

Scripted Curriculum: Obstacles in Teaching Writing Skills – Case Study in KRG, Iraq

Shohidahon Nurmatova

Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Education

Tishk International University, Iraq, KRG

e-mail: shahida.nurmatova@tiu.edu.iq

Abstract

The current research investigated how the scripted curriculum affects English writing and reading instruction in Iraq's Kurdistan Region schools. The majority of EFL/ESL reading and writing instruction research is conducted at the university level. The goal of this research was to characterize how high school English teachers in Iraq's Kurdistan Region perceive and manage teaching reading and writing under the memorization-based approaches. The research presented here used a case study design to conduct qualitative research. A total of 40 high school students and four English teachers who were piloting the implementation of a memorization-based curriculum were surveyed about possible challenges in teaching and learning reading and writing skills. The researcher herself used documentary study, interviews with English teachers, and a classroom survey to gather data for the qualitative study. The challenges that English teachers face when attempting to teach reading and writing were drawn from their own classroom experiences that followed a scripted curriculum. Teachers' and students' attitudes toward learning the writing skills were described using the features and limitations of memorization-based approach. The findings of this study demonstrated that both teacher and student subjects had differing viewpoints and challenges in teaching and learning reading and writing skills in English. The researcher then suggested solutions to minimize the drawbacks of a memorization-based approach to teaching and developing English writing abilities in the classroom.

Keywords: scripted curriculum, memorization-based learning, obstacles, teaching English reading and writing skills, high school EFL context.

1. Introduction

Language is a means by which humans can communicate their thoughts, ideas, emotions, and opinions. Human beings struggle to interact with one another because they lack language skills. To accomplish their goals in the modern world, people must communicate using a universally spoken language. Additionally, language skills are required for modern-day citizens to communicate effectively with one another. Successful contact between people is possible solely through language acquisition. Thus, English Language learners should place a premium on language skills – especially reading and writing – as these are the most critical skills for building up vocabulary, learning sentence structure and, simply, communicating in contemporary society.

It is well understood that learners have a difficult time when they're learning any language because of the things previously unknown to them, like the vocabulary, grammar structure, pronunciation, and everyday use. Acquiring new skills when learning a new language varies

according to the perception of people and their mindsets. Students' impressions may include instructors, educational practices, and abilities, as well as their thoughts and views of satisfaction. Some of these second language learning related ideas have been examined in great depth (attitudes and beliefs) (desired level of success in L2 proficiency, attributions of success or failure). These expectations are connected to the theories, procedures, and purposes of foreign language. Students' feelings and values have a strong influence on how well learners learn. (Tse, 2000) To master the new vocabulary and other skills of a language, one must put in more effort and time. In this respect, a language learner must know the requisite skills in order to be understood around the world.

Reading is one of the basics that functions as a scaffolding toward learning vocabulary, sentence structure, speaking, and writing. It is one of the fundamental skills needed for academic achievement. It is one of the most important skills gained in early academic life (McGuinness, 2004). However, there are a considerable number of students who are not involved in learning, particularly in reading or have no mental/moral support from both families and schoolteachers toward reading and learning a language in general in school districts in Kurdistan Region of Iraq, not only in the primary schools, but also as adults. On the issues of course material, insufficient school buildings, outdated methods, lack of training, and technical facilities, large classroom population of 40-50 students at once create troubles for effective learning and teaching, result in negative feelings of students toward learning in schools, especially public ones, across Kurdistan Region of Iraq. (Avcı & Doghonadze, 2017) Students in secondary and high schools experience significant problems in expressing their ideas in written form due to the disinclination toward reading. Primary and secondary school teachers, however, have struggled with lack of knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm to motivate the learners to read and write, unfortunately. The social and so-called "traditional" barriers prevent the learners from dipping into reading from their early ages, the consequences of which are seen in inability of students to explore and describe their thoughts in written form. Just as Taheri (2014) asserts, secondary education is emphasized on memorization-based learning. The students are encouraged to rely on memorizing summarized study sheets by repetition. Dismantling such a strategy needs far more time than a two-year preparatory program. The students share necessary information for exams and quizzes via Facebook to avoid excessive reading and create a "shortcut" for others to acquire the material easier. While this may seem to be a creative learning technique, it results in a group of learners with undeveloped interpretive skills as a result of their preference for less demanding modes of learning.

Another cultural problem in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's education system is a generalized lack of respect for leisure reading. Wahab (2012), in his article "Literary Theory and Teaching Democracy in a Post-Dictatorial Period" observed that many of his fourth-year students at Salahaddin University in Erbil, Kurdistan, confided him that they had never read a book in their years of study prior to taking his class. Hamash (1973), attributes some of the problems and concerns and weaknesses associated with teaching English in Iraq to the textbooks used. For Iraq's Kurdistan Region, the same could be said. It is important to make a distinction between syllabi and curricula (White, 1988). Curriculum development entails identifying students' interests, developing goals, and assessing evaluation intentions (Richards, 2001).

According to other sources, the language syllabus should be product-based, process-based, synthetic, or analytic (Wilkins, 1976). There have been several attempts to categorize language syllabi in this regard. White (1988) distinguishes two types of syllabi: Type A and Type B. Type A emphasizes pre-specification of linguistic or other contents or skills – interventionist technique; Type B is non-interventionist, observational, aiming to integrate [language] learners in real-world communication without pre-selection or preparation of objects (Allen 1984, p. 65). In Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the education system proposed the Type A – the product syllabus for English Language teaching in secondary and high schools. Teaching is based on Classical Method or Grammar Translation Method; the approach emphasizes assisting students in translating from one language to another while ignoring the target language’s culture as well as the pronunciation of words. The approach is believed to intend to help students develop mentally through mental exercises involving *memorization* and comparison of the target and native languages. (Karim, 2015). Students would gain a better understanding of their native language by studying the target language’s grammar, which would aid them in speaking and writing their native language (Freshman, 2000).

Writing is the most difficult and challenging of the four skills to master. To express what the students want to say in writing, the ELLs should consider the main point of the content, vocabulary use, the structure of the whole written text, and grammar rules – all simultaneously. (Srinivas, 2019) The most difficult linguistic feature of writing in English is its complexity and vocabulary. The teachers should engage the students in group activities in order to enhance their writing skills, so that they become involved and perform well in written assignments.

2. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of teachers and learners on the scripted curriculum, and how it creates obstacles in teaching and learning the reading and writing skills in secondary and high schools in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The information gained from this study provides educators with a close examination of the effects of “invisible” barriers generated from both the viewpoints of parents and teachers when approaching teaching the reading and writing skills. The question that guided this research is “What obstacles does the scripted curriculum create for teachers when teaching English Reading and Writing skills in high schools in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq?” Currently, there is a limited amount of qualitative research that addresses the very problem. Parents and educators must provide students with sufficient encouragement toward reading and writing by helping them face the challenges and mistakes that they can learn to overcome.

3. Review of Literature

Among the various aspects of the English language, writing is most difficult to acquire for ELLs because of its complexity. One of the biggest barriers for the students to obtain writing skills is the absence of encouragement by teachers, unfortunately. The lack of motivation and writing environment for students to compose and demonstrate their writing skills is the obstacle the teachers and learners have to overcome (Mayes, 2020). Facilitating students throughout the writing process also improves their work by providing clear and specific

goals, assisting the learners organize their ideas, having them collaborate throughout the writing process, and giving feedback on their work. (Graham et al. 2012).

Another prime obstacle in teaching writing skills in both secondary and high schools is the focus on the outcome rather than the process. "Teachers are not qualified enough in teaching writing skills. The major focus of the teachers is the product approach along with the product-based assessment without scaffolding the process skills." (Setyono, 2014)

The common belief in majority of schools in Kurdistan Region of Iraq is that the final product determines the knowledge of students as well as the teachers. At this juncture, Setonyo (2014) rightly says that by following this model, students avoid writing several drafts in order to create the final result of writing via the revising process. On the basis of the teachers' planned learning experiences, it is inferred that the teachers were unable to create teaching methods that were suitable for the intended writing tasks they developed.

In addition to the research of Setyono (2014), Oraif (2016) adds the following, "In this regard, L2 teachers are mostly concerned with grammatical accuracy and the final written product rather than the process." The ideal situation would involve a balance between the process and product approaches, as Brown (2001) emphasizes. In his opinion, it is difficult to classify the method without contemplating the end result, as the end product is the main target for the learners; however, this might not be true in all teaching circumstances. The process-oriented approach can be beneficial for English Language Learners at the intermediate stage, as it can assist them in establishing the process of creating and developing a written text. (Oraif, 2016) Another greatest barrier preventing teachers educating the learners to writing skills properly is catching up with the yearly academic curriculum and completing it on time with highest grades possible, without proper basis of knowledge or practice. At this point, Grady & Moore (2020) specify it by saying that the standardized mandates like tests, reading assignments, grades, etc., cause robotized writing instruction in the classroom. The tight schedule of teachers with one or two periods of teaching writing weekly and a bunch of topics to be covered within a short period of time, or mandates like weekly quizzes or tests, rushes both the teachers and students to complete everything due to the standardized curriculum. The insufficiency of time to practice and reflect on writing results in frustration and boredom of students in writing classes. Grady & Moore (2020) in their research state that the children met the objectives but did not demonstrate a sense of empowerment as writers or an appreciation for the personal importance of writing. It is obvious that writing instruction must progress beyond automated mandates if students are to develop their own voices. Students must believe that their thoughts and stories are deserving of being written and shared. Students need time to compose freely, which provides them with "me" time. (Grady & Moore, 2020).

The standardized tests and grades have a great impact on the future of learners, as they determine where to go and what to major in. As Mallia (2017) points out that the lack of collaborative learning, critical thinking, supplying evidence, allowance to plagiarism, and deficiency in learning the essay development in general, create no basis in learning the writing skills. Here, it is worth mentioning the quote of Al-Khatib (2017) that below-average English language proficiency, a lack of reading and text interpretation, and problems writing in a second language are all attributed to culture-specific schemata or mental representations.

In high school, teaching writing in a structured writing class environment often focused on providing students with "models of successful writing" and requesting that they repeat these

models (Al-Khatib, 2017). The emphasis is on the particular characteristics of written texts: grammar, text form, vocabulary, and style. Sometimes, little attention is paid to the texts' rhetorical features or the social contexts in which they functioned. The expectation is that learners would develop an aptitude for academic writing either during their schooling or as a result of copying the modeled materials (Al-Kasawneh & Maher 2010; Dahkordi & Allami 2012; Ghabool et. al. 2012).

The insufficiency of reading practices, analysis, drawing conclusions based on the reading, or deficiency of time to practice writing are another impediment in learning and teaching writing skills in schools in Kurdistan. The effect of the native language and different mindsets of students resulted by seeing reading unimportant, learning in large classes as well as time-consuming paper-check have also resulted in mourning of students when hearing about the writing lessons. The primary reason for the learners' difficulties with speaking and writing skills is the linguistic influence of their mother tongue, indicates P.S. Rao (2019). Likewise, Wahlström (2006) mentions that classes are too large, and there is a scheduling and grading problem.

There have been a lot of alterations and advancements in teaching writing skills in recent years, particularly since the implementation of technology and digital web browsing. However, in many schools across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the implementation of technology is significantly limited. As Lorenz (2009) reports, the lack of computers in schools in conducting creative writing lessons and organizing the graphic organizers for teaching writing have become one of the greatest problems the teachers need to overcome.

When it comes to teaching English reading and writing skills in secondary schools in Kurdistan Region of Iraq, EFL teachers face with a major cultural obstacle – memorization-based teaching and learning, which results in content-oriented, or limited learning. It restricts learners' exploratory skills and fosters a "one-and-done" attitude toward reading and writing. Besides, it has an immense influence on underdevelopment reading and writing skills in secondary and high schools in KRG of Iraq. As Al-Shaikhly (2017) claims, many Iraqi students in the United States have minimal English language skills, and as a result, universities usually require them to undergo a semester or two of language classes before enrolling in graduate programs.

4. Methodology

4.1 Case Study Method

This research study aimed to find out the obstacles that prevent teachers from incorporating necessary skills in teaching English reading and writing. It was important to determine to what extent memorization-based teaching and learning affects the learning outcome of students, English reading and writing skills, in particular.

To conduct this research study further, the case study methodology was chosen, for the case study research is an investigation and analysis of a single or collective case, intended to capture the complexity of the object of study (Stake, 1995). Case study methodology maintains deep connections to core values and intentions and is “particularistic, descriptive and heuristic” (Merriam 2009, p. 46). This qualitative approach “explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a *case*) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* and reports a *case description and case*

themes” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Case study research has been defined by the unit of analysis, the process of study, and the outcome or end product, all essentially the case (Merriam, 2009). The goal of my research was to ascertain to what extent the “scripted curriculum” or memorization-based teaching and learning was necessary for English language learners in secondary and high schools in Kurdistan Regional Government. The interview was developed to acquire more qualitative data regarding the memorization-based learning. During the interview, the specifying follow-up questions were asked to four English language and Academic Writing teachers, to get into more, topic-related, details. It also gave each teacher the opportunity to express their opinions about other obstacles such as content-limited learning and memorization-based teaching methods that result in memorizing-based teaching. The interview questions for teachers were developed in three categories: the education background of teachers, trainings, and classroom/instructional methods.

The student questionnaire includes 17 questions in total and was shared in person with 40 high school students after school time. The questions were designed to measure the necessity and/or disadvantage of limited-content and memorization-based learning in English reading and writing classes. The students of the research were also given a chance to express their thoughts and suggestions, related to learning reading and writing skills, in written form.

4.2 Participants

The participants of the study were four secondary and high school teachers who are specialized in teaching Academic Writing. All four majored in English Language Teaching and Literature with between 9 and 7 years of solid teaching experience. None of them is a native English speaker. However, they had worked and had taught students with different ethnic backgrounds in European and Asian countries. The teacher-participants of the study are new to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and its education system. Thus, they received a 2-month training program when they first arrived in this country – 2 years ago. The other participants in the study were students from grade 10, at international school. There were 40 students in the class with different ethnic backgrounds: Kurds-70%, Turksih-20%, and Arabs-10% with intermediate level of English language. They were chosen by me based on their qualifications for reading and writing skills. Research consent forms for both teachers and students were handed in person and were collected back signed in a period of 7 working days.

Ninety percent of the class population receives the highest grades in all subjects each year. However, they still struggle with reading comprehension, analysis, interpretation of intermediate and advanced texts, and creative writing skills.

5. Data Analysis

General inductive approach uses a straightforward set of procedures for qualitative data analysis to provide conclusions that are trustworthy and accurate (Thomas, 2006). The research data was analyzed using the inductive method that involves the reduction of data obtained by organizing it into significant themes discussing a scripted learning.

I addressed the research question, “What Obstacles does the Scripted Curriculum Create to the Teachers when Teaching English Reading and Writing Skills in high schools in Kurdistan

Region of Iraq?" by analyzing the student questionnaire and interview notes collected from the students and teachers during the process of the research.

In total, there were two rounds of data collection: student-survey form and teacher interviews. The data analysis method was adapted from Miles & Huberman (1994). First, field notes taken during interviews. Step two was putting the fieldnotes into a word document and locked in a coded file. To determine the themes, the study questions were used as a guide. The three themes were developed upon thorough interpretation of code phrases such as *deficiency of writing lessons, lack of teacher-trainings, demotivation, memorizing the textbook content*. The next step was creating summaries of the fieldnotes taken during the interviews. Teachers' efforts to construct learning experiences and evaluation strategies as well as the students' perceptions and viewpoints on the memorization-based teaching and learning were anticipated to be revealed through the summary. After that, the conclusions were drawn by organizing the themes based on the data analysis.

At the end of the data analysis, I explored the students' and teachers' reactions, viewpoints, and perceptions about the obstacles.

6. Findings

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the scripted curriculum creates obstacles for teachers teaching English reading and writing skills. I based my findings on the thorough analysis of the student questionnaire responses and the teacher interviews, both the audio, and the hand script taken during the process of the interview. The interview was conducted in English language. Three themes were generated in the result of the analysis: students reported that they didn't get enough practice with writing in English or doing extra reading assignments that were important; lack of excitement in teachers and students caused by the memorization-based teaching and learning; and the lack of Professional Teacher Training in Kurdistan Schools.

6.1. Theme 1: Students indicated that they do not receive relevant and adequate practice in English writing skills and in extra reading assignments.

Of the students answering the questionnaire, almost ten students agreed that English in general and the writing skills in scripted curriculum demotivate the learners from developing their language skills.

The textbook's substance is limited to simple, dull, and theoretical knowledge. Several respondents stated that English writing lessons should not be obligatory because they do not provide necessary, practical information (See Appendix A). In scripted curriculum, the lessons are mainly based on lecturing the theory. For example, the students focus on grammar rules, reading and finding the usage of a certain tense, memorizing the names of tenses and new words with their definitions the way they are given in the textbook.

Different viewpoints of students regarding the reading expansion were illustrated in Appendix A. A few of them demonstrated dissatisfaction by responding that they were never assigned to read an extra work of literature of any kind. The lesson is designed and framed according to the content of the textbook only to prepare the students for exams. The exams, in their turn, are fully based on textbook material. For example, comprehension questions are the same as those in the school textbook.

There were also other students who gave positive comments about the teachers knowing that the latter ones are overwhelmed with teaching the school material and running the lessons according to the yearly curriculum. The content of the textbook, homework assignments, and tests are first prerequisites for earning a high-Grade Point Average (GPA), not extra readings. As it can be seen from the response of students, the priority of learning in scripted curriculum environment is given to earning the highest GPA to get enrolled in the university without sitting any entrance exam. The lower the GPA, the more the students are required to sit the university acceptance exam.

In the result of the data analysis, it can also be seen that some students agreed that reading helps them “go further” in learning. They admitted that it could contribute to a large extent through showing the reader an insight into the works of professional writers. This proves the idea that the students are ready to be challenged by reading materials outside the school content. It is important for such students to learn in a different curriculum to expand their knowledge and have enough practice in both reading and writing. The scripted curriculum does not provide enough sources for students to possess a long-term learning, nor does it have the learners push their limits to demonstrate their full potential.

Additionally, according to the students' responses towards the scripted curriculum, it was determined that most students transferred from other public schools with memorization-based learning were confident in their memorization abilities during the learning process. “Memorizing the topics included in exams, we are guaranteed at least 90 points out of 100, and there’s no point to spend hours on learning the topics”, reported the students. They claimed that they had found the memorizing approach to be simple and effective in assisting them in passing both the school and state tests.

However, when students with a non-scripted learning background were surveyed, negative perceptions regarding the memorization method of study were discovered to be widespread. As a result, the students were convinced that lecturing using the textbook material was not a successful instructional method. Additionally, some students had an indecisive attitude toward negative or positive thoughts regarding the memorizing approach. One student commented that memorization should only be applied in multiple-choice questioned tests that ask about facts, dates, proper names, and definitions of terminologies.

Additionally, there were some students who expressed their perspectives toward English writing instruction and English in general. Their unfavorable comments included fear in communicating in English language and perception and judgment of others around them. Generally, the students believe that there is lack of emphasis on class discussion and insufficient sessions over the week. By constantly memorizing textbook material, the students aren't exposed to real-time conversations, phrases, or activities aimed at helping them improve their speaking skills during classes. The lessons have traditionally focused on exam-oriented teaching and learning, which incorporates only theoretical knowledge. It happens so because the tests and exams include the questions from the textbook contents only, in the result of which the students cannot acquire adequate practice in speaking or other skills in English.

Also, there were some responses in which students confessed how weak they were in performing writing in their mother tongue, leaving aside their writing skills in English. Such students report the following, “We are already poor writers in our native tongue. How could possibly are we to exhibit our writing skills in a language that we are unfamiliar with?” Reading

and writing lessons are taught once a week in which the learners are directed to theoretical learning only. Insufficient writing and reading sessions result in poor performance of both teachers and students. Writing is a complex skill that does not develop on its own; instead, it takes practice and training. Yet another factor for this is that many students do not receive the necessary or appropriate writing education. (Graham, 2019)

As to learning English in general, all respondents agreed that English should be a required subject in high school, nine advised that the curriculum be adjusted to meet students' needs. They comment, "We believe it is beneficial that English lessons and writing skills should be required in high school. However, we want to receive additional hands-on exercises in addition to the textbook knowledge." The lessons are usually framed with the requirements of the scripted curriculum – textbook content memorization with little or no practice of writing skills. Besides, the English writing lessons are conducted once weekly in which the students are taught the rules of writing the paragraph/essay/composition and memorize the essential parts of them, as in how to start the introduction, examples, linking words, and the sample essay given in the textbook.

The viewpoints of all students about the lecturing instruction based on the textbook content only and memorization type of study during the English writing lessons were quite similar. During and after the writing sessions, the learners are required to memorize all the rules and new vocabulary the same way they are given in the textbook. No further or detailed explanation is provided, nor it is supported by practical knowledge. The writing strategies are never explained or practiced during or after the class. The students pass all the tests and exams by blindly memorizing the content of the book or by simply re-phrasing the sample essays provided in the textbook with no idea what type of essay it is. The only thing the students are aware of about the writing skills is the parts of the essay: intro, 3 body paragraphs and a conclusion each of which must be written in different paragraphs.

All students suggest that the writing sessions should provide them with practical knowledge during the guided practice. The content of the textbook does not give them a chance to move further or to think out of the box. One of the reasons that the books are outdated is that the exams and tests solely rely on theoretical knowledge rather than the practical one. Thus, the context of the textbooks is generally designed according to the state exams.

Similar to students, the teachers hold the same opinion regarding the insufficiency of practical learning during the writing and reading lessons. Even though teachers were aware of their students' viewpoints about the lesson, they were only doing what was required – preparing the students for exams.

As it is illustrated in Appendix A, the teachers' response emphasizes that students' books provide them with a test-oriented topic to discuss in class. However, they strive to teach students to the maximum and benefit from the "limited" instructional time. Due to the necessity of exam preparation, teaching the textbook context only demands additional instructional time, leaving aside actual writing practice.

At this point, one of the teachers reported that good writing is supported by reading habits which depend on students' abilities to express themselves well in writing. "Learners who read will develop their writing ability, with the gain of confidence and a larger vocabulary" comments one of the interviewees. Pedagogists and classroom experts have recognized the significance of the reading-writing association and urged language teachers to maximize the

distinctiveness created by the intersection of these two skills. Spack (1985) established the literary journal as a reading/writing-and-writing/reading reinforcing activity. However, the lack of instructional time prevents them from providing the students with more reading practice. The role of teachers in scripted curriculum is to guide the students toward memorizing certain topics necessary for tests. No teaching happens here, nor practical skills or critical thinking abilities of students are developed. Every day is just another routine and monotonous time for preparing the students for tests. In fact, the students should enjoy the learning process and challenge themselves at a time to demonstrate their abilities and work on their errors. This is what actual schools are meant for.

6.2. Theme 2: The lack of enthusiasm in both teachers and students due to teaching and learning methods based on memorization.

Schools should avoid taking a one-track approach to learning, focusing solely on taking the school or the state tests. Some students discovered that all they had to do to get good grades was to memorize their textbooks. Besides, they found it demoralizing to be penalized for bad test scores. “We already know what we will do in school or in a certain lesson – read and memorize the content of a chapter, that’s it. And we will be asked the same material in exams” reported the student-participants.

Students' lack of interest in learning English writing and reading skills is due to the textbooks being filled with uninteresting, unfamiliar, and either complex or easy information that has little to do with students' needs. The topics in learning materials were designed according to the exam content and directly related to memorization. They reported that reading was either too short, too long, or too complex to understand. They were not chosen according to the students' interests. The students cannot differentiate the word “learning” from “memorization” ever since they've been in primary school. This learning structure has shaped the “learning” method of both the teachers and the students unfortunately. The reason behind this is the scripted curriculum teaching.

Additionally, the student-participants reported in their surveys that their teachers assign homework that requires them to memorize advanced grammar rules or passages related to sociology rather than English. They outline that the homework should not be based on the memorization of grammar topics or other unrelated things that have nothing to do with writing. This sincere confession of students demonstrates that they are willing to get a long-lasting knowledge. Memorizing the rules of certain grammar tenses or whole passages unrelated to writing from the textbook does not provide sufficient learning. A quality education emphasizes the social, mental, and cognitive development of students. It does more than just prepare the students for standardized testing; it prepares them for life.

The students also say that they should be tested from various sources regarding the topic being studied. If it is writing lessons, then the students need to perform their writing skills, not to match the punctuation or grammar rules to their definitions. Here they reported that English writing skills was not a rigid, inflexible subject to be tested by relying on only a certain amount of information provided in the textbook. Such responses of the students show their great interest in expanding their knowledge and go beyond the required system of education. The students expect to be actively involved in their education and have access to effective learning backed by caring and qualified teachers when they are in school.

Another demotivational factor in learning reading and writing skills is the plain reading of ready analysis of texts done by the teachers. The students are not given detailed explanation of a certain topic or a chance to take a different approach to analyze or synthesize the reading passage by themselves. The research responses show that the students, whether they understand or not, read texts together with a teacher during the class, and the teacher pauses after each paragraph to reflect and annotate. Some teachers use a local language to explain the parts they didn't understand, and the students take notes in their mother language, not in English. It is done so because the topic is vital for the test, and we must memorize it at any cost", confessed the research participants.

Students, nowadays, are not aware of "real" memorization techniques. It is well accepted that most students and their teachers use rote memorization. Memorizing information is a waste of time; more importantly, it discourages students from making critical connections and memorizing what they have learned (Klemm, 2007).

6.3. Theme: 3 The Lack of Professional Teacher Trainings in Schools in Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

The scarcity of teacher training programs in Iraq's Kurdistan region's schools is another obstacle for teachers to employ a productive writing and reading lessons. External trainers, often those who have been in English speaking countries, are employed periodically by the Ministry of Education in a train-the-trainers manner. Only a small, selected group of people receives instruction via a particular course curriculum that is designed for the teachers themselves and teachers who are considered capable of educating. This includes teacher supervisors, teachers who exhibit favorable aptitudes, and professors at colleges. Secondary and high school teachers in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq do not have professional training to implement the student-centered learning. And finally, there is no established approach, nor is there a standard training material.

English teachers in Kurdistan Region of Iraq are supposed to teach according to the student-centered method, as explained by Leu & Price-Rome (2006), as they feel that teachers should offer minimum lecturing, small group activities, and involve students by having them solve problems. In such methods of teaching and learning, discussion happens a lot, and students constantly ask about things.

Applying the student-centered approach in Kurdistan Region of Iraq's classroom environment is almost impossible and impracticable. The number of students in each class, which averages 20-25 students, restricts teachers from providing appropriate individual attention and prevents the teaching methods that allow for group learning. Moreover, the student-focused teaching cannot possibly work when implementing the scripted curriculum.

Besides, teachers note various obstacles in using the student-centered teaching method such as inadequate training, a lack of class time, and a scarcity of teaching English writing skills resources. "We are asked to implement a student-centered learning in our classes. However, it is quite impossible to apply this approach because of the large class-population and insufficient lessons during the week. The writing sessions are conducted once a week, in which we should focus on the tests and exams contents. The structure of the lesson is unchangeable, so there's no point of implementing the student-focused teaching." It's critical to ensure that a student-centered learning environment is just that: an education tailored to meet the pedagogical and developmental needs of each student in the class. With scripted teaching

in crowded classrooms, it is impossible to expect the teachers to maintain a quality education or anticipate the students in interactive learning.

Apart from the teacher-trainings, using technology in the classroom is another significant prerequisite for a teacher to be well-familiar with. As known, the process of integrating new technologies is complicated. Resources and expertise of educational procedures are necessary for teachers to successfully integrate technology (Barron et. al., 2003). In addition to this, teachers require support in the form of instructional assistance from either the school administration or other resources outside the school campus. It can also be from fellow colleagues or expert teachers who are experienced in using technology well.

Teacher participants shared a challenge when it came to incorporating technology in their English writing teaching. Despite teaching for over 5 to 10 years, two of four were at a complete loss when it came to utilization of technology in teaching. "The lack of training is the primary barrier to technology implementation in the lesson" cite both teachers. Nonetheless, despite having no formal training, they both learned about technology integration by observation and experimentation as well as by looking at other colleagues' methods. While they implemented a range of different ways, their approaches to incorporating technology varies based on their plan, how much technology they really used, and their views on technology and as a teacher in the classroom. They reported that they learned utilizing technology here and there, without any professional guidance, by observing other teachers using it. While the experienced teacher saw the technology as a supplementary tool, the beginner instructor placed it at the center of her education, believing it was fundamental to doing so.

Although the school administration or higher authorities did not provide any teacher-training support, the teachers were able to develop their digital skills on their own and involve the students into learning process by having them post, review, and reflect on one another's posts on social media. However, it did not give the teachers a chance to teach the techniques of academic writing, though.

On the one hand, the integration of technology in the classroom might benefit from the involvement of a trained instructor. On the other hand, instructors' ideas and attitudes regarding technology are just as, if not more, significant. One such source of support for teachers could be targeted professional development that helps teachers better understand their ideas and attitudes. (Zoch et. al., 2016)

7. Discussions and Recommendations

How can instructors in Iraqi Kurdistan get through the barriers the education system made for them by utilizing a scripted curriculum?

As a result, the researcher came up with the following findings and several conclusions:

Under a grammar-translation approach, students will almost never get a chance to neither practice using the target language for real dialogue nor for academic writing skills. Some participants viewed this as discouraging. Such a strategy should be employed with caution, and teachers should employ it by engaging students in the target language, so that the teaching and learning experience doesn't become completely one-sided. Methods based on memorization technique could be implemented in scaffolding new information and should definitely be

supported by other activities to connect the information with the old one to strengthen the learned material and to help the learners move it to the “long-term” memory storage.

Attending classes just for the purpose of preparing for college entrance examinations should also be avoided. Students that came from non-scripted learning environment and cared about acquiring long-lasting knowledge noticed that classroom assessments merely required them to recall information from the textbook they were reading at the time. They were shown to be dissatisfied as a result of their poor test performance because they were not used to memorize book contents word-to-word.

Teachers, in the meantime, were accused of being ineffective at incorporating engaging writing lessons. This happens because teacher-training and student-centered learning support programs aren't present in the entire country. Low-quality teaching in writing with memorization-based approach also leads students to feel hopeless towards learning. To avoid damaging their students' ability to learn, the administrative staff of school must be aware of students' perceptions of how they are treated and be ready to remediate the harm.

The lack of teacher-training programs in general and in utilizing technology into teaching is another obstacle for teachers to incorporate interactive lessons. Educators should be updated with all possible techniques to avoid the memorization-based learning effects and methods employing technological tools. The school administration should provide the teachers and learners with necessary labs to do practical learning, extend the reading and writing lesson-hours during the week, technological equipment, and a flexible access to the Internet, particularly for writing lessons. This will motivate both the learner and the teacher to do some practical work and have immediate feedback, right in the classroom.

The findings reported in this study back up the claim that standard examinations that require line-to-line memorization are connected to old-style, teacher-fronted, instruction and support the idea that memorizing is based on old-style instruction. It's crucial to point out that retrieval practice should be used in a meaningful, elaborate manner in learning rather than "simply" for remembering the material. (Weinstein, 2018)

Admittedly, this qualitative study is based on the view of only a small number of high school students in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. A study carried out by Kikuchi (2009), suggests that the next stage could be to use questionnaires to gather quantitative data from larger subjects. However, considering the findings presented here, difficulties that arose from interviews and student-instructed open-response surveys should not be neglected and should be considered as a possible barrier for teachers to teaching English writing skills.

8. Conclusion

This study found that in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, there were numerous problems related to teaching and acquiring English writing and reading skills in high school under the scripted curriculum. Majority of students concluded that it did not contribute to their learning process; whereas, the students who came from memorization-based learning background, found this technique quite easy in “learning” the material.

Lack of interest in teaching and acquiring writing abilities due to scripted curriculum requirements presented another difficulty in the course of study. It is then proposed that in

writing classes, English teachers should focus on the instances where memorization might be employed as a method of scaffolding the fundamentals or basics.

The Ministry of Education of Kurdistan Regional Government should take steps to improve the English program such as redesigning the curriculum, advancing the teacher training program, and enhancing English courses in educator colleges by actively mobilizing highly qualified English teachers and trainers in the field of English instruction.

Lastly, it is important to point out that the current English curriculum isn't ready for students' needs in acquiring English and writing skills. In different curriculum, after reading literary works, students should be directed to do assignments, such as writing short character analysis, summarizing plot points, or reflecting on an idea or passage and expanding their thoughts by putting their thoughts into their own words and writing them down. The assignments are, in effect, directive and reflective guidelines for reading and writing. After all, the students benefit from doing all the required tasks. It's easy to see the connection between reading, writing, and comprehension. Students who read for the purpose of learning will be better equipped to write. As a result, learners who are actively involved in writing to learn will be better readers. Student understanding and capacity to demonstrate their knowledge will improve with both techniques. (Mackey, 2005)

In order to use the memorization-based strategy solely in specific instances like structuring new knowledge and recruiting older information to link with the new one, systemized efforts are required. To deal with the spread of English as a worldwide language, teacher-training courses for new instructors, workshops, and conferences on technology use should be appropriately maintained.

It is suggested that future researchers examine other possible obstacles in teaching writing skills and motivation of students regarding the writing lessons. This questionnaire might possibly be used by other researchers for future investigations. If this is the case, some questionnaire items will need to be modified as they were developed particularly to address the problems that are created when memorization-based learning is used in teaching English reading and writing skills.

References

- Ahmed, H. H., Puteh-Behak, F., & Sidek, H. M. (2015). *Examining EFL Secondary Reading Curriculum in Iraqi Kurdistan: A Review*. *Journal of Applied Sciences*, 15(3), 377-391, 2015 ISSN 1812-56-54. <https://dx.doi.org/10.3923/jas.2015.377.391>
- Al-Khatib, H. (2017). *The Five Tier Model for Teaching English Academic Writing in EFL Contexts*. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) International Peer-Reviewed Journal*, 8(2), 74-86. <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol8no2.5>
- Amin, M. Y. (2017). *English Language Teaching Methods and Reforms in English Curriculum in Iraq; and Overview*. *JUHD* 3(3), <https://dx.doi.org/10.21928/juhd.20170820.23>
- Avci, R., & Doghonadze, N. (2017). *The Challenges of Teaching EFL Listening in Iraqi (Kurdistan Region) Universities*. *Universal Journal of Education Research*, 5(11) <https://dx.doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2017.051116>
- Bambang, C. Y., Rahayu, & Titik. (2020). *EFL Students' Motivation in Writing, Writing Proficiency, and Gender TEFLIN Journal: A publication on the teaching and learning of English*. Retrieved from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v3i2/162-180>
- Brady, T. F. (2008). *Visual long-term memory has a massive storage capacity for object details*. *PNAS*, 105(38), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0803390105>
- Brophy, J. (1983). *Conceptualizing student motivation*. *Educational psychologist*, 18(3), 200-215.
- Butler, Y.G., Iino, M. *Current Japanese Reforms In English Language Education: The 2003 "Action Plan"*. *Lang Policy* 4, 25–45 (2005). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-004-6563-5>
- Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications; 2013b. ISBN 978-1-4129-9531-3
- Gest, S.D., Freeman, N.R., Domitrovich, C.E. & Welsh, J.A. (2004). *Shared book reading and children's language comprehension skills: the moderating role of parental discipline practices*. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 19, 319-336. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1016/j.ecresq.2004.04.007>
- Grady, D., & Moore, M. J. (2018). *Take Joy! Five Teachers Rediscover the Enjoyment of Teaching Writing*. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 85(2), 34-37.
- Graham, S. (2019). *Changing How Writing Is Taught, Review of Research in Education*, 43, 277–303 <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X18821125>
- GÜNEŞ, F. *Discussions of Memorization in Education*. *Eğitim Kuram ve Uygulama Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 6(3), 409-418. <https://doi.org/10.38089/ekvad.2020.37>
- Hsu, J. (2004). *Reading, Writing, and Reading-Writing in the Secondary School*, ERIC, retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov>
- Kikuchi, K. (2009). *Listening to our learners' voices: what demotivates Japanese high school students?* *Language Teaching Research*, 13(4), 453–471. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168809341520>
- Klemm, W. R. (2007). *What Good Is Learning If You Don't Remember It?* *The Journal of Effective Teaching*, 7(1), 61-73.
- Leu, E., & Price-Rom, A. (2006). *Quality of education and teacher learning: A review of the literature*. Retrieved on September 19, 2021, from https://www.edu-links.org/sites/default/files/media/file/EQUIP1_Quality_of_Education_and_Teacher_Learning_A_Review_of_the_Literature.pdf

- Barbara Lorenz, Tim Green & Abbie Brown (2009) *Using Multimedia Graphic Organizer Software in the Prewriting Activities of Primary School Students: What Are the Benefits?*, *Computers in the Schools*, 26(2), 115-129, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07380560902906054>
- Mallia, J. (2017). *Strategies for Developing English Academic Writing Skills*. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, 8(2), <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol8no2.1>
- Mayes, A.S., Coppola, E.C., & Fa, B. (2019). *Using Theatre to Develop Writing Skills: The Story Pirates Idea Storm*. *The Reading Teacher*, <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1855>
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. 3rd ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. (Second edition). London: Sage Publications, Inc.
- O'Brien, M. S. (2005, July 21). *Reading and Writing for Understanding*. Harvard Graduate School of Education. Retrieved on October 2, 2021 from: <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/05/07/reading-and-writing-under-standing>
- Oraif, I. M (2016). *The Right Approach in Practice: A Discussion of the Applicability of EFL Writing Practices in a Saudi Context*. *English Language Teaching*, 9(7), <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n7p97>
- Rao, P.S. (2019) *Teaching of Writing Skills to Foreign or Second Language Learners of English* . *ELT Vibes: International E-Journal For Research in ELT*, 5(2), 136-152.
- Sonmez, H. (2018). *A Review about the Use of the Memorization Strategy during the Learning Process by Students* *International Journal of Languages' Education and Teaching*, 6(1), 212-230, <http://dx.doi.org/10.18298/ijlet.2123>
- Setyono, B. (2014). *Approaches in teaching writing designed by high school English teachers in Indonesia*. *International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research*, 14(1), 477-494, ISSN 2307-4531.
- Sofi-Karim, M. (2015, July). *English Language Teaching in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*. Retrieved from: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280978138>
- Spack, R. (1985). *Literature, reading, writing and ESL: Bridging the gaps*. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19(4), 703-725, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3586672>
- Stake R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Taheri, C. (2014, December). *Teaching the Inferno in Iraqi Kurdistan: A Case Study in Education*. Retrieved from: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280978138>
- Thomas, D. R. (2006). *A General Inductive Approach for Analyzing Qualitative Evaluation Data*, *American Journal of Evaluation (AJE)*, 27(2), 237-246, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1098214005283748>
- Tse, L. (2000). *Student perceptions of foreign language study: A qualitative analysis of foreign language autobiographies*. *The Modern Language Journal*, 84(1), 69-84, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0026-7902.00053>
- Wahlström, A. (2007). *Teaching Writing in Upper Secondary School (Dissertation)*. Retrieved from <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:hj:diva-692>

Weinstein, Y. (2018). *Memorizing versus Understanding*. Retrieved on October 2, 2021, from:
<https://www.learningscientists.org/blog/2018/2/16-1>

Zoch, M., Myers, J., & Belcher, J. (2016). *Teachers' engagement with new literacies: Support for implementing technology in the english/language arts classroom*. *Contemporary Issues in Technology & Teacher Education*, 17(1). Retrieved on October 6, 2021 from:
<https://citejournal.org/volume-17/issue-1-17/english-language-arts/teachers-engagement-with-new-literacies-support-for-implementing-technology-in-the-englishlanguage-arts-classroom>

Appendix A

Table 1: Summary of Students' Responses

Themes	Summary
<p>Students indicated that they do not receive relevant and adequate practice in English writing skills.</p>	<p>One group is quite relaxed with the memorization-based learning because they had already developed the "line-to-line" remembering technique in their past experience. Whereas the other group of learners reports that the writing sessions should prepare them for guided practice by giving them helpful information.</p>
<p>Memorization-based learning demotivates the students from practicing the writing skills properly.</p>	<p>Memorizing textbooks was enough to get good scores. A teacher-student contact declined. Teachers are sometimes accused of poor English literacy and impatience with student failures. Nearly 70% of students claimed their teachers offer them full homework that requires them to acquire writing structure on their own or solely covers book themes. However, some students enjoy memorizing the content and get the best scores.</p>
<p>Students' viewpoints about expanding the reading activities to improve the writing skills of students.</p>	<p>Fixed-mindset students: <i>The reading passages in the textbook are more than enough to learn writing and pass the tests and get targeted GPA grades. We are already loaded with bunch of daily assignments and quizzes. Why load more?</i> Growth-mindset students: <i>I think students need to be given sufficient and more manifold assignments, and their teachers should encourage them to read more resources and works of literature to enhance their intellectual abilities.</i></p>

Table 2: Summary of Teachers' Responses

Themes	Summary
<p>Students indicated that they do not receive relevant and adequate practice in English writing skills.</p> <p>The deficiency of writing sessions and the requirements of memorization-based learning demotivate the teachers and students from practicing the writing skills properly.</p>	<p>Typically, textbooks cover a test-focused topic we must cover in class, but we try to teach students to make the most of their time learning. Due to the extended exam preparations required, there are certain long-text textbooks which require more class time. The content of the book does not fulfill the students' expectations and/or is much above the students' capabilities.</p> <p>The 50-minute time slot for the writing class once a week is never sufficient neither it is efficient. There's not even enough time to incorporate other teaching resources. Unfortunately, teachers must rely on assigning textbooks as homework because of the monotonous routines; therefore, they have no alternative but to have the students memorize the content of the textbook.</p>
<p>Teachers' viewpoints about expanding the reading activities to improve the writing skills of students.</p>	<p>Reading contributes to writing a lot. I wish we could make our students read more often. It's a dream to see a student holding literature books after or during school time in the library or at campus backyard. However, the priority is to complete the textbook content by following the yearly curriculum blindly.</p>