Bala (2017) involved 18 participants, and Abid (2019) studied 25 school students. As highlighted by Creswell and Poth (2018), it is important that when reporting results, one possible limitations may stem from the use of small samples. Future studies should incorporate wider community and diverse large sample sizes in order to increase the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

8.5 Overreliance on Self-Reported Data

Most previous research has primarily used questionnaires to gather results and these often include some form of response bias thereby giving an inaccurate account of writing ability. For instance, Khidhir and Abbas (2020), Nasser & Mohammed (2021), Hamed et al. (2022), Cinkara and Galaly (2018), Mahmood (2021), and Al Khafaji (2023) at some point utilised questionnaires. As Dörnyei pointed out, there are some criticisms regarding the oversimplified and limits methods such as conventional questionnaires and interviews in the field since it tends to suffer from a range of different biases and do not mirror the different mechanisms and social context of language learning adequately. Limitations of using only self-report methods are that participants may not be truthful about their thoughts, feelings, or behaviours. For this reason, there is a call for triangulated as well as mixed research methodologies, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of EFL writing in Iraq.

9 Strengths of EFL Writing Research in Iraq

9.1 Empirical Findings and Insights

Some studies offered empirical evidence and insights that would put into light the outcomes of certain teaching strategies and interventions (Dehm, 2020; Al-Furaiji, 2022; Muhammad, 2015; Abbas, 2016; Al-Noori and Rashid, 2017; Abbas & Al-bakri, 2018; Sakran & Dakhil, 2023). These findings also add to the existing body of research in the field and may be useful in understanding and enhancing pedagogical practices for teaching EFL in Iraq.

9.2 Methodological Diversity

It is clear that different types of studies used different types of data collection methods such as experimental designs (Mohammed & Sadoon, 2020), action research (Saaed & Mohammed, 2020), and descriptive surveys (Khidhir & Abbas, 2020) which helped to provide multiple approaches to EFL writing process. For example, studies by Qader and Arslan (2019), Mohammed and Sadoon (2020), and Sakran and Dakhil (2023) applied pre-tests, post-tests, questionnaires and interviews. Shnein (2020) administered questionnaires along with interviews and writing essays, while Al-shammery et al. (2020) used descriptive essays, T-unit analysis, and study analysis framework. This methodological diversity offers a better picture on the problems and factors that are associated with the EFL writing in Iraq. Accordingly, Phakiti (2014) stresses out the need for employing both a quantitative and a qualitative data collection and analysis perspective that allows adopting both innovative procedures such as eye-tracking, neuroimaging, and virtual reality simulated approaches.

9.3 Practical Implications and Recommendations

Several studies provided useful implications and recommendations for implementing effective teaching strategies in Iraqi EFL classrooms. Studies by Muhammad (2015), Abbas (2016), Abbas and Al-Bakri (2018), Kader and Arslan (2019), Khidhir and Abbas (2020), Al-Khazali (2022), and Mohammed (2021) show the effectiveness of different teaching strategies for improving learners' performance. These recommendations can serve as valuable guidelines for teachers and policymakers aiming to improve EFL writing teaching in Iraq. Chen and Cruickshank (2009) emphasize that practical effects and recommendations are especially important in

educational research, where the aim is often to enhance teaching and learning outcomes. Providing actionable insights, researchers directly influence educational practices and policies.

9.4 Diverse Perspectives and Stakeholder Involvement

The available studies incorporated viewpoint of several stakeholders, including school students (Sakran & Dakhil, 2023), teachers (Sinkara & Galali, 2018), graduate applicants (Schnein, 2020), and postgraduate students (Keong & Mussa, 2015). These studies provide an in-depth understanding of challenges and needs. The involvement of diverse stakeholders can lead to inclusive and effective strategies to enhance EFL writing teaching. Chen and Cruickshank (2009) highlight that stakeholder participation ensures that research addresses practical, real-world language issues faced by diverse communities.

9.5 Identification of Specific Writing Challenges and Areas for Improvement

Research using writing tests, compositions, and writing tasks can best identify specific challenges faced by Iraqi EFL learners, such as difficulties with grammar, organisation, vocabulary, and coherence. Studies by Abdul-Karim (2014), Nasser (2018), Ahmad (2019), Al-Majdawi (2022), Hammad et al. (2022), and Abid (2019) used different data collection methods to assess Iraqi EFL students' writing difficulties. Insights from these studies may inform targeted interventions and educational strategies aimed at addressing identified weaknesses.

9.6 Exploration of Affective and Motivational Factors

Research on writing apprehension, academic locus of control, and writing anxiety highlights the importance of addressing emotional and psychological factors in teaching EFL writing. For example, Abbas (2016) provided valuable insights on the effects of emotional factors on writing performance. Sabati and Rashid (2019) examined the effects of writing anxiety, writing development motivation, and writing self-efficacy on writing performance. In addition, Nasser and Mohammed (2021) examined the relationship between self-esteem and writing performance. Sharrad and Faravani (2021) studied the relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' desire to write, personality traits, and writing ability. Using strategies to increase students' motivation and reduce anxiety can enhance writing outcomes.

10 Conclusion

This systematic overview aimed to synthesise the existing studies on EFL writing in Iraq, critically analysing the focus areas, methodologies, findings, strengths and limitations of the research. The evaluation reveals a latest growing frame of empirical research, the oldest dating back to 2014, addressing a diverse variety of research domain. These research domains were grouped into five categories: teaching strategies and interventions, writing challenges faced by EFL learners, error analysis, factors influencing writing overall performance, and written corrective feedback. Despite the progress, the field faces enormous challenges, inclusive of limited sample sizes, overreliance on self-reported data, and a lack of longitudinal research. These limitations underscore the need for more sturdy, theoretically grounded, and methodologically diverse research methods to enhance the generalizability and applicability of findings. Nevertheless, the strengths of the existing studies need to be recounted, along with using various methodological approaches, the provision of practical recommendations for improving EFL writing teaching, and the inclusion of perspectives from various stakeholders.

In conclusion, by means of synthesising current research and identifying critical areas for future investigation, this study aims to contribute to the development of EFL writing education in Iraq. It calls for collaborative efforts amongst teachers, researchers, and policymakers to create a supportive and effective learning environment that enhances the writing proficiency of Iraqi EFL learners. Through continued studies and practical interventions, the aim of improving EFL writing skills in Iraq can be step by step realised, ultimately helping learners in reaching academic and professional success.

10.1 Recommendations and Suggestions

Moving ahead, future research must prioritise addressing the identified limitations and expanding the scope of investigation. Conducting cross-contextual research that contain a broader variety of educational settings, learner populations, and areas inside Iraq might enhance the generalizability and applicability of the findings. Additionally, incorporating mixed-methods designs, triangulating data sources, and making use of innovative research methods could yield greater comprehensive insights into the complexities of EFL writing in Iraq. Furthermore,

fostering collaboration amongst researchers, teachers, and policymakers is important to ensure that research findings are effectively translated into practical implementations and educational policies. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, the field of applied linguistics could make extensive strides in improving EFL writing teaching and outcomes in Iraq.

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