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## **EXPLORING THE PROBLEMS FACED BY THE TEACHERS IN DEVELOPING ENGLISH WRITING SKILLS FOR THE STUDENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Teaching one of the productive skills of the English language i.e., writing skills mostly involve developing the linguistic competence of the students which many English Second Language teachers may perceive as a challenging task. The main aim of the study is to look into various challenges encountered by English Second Language teachers in teaching writing skills to students in ordinary classrooms in the context of universities. Specifically, this research focuses on identifying the problems faced by teachers of the Arts Colleges within the University of Jazan context. The researcher employed a survey method in the form of questionnaires to investigate the problems faced by the teachers when teaching writing skills. To report the problems identified among the sampled teachers in teaching writing skills, the researcher employed a descriptive method. The questionnaire contained 12 items. The findings of this research did not only reveal the problematic factors, but also proposed some practical measures to help address the situation. The findings along with recommendations of this study may help the teachers reflect on teaching practices and the concerned authorities to facilitate teachers' efforts to improve the writing skills of their students in the University of Jazan.*

**KEYWORDS:** Writing skills, teachers' problems, government intervention

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### **INTRODUCTION**

This study focuses on the problems that teachers faced upon imparting writing skills to their students in ordinary classroom settings. It is noteworthy that developing students' English language writing skills can be a challenging task for any teacher. It is particularly so at the university levels within the context of Saudi Arabia. To write effectively in either a second or foreign language, it may require both high language skills and experience, and this can be perceived as a challenge for English Second Language learners. Upon observations, it was discovered in the present context that regular teaching plan happens with the sequential order of listening, speaking, reading and writing within teaching programs. Referring to this sequential order in which language skills are taught, writing comes as the last skill even though this skill cannot be disregarded and needs considerable attention from both teachers and students owing to its most importance in their daily academic lives. In such programs, students are generally expected to learn how to be good writers. In relation to the teaching of writing skills at the university levels, the present study set out to investigate the major problems which teachers faced in developing the English language writing skills of their students. The findings of this study may assist the concerned educational authorities at university levels to better understand the processes of developing the English language writing skills from both the teachers' and the students' perspectives.

### **Statement of the problem**

Difficulties of teaching the writing skills of the English language are reportedly one of the most challenging tasks which are not only experienced by native speakers but also the English Second Language teachers around the globe. A significant number of students may have learned such writing skills in the course of their education at the high school level. These students' writing proficiency along with their weaknesses while undergoing their educational programs may only be revealed by means of assessing their coursework samples or final exams. Due to the increased demands that the academic writing place on the students for delivering an effective English language writing sample, it is therefore necessary to carry out an investigation to gauge whether or not the English Second Language teachers had to face difficulties in teaching writing skill. Good writing requires preparation and suitable feedback, which teachers must never underestimate.

### **Research questions**

1. What kind of problems that the teachers faced in teaching writing skills in their classrooms?
2. What kind of support do teachers provide to their students with writing skill problems to help improve their academic achievements?

### **Objectives of the research**

1. To improve the teaching methods, strategies and instructions that teachers employ in order to offer support to the learners for writing problems in an ordinary classroom.
2. To identify learning materials and resources used to assist the teacher to help the students on how to write.
5. Significance of the study

Students with weaknesses of the English language writing skills may consequently result in lagging behind in both their academic and career lives. This research is considered a step to point out the deterring elements, which touch the teaching and the learning methods of the English language writing skills. The main contribution of this research is to highlight the most challenging aspects in relation to the environment and the learners due to which in many cases, influence the teachers in developing the English language writing skills. It is hoped that the outcomes of this study may serve as guidelines to the administrative authorities to help facilitate both the teaching and learning of writing skills at the university levels.

### **Justification of the study**

The motivation which sparked the idea of carrying out the present study was the unique experiences of the researcher in working at the university level with students who had to encounter problems in relation to writing effectively along with a lack of teachers' consciousness about looking closer into learners with such problems and therefore do the necessary by assisting them at an early stage.

## **A REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Upon a comprehensive review of literature, it was discovered that considerably a significant amount of academic works looking into the nature of second language writing skills have to date been carried out. For instance, (Cumming, 2003) stated that it is roughly unbearable to

stratify any particular concept to teach writing skills. In a similar vein, (Lin, 2002) opined that it can be considered unlikely to learn writing skills only by means of having a skillful teacher along with doing more practices on writing.

(Grabe and Kaplan, 1997) stated that educationally oriented second language learners may need to develop writing skills, and in relation to this, teachers may equally need to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills of how to teach writing skills. As has been reported in some studies, most of the second language teachers find writing rather a complex skill to teach by aptly linking it with their students' learning outcomes. (Kellogg, 1999) has nicely pointed out that the teachers' tasks are certainly to explore students' stimulus for writing, which, contains attainment motivation, fundamental motivation, and extrinsic motivation, which is believed to assist the teachers plan meaningful and significant writing tasks by taking into account the students' level of motivation. Interestingly, (Flower and Hayes, 1981) claimed that writing methods can be briefly summarized as a procedures of planning, reviewing and writing. Upon considering the viewpoints presented in the foregoing along with the context in which the study was carried out, the researcher decided to focus on clarifying how to offer input for students before writing, how to encourage students to increase their' level of understanding of social contexts, and how to respond to students' writing efforts since these reportedly seem to be the most serious difficulties that the teachers in their efforts to teach writing skills, had to encounter.

(White, 1994) claimed that portfolio evaluation can be considered useful because it is capable of measuring all points of writing that have been trained. Indeed, the portfolio permits to gather numerous dissimilar types of writing genres that students study throughout their entire writing skill courses. Such a wide-ranging record may provides the teachers with an idea of how their learners can strive to improve their writing skill process. Moreover, portfolio evaluation is also well-known for the reason that it has specific and clear principles as well as assessment guidelines. Moreover, (Farnan, 2000) stated that the instructors may need to make the worksheets comprehensible to students by training students on how to use them. All of these can facilitate teachers and students to work in concerted efforts.

Moreover, (Reid, 2003) argued that individuals with writing difficulties may have a great deal to offer to societies by means of their creativity, skills, and talents which may remain inactive and untapped owing partly to the frustrations of not being able to write like the rest. The researcher agrees with the above mentioned author when he asserted that a change of attitude must be observed within the learning atmosphere that is shared by all members of teaching as well as to accommodate students with writing problems in ordinary classrooms. While (Shaywitz, 2003) highlighted that teachers are required to know that students learn in different ways, hence it may require different assets and requirements. For example, a low-achieving student in writing may not be necessarily be a low-achiever in other aspects of academic achievement. Every student with writing problems may have their own learning style, interests, requirements, and assets. In this regard, it is the teachers who should be able to help the students to identify their interests and strengths.

Moreover, (Shaywitz, 2003) stated that it can also be equally useful for teachers to make the students aware of the problems associated with their writing skills and their capacities so that the students can gain more confidence which may in turn help in the making of successful and skilled individuals. To boost their students' motivation, teachers may share success stories

with their students instances of reputable individuals who had writing problems while undergoing education in schools. Nevertheless, (O'donnell *et al.*, 2002) claimed that tutoring should be supported by teachers for the reason that it may help improve personal interdependence, individual responsibilities, and obliging skills. It may also allow the students to respect each other's ideas and turn taking practices in their respective groups.

Furthermore, (O'connor and Vadasy, 2013) stated that in the course of resolving problems, the teachers may need to provide space for the students to ask questions and look for clarifications among themselves, learn to unify their familiarities or reactions by exchanging ideas. This communication among peers may also result in conflicts in relation to intellectual attributes which may encourage them to question their understanding critically and as a result, try out new ways of solving the problems at hand. It has also been promoted in some studies that teaching can be carried out by more than one teacher i.e., teacher assistants or special educators assisting the students with some extra support apart from what is already offered in the classrooms. Such a teamwork may supplement and assist the existing teaching plans of the regular classroom teachers about the curriculum and teaching methods. This is called teamwork as it allows teachers to understand and value the support of other instructors which may better meet the specific requirements of the students in the classrooms. In addition, it may also assist teachers to recognize their shortcomings without any feeling of humiliation and can accept constructive criticisms from their associates positively to support the learners.

While, (Strickland *et al.*, 2002) stated that by means of cooperation, instructors may exchange thoughts about suitable teaching methods between one another and such a practice may help raise their awareness on how to deal with different kinds of learners in their classrooms. Moreover, (Isaacs, 2013) pointed out that it is hard to carry out lessons in classrooms without using appropriate resources for the lesson or topic being taught. In this regard, the resources should be up to date to enhance sensual curriculum and easy to be managed by all the students in the classrooms. While (Swanson, 1999) stated that the following recommendations could be implemented for teaching students the writing skills, this includes; employ various strategies by cueing students, expose students to various types of writing materials to create an atmosphere which is language-rich, provide clearer and more accurate directions, create regular opportunities to write well. Furthermore, (Wilkins, 1972) stated that instructors may need to amend topics, curriculum, instructional strategies, and materials to help all students succeed in achieving the overall objectives of the program. It is of utmost significance for classroom teachers to keep a record consistent of all the adaptations for to the convenience of the next class teacher who will take over the session when the year begins.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

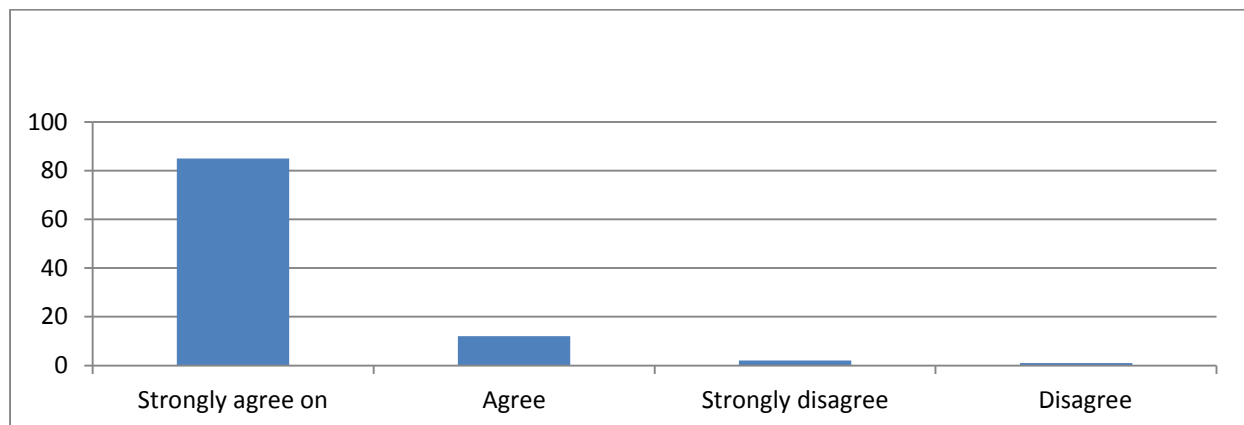
The questionnaire was carried out administered to explore the problems which the teachers faced in imparting writing skills of the English language. In this study, the number of participants involved was 20, and a quantitative method was employed in collecting the data. The identities of the participants are not revealed in the present study. With regards to the participants' demography, gender, has no impact on the level of analysis in this study.

### Responses to the questionnaire

The researcher administered a questionnaire which was employed for the data collection methods. The survey was meant for investigating the problems of writing skills which the teachers faced in imparting writing skills. The following responses were provided by the participants sampled in this study:

#### The most prominent issue in teaching writing skills is the grammar difficulties faced by the students

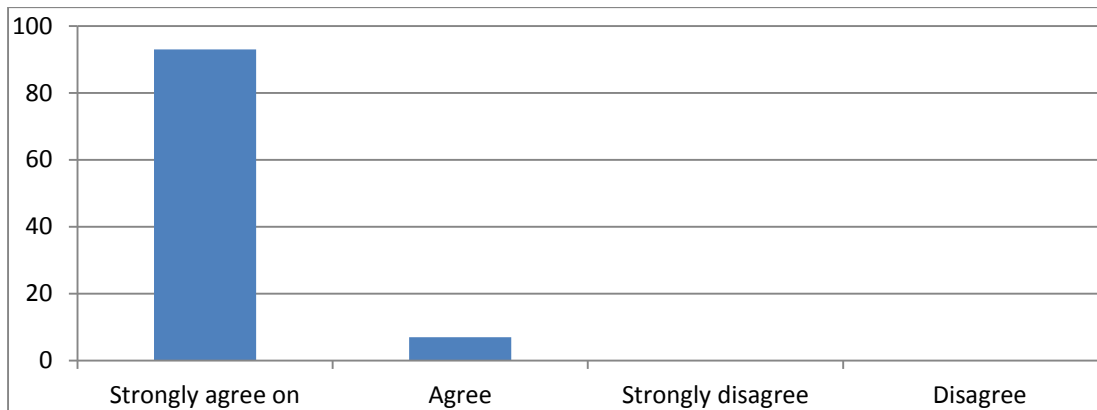
Figure 8.1.1 shows the frequency count of the responses provided to the question: the most challenging issue in teaching writing skills was the difficulties associated with grammar faced by the students. Of the 20 participants sampled in this study, eighty-five percent of the participants strongly agreed that the grammar difficulties were the most prominent issues in teaching writing skills to their respective students. In a similar vein, the twelve percent of the participants opted to say that they agree that grammar difficulties were the most challenging issues in teaching writing skills and the two percent of the participants strongly disagreed that grammar difficulties were the most challenging issues in teaching writing skills to students. Finally, one percent disagreed that grammar difficulties were the most challenging issues in teaching writing skills.



**Figure 8.1.1**

#### Lack of vocabulary among the students is one problem for teaching writing skills.

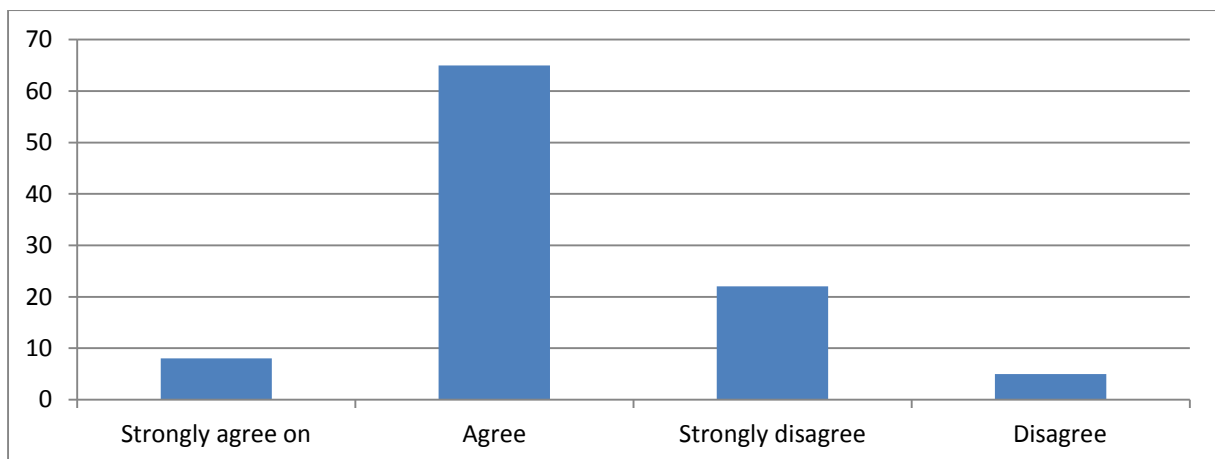
Figure 8.1.2 shows the frequency count of answers provided to the statement above: Perceived lack of vocabulary among the students was one of the problems for teaching writing skills. Of the 20 participants, eighty-three percent of them strongly agreed that a lack of vocabulary among the students was one of the problems for teaching writing skills. Similarly, seven percent of the participants agreed that the lack of vocabulary among the students was one of the problems for teaching writing skills and interestingly, none of the sampled participants strongly disagreed or disagreed that the perceived lack of vocabulary among the students was one of the problems for teaching writing skills.



**Figure 8.1.2**

**The topics in the text books for writing skills are not attractive and persuasive enough which makes it quite discouraging to teach writing skills to the students.**

Figure 8.1.3 shows the frequency count of responses to the statement: The topics in the text books for writing skills are not attractive and , persuasive enough which makes it quite discouraging to teach writing skills to the students. Of the 20 participants, eight percent of the participants strongly agreed that the topics enlisted in the text books, for writing activities were not attractive and, persuasive enough which made it quite discouraging to teach writing skills to their respective students. Also, sixty- five percent of the participants agreed to this statement. Twenty- two percent of the participants strongly disagreed with this statement. Notably, a small number i.e., five percent disagreed with this statement.



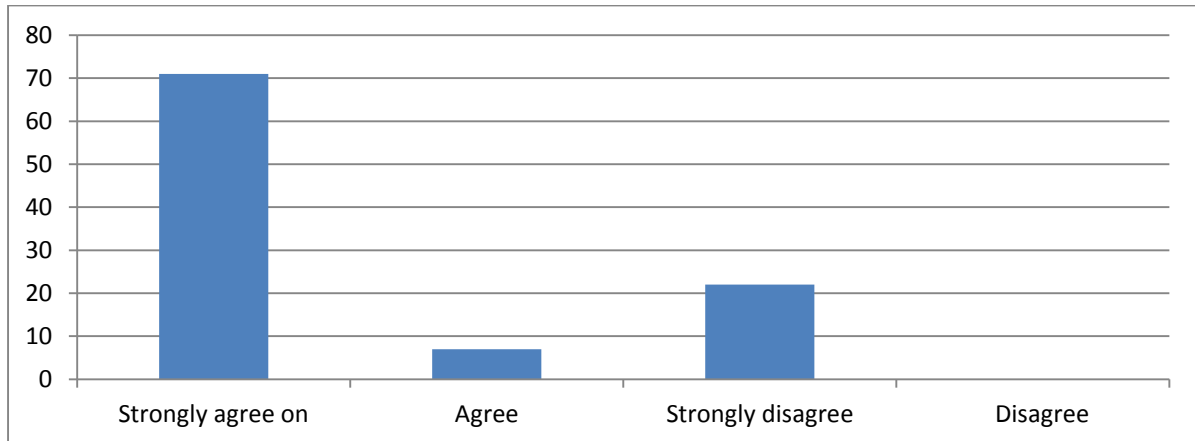
**Figure 8.1.3**

**The lack of motivation among the students to improve their writing skills is a problematic factors in teaching process.**

Figure 8.1.4 shows the frequency count of responses to the statement: The lack of motivation among the students to improve their writing skills is a problematic factors in teaching process. Of the 20 sampled participants, seventy-one percent of the participants strongly agreed that the lack of motivation among the students to improve their writing skills is a problematic factors in teaching process. Also, seven percent of the participants agreed that the lack of motivation among the students to improve their writing skills is a problematic factors in teaching process. Twenty-two percent of the participants strongly disagreed that the lack of motivation among



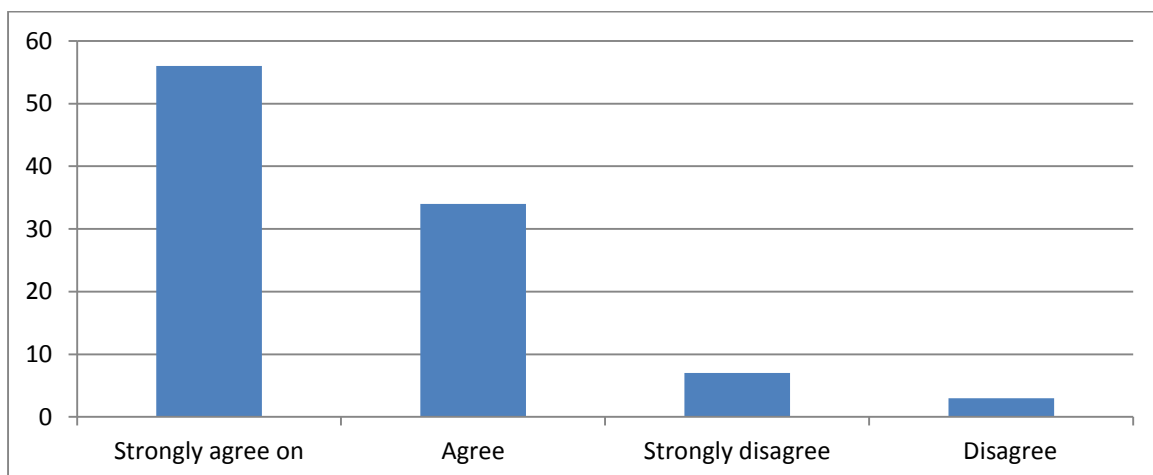
the students to improve their writing skills is a problematic factor in teaching process. Finally, one percent of the participants disagreed that the lack of motivation among the students to improve their writing skills is a problematic factors in teaching process.



**Figure 8.1.4**

**Collaborative strategy among the students in the classroom can overcome difficulties as it encourages mistake- corrections and the restructuring of ideas that may help to improve teaching.**

Figure 8.1.5 shows the frequency count of responses to the statement: Collaborative strategy among the students in the classrooms can overcome difficulties as it encourages mistake-corrections and the restructuring of ideas that may help improve the teaching. Of the 20 participants, fifty-six percent of the participants strongly agreed with this statement. Also, thirty-four percent agreed. Notably, seven percent strongly disagreed and only three percent disagreed, with this statement.

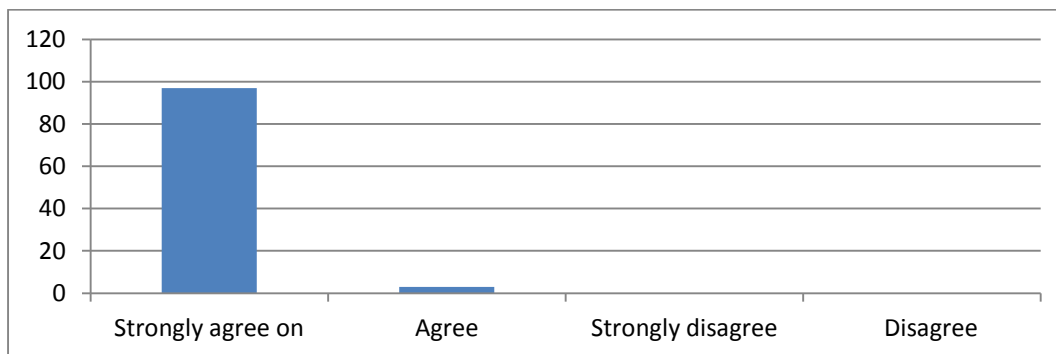


**Figure 8.1.5**

**More credit hours should be added to teaching writing skills so that the problem of writing skills in classrooms can be eradicated.**

Figure 8.1.6 shows the frequency count of of responses to the statement: more credit hours should be added to teaching writing skills so that the problem of writing skills in classrooms

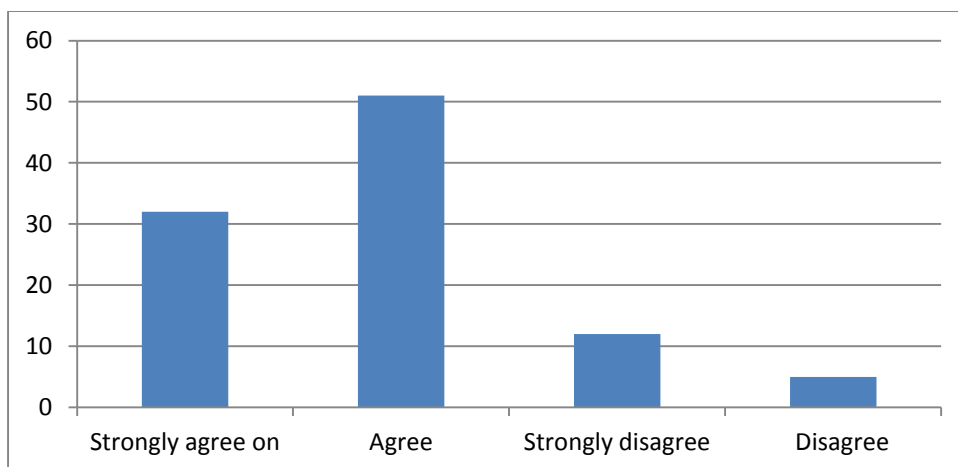
can be eradicated. Of the 20 sampled participants, ninety-seven percent of the participants strongly agreed that more credit hours should be added to teaching writing skills so that the problem of writing skill in classrooms can be eradicated. As can be seen from the figure, thirty five percent agreed that more credit hours should be added to teaching writing skills so that the problems of writing skills in classrooms can be eradicated. Finally, none of the participants strongly disagreed nor disagreed that more credit hours should be added to teaching writing skills so that the problems of writing skills in classrooms can be eradicated.



**Figure 8.1.6**

**The higher number of students in each class is a barrier for lecturers to achieve their teaching goals for teaching writing skill.**

Figure 8.1.7 shows the frequency count of responses to the statement: the higher number of students in each class is a barrier for lecturers to achieve their teaching goals for teaching writing skills. Of the 20 participants, thirty two percent of the them strongly agreed that the higher number of students in each class is a barrier for lecturers to achieve their teaching goals for teaching writing skills. Also, fifty – one percent agreed that the higher number of students in each class is a barrier for lecturers to achieve their teaching goals for teaching writing skills and twelve percent of the participants strongly disagreed that the higher number of students in each class is a barrier for lecturers to achieve their teaching goals for teaching writing skills. Finally, only five percent disagreed that the higher number of students in each class is a barrier for lecturers to achieve their teaching goals for teaching writing skills

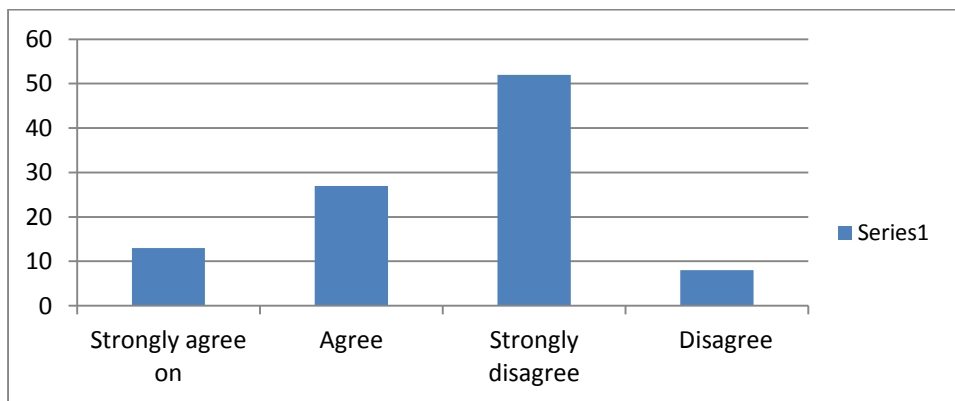


**Figure 8.1.7**



### **Mother tongue interference among students is a disruptive factor in teaching the English language writing skills.**

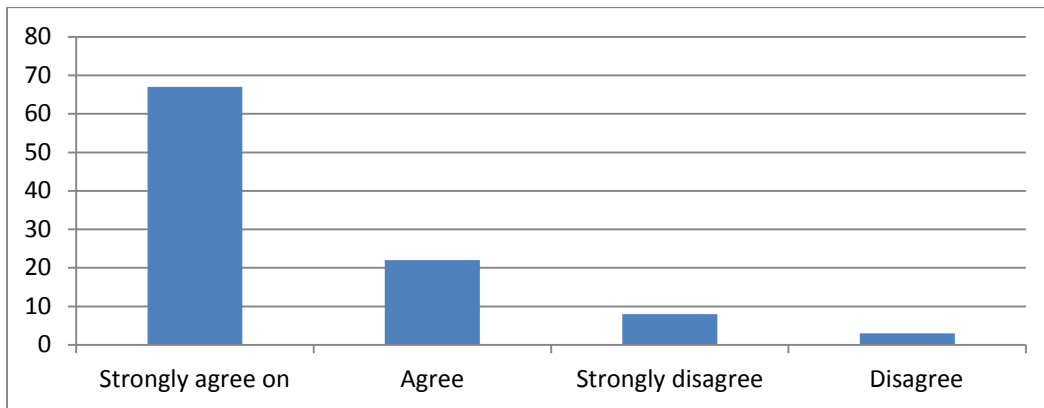
Figure 8.1.8 shows the frequency count of responses to the statement: mother tongue interference among the students is a disruptive factor in teaching the English language writing skills. Among the 20 participants sampled in this study, thirteen percent of the participants strongly agreed that mother tongue interference among the students is a disruptive factor in teaching English writing skills. Besides, twenty seven percent agreed ,that mother tongue interference among the students is a disruptive factor in teaching the English language writing skills and fifty two percent of the participants strongly disagreed that mother tongue interference among the students is a disruptive factor in teaching the English language writing skills. Finally, only eight percent disagreed that mother tongue interference among the students is a disruptive factor in teaching the English language writing skills .



**Figure 8.1.8**

### **Regular workshops and trainings conducted by the university for teachers will reach the goal of good teaching of writing skills.**

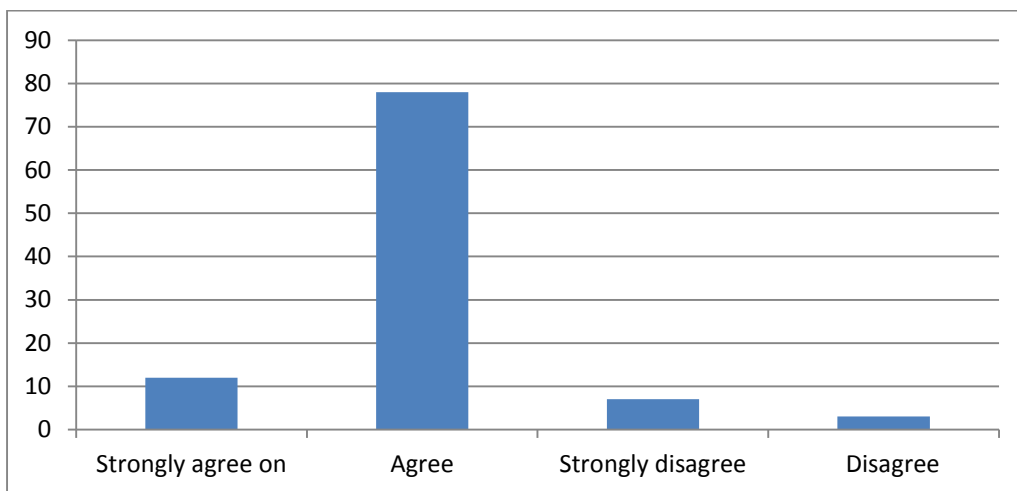
Figure 8.1.9 shows the frequency count of answers to the statement: regular workshops and trainings conducted by the university for teachers will reach the goal of good teaching of writing skills. Out of the 20 participants sampled in this study, sixty-seven percent of the participants strongly agreed that regular workshops and trainings conducted by the university for teachers will reach the goal of teaching of good writing skills. Besides, twenty-two percent agreed that regular workshops and trainings conducted by the university for teachers will reach the goal of good writing skills. Notably, eight percent strongly disagreed that regular workshops and trainings conducted by the university for teachers will reach the goal of teaching of good writing skills. Finally, only three percent disagreed that regular workshops and trainings conducted by the university for teachers will reach the goal of teaching good writing skills.



**Figure 8.1.9**

**Teacher competence in using devices or equipments for learning writing skills will assist the attainment of writing skills in the classrooms.**

Figure 8.1.10 shows the frequency count of responses to the statement: Teacher competence in using devices or equipments for learning writing skills will assist the attainment of writing skills in the classrooms. Out of the 20 participants sampled in this study, twelve percent of the participants strongly agreed that : teacher competence in using devices or equipments for learning writing skills will assist the attainment of writing skills in the classrooms. In addition, seventy-eight percent agreed that teacher competence in using devices or equipments for learning writing skills will assist the attainment of writing skills in the classrooms and seven percent of the participants strongly disagreed that teacher competence in using devices or equipments for learning writing skills will assist the attainment of writing skills in the classrooms. Finally, only three percent of the participants disagreed.

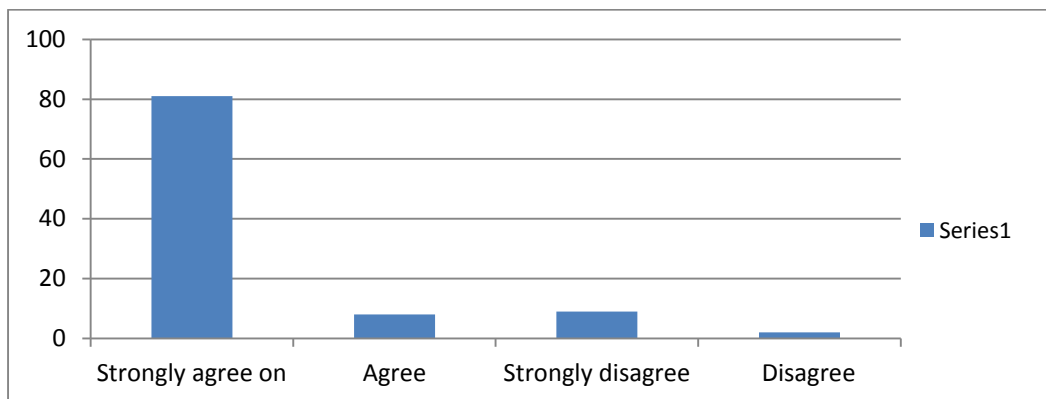


**Figure 8.1.10**

**Intensive writing exercises and teachers' regular assessment of the material will identify the the students' weaknesses in learning the English language writing skills.**

Figure 8.1.11 shows the frequency count of responses to the statement: intensive writing exercises and teachers' regular assessment of the material will identify the the students' weaknesses in learning the English language writing skills. Of the 20 participants sampled, eighty-one percent of the participants strongly agreed that intensive writing exercises and

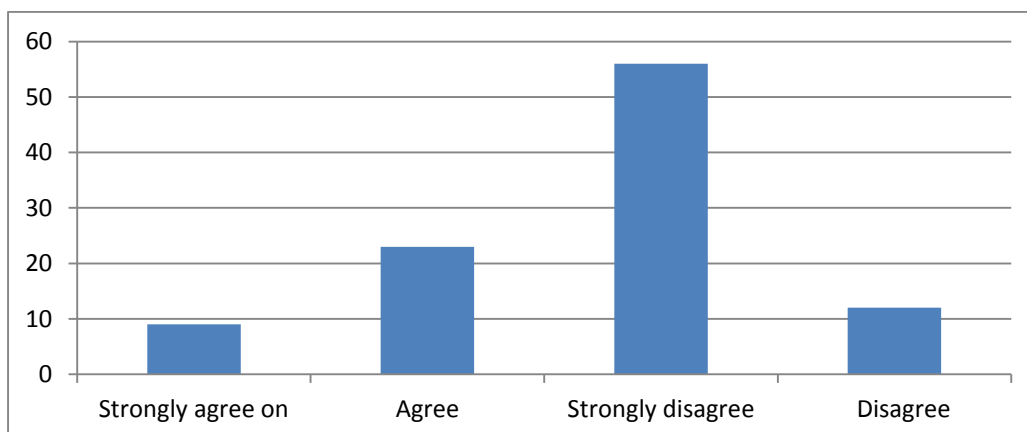
teachers' regular assessment of the material will identify the the students' weaknesses in learning the English language writing skills. In addition, eight percent agreed. Notably, nine percent of the participants strongly disagreed that the intensive writing exercises and teachers' regular assessment of the material will identify the the students' weaknesses in learning the English language writing skills. Finally, only two percent disagreed that intensive writing exercises and teachers' regular assessment of the material will identify the the students' weakness in learning the English language writing skills.



**Figure 8.1.11**

**Previous knowledge about the English language writing skills among the students from their level of education will support further development of students' writing ability at the university level**

Figure 8.1.12 shows the frequency count of responses to the statement: previous knowledge about the English language writing skills among the students from their level of education will support further development of students' writing abilities at the university level. Out of the 20 participants sampled in this study, nine percent of the participants strongly agreed to this statement. Also, twenty-three percent agreed to this. Fifty –six percent of the participants strongly disagreed that previous knowledge about the English language writing skills for the students from their level of education will support further development of students' writing abilities at the university level. Finally, only five percent disagreed that previous knowledge about the English language writing skills for the students from their level of education will support further development of students' writing abilities at the university level.



**Figure 8.1.12**

## DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The primary purpose of the quantitative data analysis was to reveal the problems which the teachers faced in teaching writing skills to students in an ordinary classroom. The study was conducted at the Arts College of Jazan University. The participants, i.e., 20 of them were teachers teaching writing courses at the university. The data were collected by means of employing a survey method. It closely focused on the writing skills, the results of which indicated that many teachers always ignored learners with writing problems in their classes owing partly to a lack of sound knowledge base on how effectively to teach them.

It is of most importance for class instructors being capable of detecting students who have problems in relation to expressing their thoughts through writing. It is worth highlighting that not all the students with writing problems showed the same features.

The study also revealed that the attitude of teachers towards educating students with unique characteristics can be considered as a crucial factor in making writing skills more helpful for all the students. Teachers also stated that once they have diagnosed their students' writing problems, they gave them specific attention. It is important to look into the holistic aspect when teaching writing skills. The focus should not only take the center stage on the learners' strengths and weaknesses, but also their preferred styles. Consequently, the teaching methods and intervening strategies should address the needs of the students in the classrooms, as has been posited by (Reid, 1994).

Moreover, with regards to linguistics problems, the teachers should identify the mistakes and clarify ways of improving such mistakes in future all of which may offer learners with clarification for the achievement of fundamental knowledge. As well as identifying ways of how to deal with the students' mistakes in relation to writing skills, teachers may also need to collaborate with students by sharing the amendment workload with them. The knowledge of second language acquisition may assist the writing ability, and teachers assess the students' linguistic performance, which is similarly reported by (Kathleen and Hartford, 1997). Finally, the salient points which were highlighted by the participants of the study by means of the findings can be summarized as follows:

1. The English language proficiency of the majority of the students are poor.
2. The textbook of writing skill activities is not attractive and simple for the students to comprehend them fast.
3. Mother tongue interference among students is a disruptive factor in teaching
4. Teaching aids such as relevant equipment and devices are not accessible to the teachers.
5. Classes are quite overloaded.
6. Teachers typically follow rather dated methods for teaching purposes, and they are contented with their teaching methods.
7. Teachers cannot spend more time for writing exercises in classes because they are required to cover various other aspects and classrooms which are bigger in size.
8. Lack of motivation among the students to improve their writing skills is a challenging factor that faced the teacher of writing skill

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study revealed that the problems associated with teaching of writing skills can be addressed by means of various approaches. The ultimate goal of the teachers is to develop the writing skills, competence of language among the students, which includes, sociolinguistics competence, grammatical competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence. Besides, teachers also may need to have a better understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of all the primary writing methods. Teachers must always apply a combination of these approaches simultaneously since writing problems are likely to arise when teachers rely solely on one teaching technique or strategy. It can be significant as it may enable classroom teachers to recognize students who are struggling with problems associated with writing skills.

## REMEDIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Referring to the findings of the study, teachers indicated that there were no fixed methods which can be adopted when teaching writing skills. Based on the results and discussion of this study, some remedial recommendations are suggested which are believed to help avoid such problems from recurring in future.

1. The English language writing skills may need to be taught more accurately at the preceding primary, middle and high school levels.
2. A comprehensive syllabus may need to be designed to encourage writing activities among the students.
3. Teachers may need to be trained consistently.
4. At the university level, some additional classes may need to be offered to mitigate the weaknesses of linguistics among students. More emphasis need to be put on sentence structure, grammar, and spellings.
5. Students may need to be more pro-active in improving their academic writing forte.
6. Classroom size may need to be reduced to a minimum of 25 students.

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