

A textual analysis of the Egyptian EFL freshmen's performance in FL writing composition

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Abstract

The current study discussed the performance of Egyptian EFL freshmen in writing FL composition in terms of the five criteria describe in Jacobs' (1981) practical approach to test ESL composition. These criteria are content and ideas, organization, choice of word, language use, and formality and objectivity. Prior to data collection, an EFL academic writing course was taught to the targeted population. It spanned twenty eight weeks. For the purpose of data collect, a five-criterion checklist was created based on Jacobs' (1981) composition testing approach. Data were analyzed based on the distribution of frequency and percentage to identify the textual difficulties of the Egyptian EFL freshmen's performance in freshmen had various trouble spots in writing FL composition according to the above-mentioned five criteria. The study provided teaching implications to improve the Egyptian EFL freshmen's performance in writing FL composition.

Keywords: Egyptian EFL freshmen, FL writing composition, content and ideas, cohesion and coherence, frequent grammatical errors, choice of word, formality and objectivity.

تحليل نصي لأداء الطلاب المصريين بالفرقة الأولى الجامعية الدراسيين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في كتابة المقال

المخلص

ناقشت الدراسة الحالية أداء الطلاب المصريين بالفرقة الأولى الجامعية لكتابة المقال باللغة الإنجليزية في إطار خمسة معايير تصف منهج جاكوبز العملي (1981) لإختبار الكتابة في اللغة الثانية ، و هذه المعايير هي المحتوى و الأفكار، التنظيم، أختيار الكلمات، استخدام اللغة ، و الصياغة و الأهداف، و قبل تجميع البيانات البحثية تم تدريس دورة في الكتابة الأكاديمية للطلاب المستهدفين، و التي أمتدت على مدار ثمانية أسابيع ، و لغرض تجميع البيانات البحثية تم إعداد قائمة تدقيق تقومة على خمس معايير إستنادا على منهج جاكوبز (1981) لأختبار الكتابة ، و تم تحليل البيانات البحثية بإستخدام معامل التكرار و النسب المئوية لل صعوبات النصية لأداء الطلاب المصريين بالفرقة الجامعية الأولى للكتابة ، و أظهرت النتائج أنهم لديهم مشاكل متعددة في الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية طبقا للمعايير الخمسة السالفة الذكر ، و طرحت لدراسة مضامين تدريسية لتحسين أداء الطلاب المصريين في كتابة المقال بللغة الإنجليزية

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Background of the study

Undoubtedly, writing has an influential role in the process of foreign language learning and teaching. Writing is essential for the academic success because it constitutes a measure of assessment that helps foreign language (FL) teachers to assess the writing ability of their students (Tan, 2011; Kalan, 2014; and Rusinovci, 2015). Over the past decade there have been increasingly growing interests in the ability of foreign language (FL) learners' writing composition (Dai, 2010; Lei, 2012; and Cheung, 2016). Thus, FL teachers have been encountering higher demands of assessing their students writing skills in order to pin down their writing errors and provide solutions for correcting and developing their students' writing skills (Simin, and Tavangar, 2009; Hyland, 2013; and Han and Hyland, 2015). The FL writing composition is a complex process as it entails teachers' writing instruction and the students' actual production of writing (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005; Mullany, and Stockwell, 2010). Since essay writing is a core course taught at all Departments of English at various higher learning institutions in Egypt, it necessary to comprehend the structures, forms, and features of the essays written by Egyptian EFL freshmen. Undoubtedly, the written production of Egyptian EFL freshmen reflects their writing techniques and strategies which are based on the FL writing instructions they received from the FL instructors. Most of the studies on the Egyptian EFL learners' performance in writing English composition focused on (1) reasons hinder their realization of cohesion and coherence in writing English essays (e.g. Ahmed, 2010), (2) types and sources of their writing errors (e.g. Marghany, 2014), and (3) the influence of direct and indirect corrective e-feedback on their writing accuracy (Seiffedin and El-Sakka, 2017). Therefore, there have been limitations on providing full textual analysis of the Egyptian EFL freshmen's writing product in terms of Jacobs' (1981) standardized criteria for testing ESL writing composition. Indeed, Egyptian EFL freshmen have been studying certain writing structures without considering how these structures can form good essays or how they affect the development of Egyptian EFL freshmen's skills to produce good written essays.

Problem of the statement

The current study examines the distinguishable textual aspects of FL writing composition among the Egyptian EFL freshmen at the Department of Languages and Translation, Sherton Higher Institute in the context of an academic writing course taught to them over two semesters. The examination covers various textual aspects including content and ideas, organization, choice of words, language use, and formality and objectivity. The study determines the writing aspects taught to the participants in order to evaluate how these aspects are reflected in their pieces of writing. The current study explains how these aspects of writing are not only relevant to the particular context in which participants employ them but also to the general FL context of writing composition. The study provides a rigorous description of the participants' structural complexity. It also defines how the participants are successful in fulfilling the writing task and how FL writing instructions can be modified in order to ensure better performance for the Egyptian EFL freshmen.

Research questions

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How do the Egyptian EFL freshmen vary in their adherence to the proper aspects of writing according to the criterion of content and ideas?
2. To what extent does the Egyptian EFL freshmen's performance in writing composition vary in terms of organization?
3. What are the difficulties which the Egyptian EFL freshmen encounter in writing FL composition in terms of choice of word?
4. How does the Egyptian EFL freshmen's performance in writing vary in terms of language use?
5. What are the features of the Egyptian EFL freshmen's written production in terms of formality and objectivity?

Research aims

The present study aims to provide an analysis of the Egyptian EFL freshmen's performance in FL writing. It analyzes the structural aspects of the participants' writing in order to determine the difficulties which they encounter in FL writing. It provides a description of the textual aspects which characterize the written production of the Egyptian EFL freshmen. It also measures the effectiveness of FL writing instructions in improving the Egyptian EFL freshmen's writing performance.

Significance of the study

The study is of special significance to serve the main policy of FL teaching at the Department of Languages and Translation, Sherton Higher Institute. It reinforces the objectives of teaching English to English-majoring students in order to fulfill the vision and mission of the Department. It also has a general significance to the process of teaching

writing to the Egyptian EFL in general because it delineates an image of the structural aspects distinguishing the Egyptian EFL learners' writing skills. It introduces as well implications for teaching FL writing to Egyptian EFL learners.

Limitations

The findings of the present study are mainly limited to the students enrolled at the department of Languages and Translation, Sherton Higher Institute. It can also be used as a guideline for teaching English writing to Egyptian EFL learners at other higher learning institutions.

Literature review

This section reviews pertinent studies to the investigation into the Egyptian EFL learners in FL writing specifically (e.g. Ahmed, 2010; Marghany, 2014; Seiffedin and El-Sakka, 2017) and the writing performance of EFL learners in general (e.g. Ridha, 2012, Han, 2017; and Obeid, 2017).

Ahmed (2010) focused on the realization of cohesion and coherence in the Egyptian student teachers' EFL essay writing. Data were collected through a mixed method research design which includes a questionnaire and indepth interviews. The data collection instruments aimed to collect data on the participants' perception of cohesion and coherence of written essays. As for coherence, Egyptian student teachers were found to have difficulty in writing the introduction, this statement, topic sentences, and concluding sentences. Ahmed (2010) attributed the coherence problems encountering Egyptian student teachers to several reasons. First, their background knowledge greatly influenced their writing ability on specific topics. Second, their low proficiency level in English. Third, the Egyptian student teachers a writing style in English which is mainly based on elaboration. This elaborate style of writing prevents to write coherent topic sentences in the beginning of their essay writing. As for cohesion, the Egyptian student teachers faced cohesion problems such as their inability to use cataphoric and anaphoric reference, ellipsis, substitution and genre pertinent to cohesive ties. In addition, Ahmed (2010) named some psychological reasons behind the coherence and cohesion problems which the Egyptian students teachers face while writing essays in English. These psychological reasons include lack of motivation towards learning English, lack of self-confidence, and writing anxiety.

Ridha (2012) examined the writing errors of eighty Iraqi EFL undergraduates enrolled at the Department of English, Faculty of Education, Basrah University. The Iraqi participants were required to write an essay on one of the suggested narrative, argumentative or descriptive essays. The Iraqi participants did not have prior knowledge of

the purpose of the study. Ridha (2012) attributed the errors of her examined sample to the influence of the Arabic language on the participants' English written output. Therefore, Ridha (2012) attributed the Iraqi EFL undergraduates' writing errors to the syntactic differences between the Arabic and English languages.

Marghany (2014) examined the writing errors made by Egyptian EFL learners based on their gender. Data were collected through writing 100-word paragraphs. The participants' writing errors were statistically analyzed by using descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage. Marghany (2014) reported that Egyptian EFL female participants made less writing errors compared to their male counterparts. In addition, the Egyptian EFL learners' writing errors were attributed to two main sources: interlingual and intralingual errors. Examples of interlingual errors include omission of the indefinite article 'a', redundant use of definite article 'the', and comma omission after a prepositional phrase. On the other hand, the intralingual errors include overgeneralization of using the verb 'go' regardless of the sentence tense form present or past, lack of using plural forms of nouns as in 'five murder' instead of 'five murders', and overgeneralization of the English capitalization rules.

Seiffedin and El-Sakka (2017) examined the influence of direct and indirect corrective e-feedback on the Egyptian EFL students' writing accuracy. Data were collected from forty eight participants enrolled at the Department of Kindergarten at Suez Faculty of Education. Data were collected through pre and post test in writing. The participants were divided into an experimental group and a control group. Whereas the former includes 25 participants, the latter comprises 23 participants. While the experimental group had corrective e-feedback via the email on their writing, the control group did not have that privilege. Data analysis relied on the calculation of each group's mean scores in the pre and post tests. The Paired Samples T-Test was employed to reveal the significant differences between both groups' mean scores in the pre and post tests. The results indicated that there were significant differences in favour of the experimental group which had higher mean score of writing accuracy compared to the control group.

Han (2017) investigated into the effectiveness of employing writing strategies to improve the ability of EFL learners of writing English composition from cognitive and sociocultural perspectives. Han (2017) found that English non-majoring Chinese students differ from their English-majoring counterparts because they could not attend extensive courses in writing and obtain systematic and professional instruction about to use writing for the end of having meaningful communication. The use of writing strategies was effective in teaching

English non-majoring Chinese EFL students how to use correct and proper expressions in writing. Based on the cognitive theory, application of writing strategies can improve unskilled Chinese EFL learners. From sociocultural perspective, artifact-mediated and rule mediated writing strategies, which can be attained via the internet, are useful in improving English non-majoring EFL students' ability in writing composition. Han (2017) recommended that EFL instructors should create society-mediated strategies that affect the process and product of writing. This can be attained when EFL learners realize that writing is not a private process but it is rather a collaborative and social activity.

Obeid (2017) explored the perception and attitudes of Saudi EFL learners and teachers towards writing assessment. Data were collected during the first semester of the academic year 2016. Twenty two EFL teachers and seventy eight learners at the English Language Institute, King Abdul Aziz University participated in the present study. Data were elicited through two Likert-scale questionnaires designed for both Saudi EFL teachers and learners. The results indicated the agreement of Saudi EFL teachers and learners for having a procedure for writing skills testing. The Saudi EFL teachers explained that the big size of classes hinders them from enough time to discuss the rubric with their students and they were not consulted for the rubric design. The Saudi EFL learners indicated that they do not sufficient knowledge of what writing skills they are required to accomplish for the examination preparation.

Methodology

The Egyptian EFL freshmen at the Languages and Translation Department, Sherton Higher Institute were taught the academic writing course as one of the core courses for the requirements of their first year achievements at the Department. The course spanned 28 weeks over two semesters in the academic year 2017/2018. The academic writing course was based on Whitaker's (2010) academic writing guide (Appendix A). Throughout the course, students were trained to focus on reading in order to have better understanding of the FL written texts. This training helps to create eventual development of the students' understanding of building up ideas and putting them in logical order in the FL. The course gives students opportunities to have questions about free-writing, peer response and in-class writing. The course also adopts group discussions to help students exchange FL writing ideas, refine their writing skills and improve their knowledge of FL vocabulary. Students were allowed to write about their personal experiences, so that they could have an exploration of ideas that stems out of examining their own experiences. As such, students were prepared to fulfill more writing complex tasks through conducting textual analysis of various essays.

Participants

Seventy Egyptian EFL freshmen were selected randomly to participate in the present study. They are enrolled at the Department of Languages and Translation, Sherton Higher Institute.

Data collection instruments

Data collection was based on two instruments. First, the seventy participants were asked to write an essay about one of four suggested topics. These topics are namely, (1) a personal experience, (2) freedom, (3) happiness and (4) a free topic. Each participant was given an anonymous registered code. For example, the participants were coded (E1 through E70). Two sessions were concurrently held for the purpose of data collection where the seventy participants were separately examined in two different classrooms. Second, a five-criterion checklist was developed to identify the Egyptian EFL freshmen's writing aspects. The checklist was based on Jacobs' (1981) practical approach to test ESL composition. It consists of five criteria (Appendix B).

Data analysis

The present study relied on the distribution of frequency and percentage to identify the textual difficulties of the Egyptian EFL freshmen's performance in writing FL composition in relation to the checklist five criteria developed based on Jacobs (1981).

Results, discussion, and teaching implications

Table 1 shows the difficulties which the Egyptian EFL freshmen encountered when writing essays on previously mentioned topics. These difficulties are defined based on the frequency and percentage scores calculated for the items included in the five-criterion checklist, namely content and ideas, organization, choice of word, language use and formality and objectivity.

Table 1: The participants' trouble spots in FL writing composition based on content and ideas

Description	F	%
- Ideas are not varied	- 102	- 36.42
- Topic is inadequately treated	- 85	- 30.36
- Lack or absence of useful details	- 55	- 19.64
- Irrelevancy of content	- 25	- 8.49
- Writing purpose is not fulfilled	- 14	- 5.09
Total	281	100

As for content and ideas, the Egyptian EFL freshmen's performance in English composition lacks varied ideas as indicated in the frequency of 102 (36.42). Lack of varied ideas is the most frequent trouble spots which Egyptian EFL freshmen encounter when writing FL composition. This trouble spot is attributed to the participants' failure in defining the thesis statement of their writing (Ferris, 2003; Miyazoe, and Anderson, 2010; and Mirzaii, 2012). For examples, some participants, in their composition about happiness, only handled the idea of having money as the main source of happiness. They did not other types of happiness like spiritual or religious happiness. Examples of the participants' composition are as follows:

- When I have money I become happy.
- Money is the main source of happiness
- We cannot survive without money
- I only aim to have a lot of money to become happy
- Without having money, I feel sad.

Therefore, it is recommended that the EFL instructors should train their student to write the thesis statement in prior to get involved in writing the whole essay (Morgan, 2001). This procedure will help the Egyptian EFL freshmen to discuss various ideas pertinent to the main topic. It will also help them elaborate and handle various aspects of the topic. Consequently, the Egyptian EFL freshmen will be able to generate various ideas and produce effective writing of the intended topics.

The second most frequent trouble spot of the Egyptian EFL freshmen's performance in FL composition writing is that they did not adequately treat the topics (30.36). That is, the participants did not fully elaborate on the topics of their FL written compositions. For example, the majority of the participants who wrote about freedom did not sufficiently handle the different interpretations of freedom. Instead, they only focused on the freedom of behaviour. Below are some examples:

- For me freedom is to act freely without control.
- Freedom is to do whatever I like and whenever I like.
- I am free when I can do what I want.
- We should be free because God has created us as free people.

This finding indicates that the Egyptian EFL freshmen are not confident in writing about their topics. They do not have the feeling of equality to those experienced writers. This is partially attributed to their FL low proficiency. This trouble spot entails that the Egyptian EFL freshmen should first get familiar with the topics they will write about. This familiarity can be realized through reading different articles pertinent to the topics of their intended essays. Therefore, the FL instructors can handle this trouble spot by exposing their students to

various FL well-written essays. This procedure will provide the Egyptian EFL freshmen with well-formed patterns of FL writing and help develop their writing skills (Williams, 2002; Vanderburg, 2006; and Storch, 2011).

Another evident trouble spot of the Egyptian EFL freshmen's FL writing composition is the lack and/ or absence of useful details. This finding is evident from the frequency score of 55 (19.64). This finding is a logical consequence of the previous two findings of lack of varied ideas and insufficient treatment of their written compositions. For examples, the participants failed to provide useful details about happiness and freedom because they did not have definite thesis statements of these two topics and they did not also manage to vary their ideas and have further elaborations on these two topics. This trouble spot can be handled through intensive reading in English. The Egyptian EFL freshmen should be trained on how read to effectively read FL texts in order to develop their FL writing skills.

The participants also have the difficulty of handling the relevant contents to their topics as indicated by the frequency of 25 (8.49). This finding can be attributed to the participants' misinterpretation of the topics, lack of information about the topic or their FL low proficiency level that hampers their ability to express their thoughts in English. For examples, some participants chose to write about the advantages of studying abroad or the qualities of a good teacher as free topics. However, they handled irrelevant contents such as talking about the Egyptian footballer Mohamed Salah's goals, Indian movies or Turkish series.

- Mohamed Salah scored a marvelous goal against Man United team.
- I wish to become as famous as Mohamed Salah.
- The Turkish series have good scenery.
- I do not believe many stories depicted in the Indian movies.

In this regard, the EFL writing instructors should give their students corrective feedback about the relevancy of these contents to their written compositions. The Egyptian EFL freshmen can also be trained to extract irrelevant sentences included in English essays. This will help develop their ability to judge the relevancy of what they intend to write to their assignments of FL writing composition.

A few participants did not manage to fulfill the writing purpose with the frequency of 14 occurrences (5.09). Those participants were not able write essays that fully handled the intended topics of writing. They could not give varied ideas, useful information, and relevant content on the topics they chose to write about. This finding can be mainly attributed to those participants' FL low proficiency levels. Therefore, EFL instructors

should intensify their roles in guiding those students to identify and define the purpose of their FL writing composition (Dalsky, 2007).

Table 2: The participants' trouble spots in FL writing composition based on organization

Description	F	%
- Absence of cohesive connectives	- 40	- 19
- Absence of coherence or logical sequence	- 38	- 18
- Weak, poor and ineffective introduction, supporting sentences and conclusion	- 38	- 18
- Paragraphing is poor	- 33	- 15
- Difficulty to follow ideas	- 29	- 13
- Fluent expressions do not exist	- 27	- 12
- Poor organization	- 12	- 5
Total	217	100

As for organization, the participants' FL writing compositions are highly marked with absence of cohesive connectives (40), absence of coherence or logical sequence (38), weak poor paragraphs (38), paragraphing is poor (33), difficulty to follow ideas (29), absence of fluent expressions (27) and poor organization (12). In this concern, FL instructors should train their students to prepare outlines of their intended essays (Valdez, 2016). As such EFL students can observe the absence of using cohesive connectives or lack of coherence. Then, they can work out their paragraphs to compensate for the absence of such features.

Examples of the Egyptian EFL freshmen's absence of cohesive connectives are as follows:

- The run-on sentence 'last summer I wanted to go to Alexandria, my parents insisted to go to Sharm (absence of *but*).
- I used to draw picture, I was young (absence of *when*).
- In conclusion, happiness is an inner feeling it arises from within the person himself (absence of *because*).
- I had a lot of things to do. First, I had to book a return ticket to my hometown. I had to call my parents there to tell them about the time of my arrival. I had to arrange my luggage. Finally, I had to

arrange transportation to the railway station, so that I could catch the train (absence of temporal connectives *second* and *third*).

Below are examples of the Egyptian EFL freshmen's absence of coherence or logical sequence:

- I had terrible experiences when I was young, it was very bad (Coherence with pronouns).
- Paragraphs are not coherent; they lack the use of conjunctive adverbs of contrast like 'one the other hand', 'in contrast', 'conversely', 'unlikely'.
- Paragraphs also lack the use of conjunctive adverbs of cause and result like 'therefore', 'as a result', 'consequently'
- Paragraph lack transition words of comparison like 'likewise', 'similarly', 'in the same way'.
- Paragraph lack transition words that show summary such as 'finally', 'in summary', 'in conclusion'.

Examples of the Egyptian EFL freshmen's absence of cohesive connectives include the following aspects:

- The use of run-on sentences.
- Lack of temporal connectives.

Examples of the difficulty to follow ideas:

- Supporting sentences are irrelevant to the topic sentences.
- Topic sentences have broad meanings.

Table 3: The participants' trouble spots in FL writing composition based choice of word

Description	F	%
- Incorrect choice and usage of word	- 280	- 66
- Limited vocabulary	- 88	- 20
- Inappropriateness of words to the context	- 60	- 14
Total	428	100

The Egyptian EFL participants were unable to differentiate between the use of 'gain' and 'earn' in 'to earn knowledge/ experience', or the use of 'garden' and 'park' in 'the park of the house'. Their writing indicates relying on very limited vocabulary because of their FL low proficiency. This was apparent in repeated use of certain words such as 'future' instead of using words like 'prospects' or 'expectations', 'dreams' instead of 'ambitions' or 'aspirations'. They also could not differentiate between the use of 'live' and 'leave' as verbs and were confused of the different usages of the word 'leave' as a noun and a verb. These trouble spots, once again, highlight the importance of reading English texts and

being exposed the different usages of similar words. Therefore, FL instructors should train their students on how words function in sentences, particularly when words have multiple functions. They should help their students acquire advanced level vocabulary, use different collections appropriately and avoid using informal words in their academic writing. The use of such informal is acquired through the social media, which reflects the negative effectives of the internet, facebook and twitter on the development of Egyptian EFL learners' learning of FL vocabulary (Richards, and Renandya, 2002; and Marghany, 2017).

Table 4: The participants' trouble spots in FL writing composition based language use

Description	F	%
- Poor sentences and structures	- 94	- 33
- Frequent grammatical errors	- 74	- 26
- Awkward sentences	- 52	- 18
- Obscured meaning	- 44	- 15
- Structural errors	- 24	- 8
Total	288	100

The results of Table 4 indicate that the Egyptian EFL freshmen are in dire need for improving their grammar skills and knowledge. Therefore, those instructors in charge of teaching FL grammar should pay attention to improving their students' performance in FL grammar. In this regard, tedious drills are required to train Egyptian EFL student to avoid making such grammatical errors. Moreover, explosion to well-formed patterns of English sentence will help the Egyptian EFL students have better performance in FL grammar and consequently improve their performance in writing FL composition (Yasuda, 2004 and Marghany, 2014).

Examples of poor structures and frequent grammatical errors include subject-verb agreement (e.g. he write good articles); sentence fragments (e.g. Because I like football.); and noun-pronoun error (everyone should bring *their* notebook). Examples of awkward sentence are related to the identification of the main noun and verb (e.g. The fact that we do not have accurate pronunciation is our main problem and that we do not use words properly). In this example, it seems first that

mispronunciation is the main problem, but towards the end of the sentence another subject appears (i.e. improper use of words). Another example of awkward sentence is 'enjoying life a day is how I believe it should be done to be happy'. Instead, the correct sentence should be 'enjoying life one day will make me happy'.

Table 5: The participants' trouble spots in FL writing composition based formality and objectivity

Description	F	%
- Frequent use of the first pronouns	- 76	- 36
- Frequent use of contracted forms	- 62	- 29
- Frequent use of rhetorical questions	- 24	- 11
- Frequent use of colloquial words	- 19	- 9
- Frequent use of emotive language	- 18	- 8
- Frequent use of two-word verbs	- 11	- 5
- Frequent use of abbreviations	- 6	- 2
Total	216	100

As for formality and objectivity, Table 5 shows the Egyptian EFL freshmen writing composition is marked with the use of first and second pronouns (36%); the use of contractions (29%), and rhetorical questions (11%). Although these features common in spoken English, they are not suitable for writing academic essays. The least used features, which violate formality and objectivity, are phrasal verbs (5%) and abbreviations (2%). These two features are suitable for informal writing because in formal writing it is neither a preference to use phrasal verbs nor abbreviations.

Examples of the frequent use of rhetorical questions include: Is there anything better than having money? Is it a joke to be happy in poverty? There is no hope to realize my dreams, is there? Obesity causes different diseases, who knows? Who cares about other people's personal experiences?

Examples of the frequent use of colloquial words include the use of fillers (basically, even, well) as in (I'm basically happy when other people are happy; I have learned a lot of things from this experience like how to be patient, how to make a correct decision and even how to care for others; who cares about other people's happiness? Well, nobody does).

Extracted examples of the emotive language include:

- I wanted to *save* the cat's life.
- I do not want to live the life of *miserable poor* people.
- Society should help the innocent victims of poverty.
- In cool blood we used to see victims of war on the TV.

In this concern, the FL instructors should train their students to avoid using fillers like (basically, even, well, etc.); contractions (don't, shouldn't, I'm, I've, etc.); and using preposition-ended sentences (What are they fond of?) in formal writing. The Egyptian EFL freshmen should be also trained to avoid using colloquial words like ain't, alright, anyways, gonna, and wanna. Instead, they should be accustomed to use is not, all right, anyway, going to, and want to (Richards, and Rodgers, 2001; Connor, 2002; and Connor, 2004).

Conclusion

As for content and ideas, the most frequent trouble spot which marks the Egyptian EFL freshmen' FL writing composition is the lack of varied ideas. This trouble spot mainly stems from the participants' inability to have well definition of the thesis statement of their essays. The Egyptian EFL freshmen should be taught writing FL composition in gradual steps that ensure the development of their writing skills. These steps should start with training them how to realize paragraph unity through achieving cohesion among its topic sentence, supporting sentences and concluding sentence. Then, the Egyptian EFL can be taught how realize coherence among different paragraphs of their essays.

As for organizing their FL composition, the Egyptian EFL freshmen should be taught and trained how to use cohesive connectives and coherence markers. They should be aware of avoid making errors of run-on sentences. In this concern, the FL instructors should ensure their students' full understanding of the differences between dependent and independent clauses.

As for language use, the Egyptian EFL freshmen are in a dire need for having intensive exercises to write well-formed sentences and avoid ill-formed sentences. This could be realized through exposing to authentic English texts that provide them with good examples of proper writing in English. The remedy for these trouble spots highlights the importance of reading to the development of FL learners' writing ability.

The present study has revealed that the examined participants have limited knowledge in FL vocabulary and they cannot make the right choice of selecting words appropriate to the context of writing. In this regard, it is necessary for the FL instructors to train their students on how to use different words of multiple meanings in various contexts of writing.

In terms of formality and objectivity, the Egyptian EFL should be trained to avoid using features commonly used in informal writing or spoken language while writing FL composition. These features include the use of first and second pronouns' contractions and rhetorical questions.

Recommendations for further research

The current study provides the following recommendations for further research:

1. Performance of Egyptian EFL freshmen in writing FL composition can be replicable on the basis of gender comparison between male and female freshmen.
2. The present study can be replicable in terms of the relationship between different FL proficiency levels and the Egyptian EFL learners' performance in writing FL composition.
3. Performance of the Egyptian EFL learners' in writing FL composition can be investigated according to their FL attitudes and motivation.
4. The present study can be replicable using different types of population such as the ESP Egyptian students.
5. The Egyptian EFL learners' performance in writing FL composition can be investigated in terms of their writing strategies.
6. The influence of FL instructors' feedback on the Egyptian EFL learners' performance in writing FL composition can be examined as well.

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Appendix A

Content of the Academic Writing Course based on Whitaker's (2010) Academic writing guide

Topic	Description
Why academic writing	Students are familiarized with the main features of academic writing
The writing process	Students become knowledgeable with stages of writing
Choosing and narrowing a topic	Students are trained to begin with some ideas and choose the best one after consulting their instructor who provides them with steps to choose a topic
Brainstorming	Students are trained to write all information, opinions, and questions pertinent to the topic. This helps them determine what they already know, and what they need to know about the topic.
Thesis statement	Students are taught to write the main idea of the essay, their viewpoints about the topic, the purpose of their writing, and how to solve problems
Basic outline	Students are trained to organize the ideas of their first attempt of writing the essay
Taking notes	Students are trained to take notes on the main ideas of their writing of the first basic outline. The FL instructor train them on how take notes based on summarizing, paraphrasing, quoting, and making comments
Detailed outline	Students are trained to write detailed outline by adding new ideas to the basic outline
Writing the first draft	Students are trained to write separate paragraphs and save the introduction and conclusion for the end
The introduction	Students are trained to write introduction that gains the readers' immediate attention and provides the necessary information and definition of the topic
Body paragraphs	Each paragraph should contain a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence
The conclusion	Students are trained to summarize, restate and paraphrase the main ideas of their topic. They may also provide advice, explanation and make prediction
Connection between ideas	Students are taught to use coherence tools among paragraphs
Revising	Students are trained to revise the organization of ideas, relevance of the supporting sentences to the topic sentences, and rereading the essay as the audience
Editing	Students are trained to examine whether every sentence is clear, complete and concise. They can use an English-English dictionary and a grammar book
Proofreading	Students are taught to check their writing for the careless errors such as punctuation, spelling, capitalization meaning of every word, etc.

Appendix B: Checklist of evaluation the Egyptian EFL freshmen's writing composition

Criterion	Description	Score 100
Content and ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ideas are not varied - Topic is inadequately treated - Lack or absence of useful details - Irrelevancy of content - Writing purpose is not fulfilled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 marks for each item (20)
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Absence of cohesive connectives - Absence of coherence or logical sequence - Weak, poor and ineffective introduction, supporting sentences and conclusion - Paragraphing is poor - Difficulty to follow ideas - Fluent expressions do not exist - Poor organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 marks for each item (21)
Choice of word	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incorrect choice and usage of word - Limited vocabulary - Inappropriateness of words to the context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 6 marks for each item (18)
Language use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poor sentences and structures - Frequent grammatical errors - Awkward sentences - Obscured meaning - Structural errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 marks for each item (20)
Formality and objectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frequent use of the first pronouns - Frequent use of contracted forms - Frequent use of rhetorical questions - Frequent use of colloquial words - Frequent use of emotive language - Frequent use of two-word verbs - Frequent use of abbreviations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 marks for each item (21)

