



An overview of first year licence students' engagement in EFL writing

نظرة عامة على مشاركة طلبة السنة الأولى في مرحلة الليسانس في كتابة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

Un aperçu de l'engagement des étudiants de première année de licence dans l'écriture en ALE

Fatma Zohra Zemouchi

University of Algiers 2, Translation of Historical Documents Laboratory,

Pr. Samira Arar

University of Algiers 2, LIRRADI Laboratory,

Submission date: 20-02-2024-**Acceptance date:**22-09-2024

Publication date: 30-10-2024

ملخص

في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الجزائر 2، لطالما اعتبرت الكتابة بالإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية مصدر قلق كبير. بالنظر إلى أهمية هذه المهارة في مسيرة الطلبة الأكاديمية و/أو المهنية، الهدف الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة البحثية هو التحقيق في طبيعة المشاركة في كتابة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بين طلبة السنة الأولى من مرحلة الليسانس وفهم العوامل التي تجعلهم أكثر أو أقل مشاركة. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، تم إجراء تحقيق استكشافي باستخدام استبيان تم توزيعه على (30) طالبًا ومقابلة مع (05) أساتذة للكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. كشفت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن الطلبة يعانون من نقص في المشاركة على ثلاث مستويات: السلوكي (ضعف الحضور)، المعرفي (سوء استخدام عملية الكتابة) والعاطفي (مستويات عالية من القلق عند الكتابة). لذلك، يجب أخذ هذه المستويات الثلاثة بعين الاعتبار بشكل جاد لتقديم منظور جديد من أجل تحسين: مشاركة الطلبة في كتابة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

الكلمات الدالة: مشاركة الطلبة؛ الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ المستوى الجامعي؛ طلبة السنة الأولى.

Abstract

In the department of English at the university of Algiers 2, EFL writing has long been regarded a significant concern. Considering the importance of such skill for the students' academic and/or professional careers, the main objective of this research study is to investigate the nature of engagement in EFL writing among

first-year licence students and to understand what makes them either more or less engaged. In order to achieve this goal, an exploratory investigation was carried out using a questionnaire administered to (30) students and an interview with (05) teachers of EFL writing. The results of this study revealed that students lack engagement at three levels: behavioural (poor attendance), cognitive (misuse of the writing process) and emotional levels (high levels of writing anxiety). Therefore, these three levels should be seriously taken addressed to bring a new perspective in order to better improve students' engagement in EFL writing.

keywords: student engagement (SE); EFL writing; university level; first-year students.

Résumé

Dans le département d'anglais de l'Université d'Alger 2, l'écriture en anglais langue étrangère (ALE) est depuis longtemps considérée comme une préoccupation importante. Compte tenu de l'importance de cette compétence pour les carrières académiques et/ou professionnelles des étudiants, l'objectif principal de cette étude est d'examiner la nature de l'engagement des étudiants de première année de licence dans l'écriture en ALE et de comprendre ce qui les rend plus ou moins engagés. Afin d'atteindre cet objectif, une enquête exploratoire a été menée à l'aide d'un questionnaire administré à 30 étudiants et d'un entretien avec 5 enseignants de l'écriture en ALE. Les résultats de cette étude ont révélé que les étudiants manquent d'engagement à trois niveaux : comportemental (faible assiduité), cognitif (mauvaise utilisation du processus d'écriture) et émotionnel (niveaux élevés d'anxiété liée à l'écriture). Par conséquent, ces trois niveaux doivent être sérieusement pris en compte pour apporter une nouvelle perspective afin d'améliorer l'engagement des étudiants dans l'écriture en ALE.

Mots-clés: engagement des étudiants; écriture en ALE; niveau universitaire; étudiants de première année.

Introduction

It can be quite challenging to engage students in writing, as this latter requires dealing simultaneously with the three domains of learning (Fredricks et al., 2004): cognitive (thinking), affective (feeling) and psychomotor (doing). In addition, one should not overlook the social and cultural factors that have probably shaped the environment in which the student was educated (Trowler, 2010). Thus, research that has been conducted on student engagement as a multi-faceted construct (cognitive, behavioural and emotional) can be used to help us better understand students. For example, in the department of English at the University of Algiers 2, several teachers have raised the issue of university students' level in EFL writing which is considered below expectations when compared to the number of years students usually spend



studying and/or practicing the English language (from their first middle school year). This matter has so far been interpreted as the possible outcome of students' lack of enthusiasm and/or effort. However, one cannot deny the importance of writing tasks that can be much more engaging, if they are authentic and if they trigger interest. In other words, students may feel more involved when they write about an up-to-date, genuine topic that is of interest to them. Consequently, the challenge that may face writing teachers is how to motivate their students to write. But before tackling that matter, the question that needs to be first asked is how engaged are first-year licence students in EFL writing?

1. Theoretical background

There has been a significant interest in studying student engagement for quite a while to better understand how students can perform well in school.

1.1. Student engagement

Although student engagement can be traced back to Astin's work on student involvement in 1984, it gained more attention in the literature in the mid-1990s with its goal to enhance learning and teaching in higher education. Student engagement, as many other complex concepts, has several definitions. However, this concept has been narrowed down by some scholars who define it three dimensions, five levels and a considerable number of instruments to facilitate its assessment.

1.1.1. Basic Definitions

Student engagement can be found in both popular and research definitions. These definitions often highlight the attributes that many of today's students may still lack.

On the one hand, the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (6th edition) defines engagement as 'being involved'. In the Online Cambridge Dictionary (2019) 'to engage' means 'to become involved' or 'to interest someone in something and keep them thinking about it'. The American Heritage Dictionary (5th edition) defines the adjective 'engagé' as being 'actively committed' and the verb 'to engage' means 'to involve oneself or participate'.

On the other hand, research definitions have varied through time from one scholar to another. While some definitions show that student engagement is the student's responsibility, other definitions state that it is the responsibility of the institution. For instance, Hu and Kuh (2001) define engagement as



“the quality of effort students themselves devote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute directly to desired outcomes” (p.3), but others define it as “the process whereby institutions and sector bodies make deliberate attempts to involve and empower students in the process of shaping the learning experience” (HEFCE, 2008). In addition, there are other definitions that place the responsibility for engagement on both individual students and their institutions. For instance, Kuh (2009) states that “student engagement represents the time and effort students devote to activities empirically linked to the intended outcomes of college and what institutions do to both provide these activities and induce students to participate in these activities” (p. 683).

To sum up, one can say that engagement in general is the amount of time and effort that students put into their work in order to achieve a specific academic purpose.

1.1.2. The three dimensions of student engagement

Inspired by Bloom’s work on learning (1956), Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004, p. 62-63) have identified three dimensions to student engagement at school level:

Behavioural Engagement (BE)

This type of engagement can be defined in three different ways. The first definition states that BE involves positive conduct and the absence of disruptive behaviour. In other words, if, for instance students follow school rules, adhere to classroom norms, attend classes regularly and stay out of trouble, they will be described as behaviourally-engaged. The second definition explains that BE is about involvement in learning and academic tasks. This explanation entails behaviours such as effort, perseverance, concentration, attention, asking questions, and contributing to class discussion. The third definition concerns participation in school-related activities such as athletics or school governance.

Emotional Engagement (EE)

This type of engagement concerns the students’ affective reactions in the classroom including interest, boredom, happiness, sadness, and anxiety. That is to say, students can experience several feelings that may affect their sense of belonging to the school in general and the classroom in particular, i.e., their learning experience as a whole.



Cognitive Engagement (CE)

In the literature, cognitive engagement is referred to in two kinds of work: 'school engagement' which focuses on investment in learning, or 'learning and instruction' which involve self-regulation and learning strategy use (Fredricks et al., 2004). Thus, it can be defined in two different ways. The first definition highlights a psychological investment in learning, meaning that students should be involved in their learning, have a preference for challenge, and aspire to go beyond the requirements. The other definition targets cognition and emphasizes strategic learning, referring to the metacognitive strategies that students generally utilize to plan, monitor, and evaluate their cognition while completing tasks. Finally, Fredricks et al. (2004) suggest that scholars combine both definitions as the idea of cognitive engagement can play an important role in understanding school success.

1.2. Challenges in EFL writing

Writing, in general, is a complex task to do; however, writing in another language, such as English (EFL writing), can make the same task much more challenging for several reasons.

To begin with, EFL students can sometimes transfer their mother tongue (L1) knowledge and conventions into the target language, which is English in this case. However, Kaplan (as cited in Nunan, 2003) claims that every language and every culture has its own unique paragraph structure and that learning another language includes the mastery of that language's logical system. This is what he calls contrastive rhetoric. Therefore, some EFL writing issues may be related to the students' mother tongues (L1).

Furthermore, the emergence of social constructionism, which is a teaching approach that concentrates on the context of writing and the power that context has on the product, has doubled the burden for EFL students in academic environments. Accordingly, EFL writers need to learn the skills that will help them integrate into the new language community as well as into the academic community (Sokolik, 2003).

Additionally, one cannot overlook EFL writers' affective side because a task as complex as writing in a language, such as English, which is not their first language may have an impact on their motivation and can even lead to their disengagement. Harmer (2001) lists four sources of motivation that can influence the EFL students' attitude towards learning in general: the society one lives in, significant others, the teacher and the method. To sum up, there are several reasons that can challenge EFL writers (Harmer, 2001).



1.3. Related Research

Despite the growing interest in student engagement as a multi-faceted concept, there are almost no empirical studies that demonstrate its nature in EFL writing in Algeria. While most Algerian researchers have mainly focused on motivation as a construct in itself (Korichi and Bahloul, 2021; Belaid and Belmekki, 2020), foreign researchers have studied motivation as part of student engagement. However, most of their research studies were experimental. A few of those research studies have focused on testing methods or approaches to improve student engagement in the writing classroom. Norazmi et al. (2017) suggested that the flipped classroom approach can engage students in the writing process and should be employed in all areas of language learning. Liu et al. (2018) also noted that collaborative writing can help to increase the students' behavioural engagement and can also improve the quality of their writing while performing difficult tasks. The results of Nguyen (2021) suggest that students can engage affectively, cognitively, and behaviourally with feedback activities. In addition, according to the findings of Zheng and Yu (2018), the use of written corrective feedback can help students to display some positive affective engagement; however, it may negatively influence the behavioural and cognitive engagement of students with lower English proficiency, as this latter may hinder their understanding of the feedback itself. It follows that more research work needs to be conducted to illustrate the multiple uses of student engagement as a concept in practice, particularly in EFL writing in an Algerian context.

2. Methodology

This section describes the setting, the sample, the data collection tools, and the procedure that were used to achieve the main purpose of this study.

This study took place during the second semester in the Department of English, at the University of Algiers 2. Thirty students, including fifteen males and fifteen females, accepted to take part in this research work. They were all first-year licence students who were randomly selected by the researcher. Moreover, five teachers of EFL writing were also part of this study.

To achieve the main objective of the present research study, two main tools were used. A questionnaire was administered to the thirty first year licence students in order to investigate their behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement. Moreover, an interview was conducted with the five teachers



of EFL writing as to delve deeper into their students' engagement and understand it better.

In order to conduct this study, the informants were selected randomly and the data were collected using a mixed research method; i.e. both quantitative (questionnaires for students) and qualitative (interviews with teachers). Moreover, the quantitative data were treated in accordance with descriptive statistics, while the qualitative data were examined with the help of content analysis.

3. Results

This section describes the findings obtained from both data collection tools: the questionnaire for students and the interview with teachers.

3.1. The Students' Questionnaire

The questionnaire for students is divided into three parts. Each part refers to one of the three facets of student engagement (behavior, cognition and emotion) for a better understanding.

Part A: Behavioural Engagement

1st statement: I always complete my writing homework on time.

This statement has revealed that 43.3% students neither agree nor disagree, while 33.3% only agree. However, 16.7% students disagree, 3.3% strongly disagree and only 3.3% strongly agree.

2nd statement: *In class, I pay close attention to what my writing teacher says.*

For this statement, most students agree with a percentage of 56.7%; however, 20% neither agree nor disagree, 10% strongly agree, the other 10% disagree and 3.3% strongly disagree.

3rd statement: *I always complete my writing class assignments/tasks on time.*

For the 3rd statement, 36.7% of the students agree. Moreover, 26.7% of them neither agree nor disagree while another 26.7% disagree. These ones are followed by 6.7% of students who strongly agree and a mere 3.3% of them who strongly disagree.

4th statement: *In class, I ask questions when I do not understand my teacher's instructions.*

For the 4th statement, only 40% of the students have agreed; however, 33.3% have neither agreed nor disagreed, 10% have strongly agreed, another 10% have strongly disagreed and the remaining 6.7% have disagreed.



5th statement: I ask my teacher for feedback about my writing tasks.

For this statement, the number of students who agree equals the number of students who neither agree nor disagree with 26.7% for each category. There is also a percentage of 30% students who disagree, 13.3% disagree strongly and a mere 3.3% of students who agree strongly.

6th statement: I sometimes team with my classmates to complete a writing task in this class.

For this statement, 40% of the students agree, 20% strongly agree, another 20% disagree and the remaining 6.7% disagree strongly.

7th statement: I always work individually on my writing tasks in this class.

This statement reveals that 33.3% of the students agree while another 33.3% neither agree nor disagree. In addition, 16.7% students strongly agree and the remaining 16.7% disagree.

8th statement: I only use my mobile phone for academic reasons in this class (ex: check the meaning of a word, etc).

Most students agree with this statement, including 40% of them who agree and 33.3% who strongly agree. The other students include 10% who neither agree nor disagree, another 10% who disagree strongly and the remaining 6.7% disagree.

9th statement: I engage in side conversations that are not related to the writing class that I am attending.

For this statement, 43.3% students neither agree nor disagree, 26.7% disagree, 20% agree, 6.7% disagree strongly and only 3.3% agree strongly.

10th statement: I always complete the writing assignments that my teacher uploads into MOODLE.

For this statement, 33.3% represents the students who agree, 26.7% shows the students who neither agree nor disagree, another 26.7% shows the students who disagree, 10% represents the students who strongly agree and 3.3% is the percentage of students who disagree strongly.

11th statement: I always read the writing lessons that my teacher uploads into MOODLE before coming to class.



For this statement, the students' responses show 30% agree, 30% disagree, 30% neither agree nor disagree, 6.7% strongly agree and 3.3% strongly disagree.

12th statement: I usually print my MOODLE writing lessons so that I can follow with my teacher in class.

Most students disagree with this statement, responding with 43.3% disagree and 20% strongly disagree. However, 16.7% strongly agree, 13.3% neither agree nor disagree and 6.7% agree.

Part B: Cognitive Engagement

1st statement: I put a lot of effort into my writing tasks.

For this statement, the answers show that 53.3% of the students agree, 23.3% neither agree nor disagree, 20% disagree and only 3.3% strongly agree.

2nd statement: I organize my study time well for my writing class.

The students' responses for this statement reveal that 33.3% neither agree nor disagree, 33.3% agree, 20% disagree, 10% strongly disagree and 3.3% strongly agree.

3rd statement: When I am working on a writing task, I ask myself questions to make sure I understand the topic.

60% of the students agree and 13.3% strongly agree with this statement; however, 16.7% neither agree nor disagree and 10% disagree.

4th statement: When I learn something new in my writing class, I relate it to my previous knowledge.

For this statement, 63.3% of the students agree and 13.3% strongly agree. However, 16.7% neither agree nor disagree and 6.7% disagree.

5th statement: Before I start writing, I think about what I should write about (the topic).

The students' responses show that 46.7% strongly agree and 36.7% agree, while 13.3% neither agree nor disagree and 3.3% disagree.

6th statement: I always start with an outline before writing (planning).

For this statement, most students agree with 46.7% and strongly agree with 20%. The other ones disagree with 16.7%, neither agree nor disagree with 13.3% and strongly disagree with 3.3%.



7th statement: While I am writing, I think about how to link the ideas that I have selected together.

The students' responses for this statement reveal that 53.3% of the students agree, 33.3% strongly agree, 10% disagree and 3.3% neither agree nor disagree.

8th statement: When I finish writing, I check my work to make sure I did it correctly (spelling, grammar, layout, etc).

The 8th statement shows that 40% of the students agree and 36.7% strongly agree, while only 23.3% neither agree nor disagree.

9th statement: I have a clear idea of what I have to achieve in my writing class.

For this statement, 46.7% of the students neither agree nor disagree, 36.7% agree, 6.7% strongly agree, 6.7% disagree and 3.3% strongly disagree.

10th statement: Even when I don't want to write about a topic, I force myself to do it.

The students' answers for this statement demonstrate that 36.7% of the students neither agree nor disagree, 23.3% agree, 16.7% strongly agree, 16.7% disagree and 6.7% strongly disagree.

11th statement: I clearly understand the writing lessons/assignments that my teacher uploads into MOODLE.

The students' answers show that 36.7% agree, 30% neither agree nor disagree, 20% disagree, 10% strongly agree and only 3.3% strongly disagree.

12th statement: While reading the writing lessons that my teacher has uploaded into MOODLE, I often take notes to facilitate my understanding of the content.

This statement shows that 36.7% of the students agree, 23.3% strongly agree, 16.7% neither agree nor disagree, 20% disagree and 3.3% strongly disagree.

13th statement: I organize my writing lessons better thanks to MOODLE.

The students' answers for this statement show that 33.3% agree, 30% disagree, 23.3% neither agree nor disagree, 10% strongly disagree and only 3.3% strongly agree.



Part C: Emotional engagement

1st statement: I enjoy learning in the writing class.

The students' answers for this statement demonstrate that 30% of the students agree, 26.7% neither agree nor disagree, 23.3% disagree, 16.7% strongly agree and only 3.3% strongly disagree.

2nd statement: I love writing in English.

Most students have positively responded to that statement. Their answers show that 43.3% strongly agree, 43.3% agree, 10% neither agree nor disagree and only 3.3% disagree.

3rd statement: The topics that we write about in this class are interesting to me.

This statement shows that 43.3% of the students neither agree nor disagree, 40% agree, 10% strongly agree and 6.7% disagree.

4th statement: I feel proud when I complete my assignments in this class.

The students' answers show that 50% of the students agree and 16.7% strongly agree. However, 23.3% of them neither agree nor disagree, 6.7% disagree and 3.3% strongly disagree.

5th statement: I feel enthusiastic when my writing teacher allows me to choose the topic that I can write about.

Most students have answered with agree (43.3%) and strongly agree (13.3%), while the other ones have responded with neither agree nor disagree (40%) and disagree (3.3%).

6th statement: I feel positive about my participation in this class.

For this statement, the answers show that 43.3% of the students agree, 26.7% disagree, 20% neither agree nor disagree, 6.7% strongly agree and 3.3% strongly disagree.

7th statement: I am scared to have a bad mark in writing because of its high 'coefficient'.

The students' responses for this statement have also demonstrated some major agreement as 53.3% of the students strongly agree and 20% agree. On the other hand, 13.3% of them disagree, 10% neither agree nor disagree and only 3.3% strongly disagree.

8th statement: I feel that my level in writing in English is average.

For this statement, 33.3% of the students agree, 30% neither agree nor disagree, 23.3% disagree, 6.7% strongly agree and 6.7% strongly disagree.



9th statement: I feel discouraged when my mark in writing is bad.

The students' responses for this statement show that the majority is in favour as 33.3% of the students strongly agree and 30% agree, whereas 13.3% of them strongly disagree, 13.3% disagree and 10% neither agree nor disagree.

10th statement: I feel confused about what I should do to improve my writing in English.

Most of the students have demonstrated their agreement with this statement as 33.3% of them agree and 26.7% strongly agree. However, 23.3% of the students disagree, 10% strongly disagree and 6.7% neither agree nor disagree.

11th statement: I enjoy uploading my writing assignments into MOODLE.

For this statement, the answers reveal that 30% of the students disagree, 30% neither agree nor disagree, 20% strongly disagree, 16.7% agree and only 3.3% strongly agree.

12th statement: I am often impatient to read the new writing lessons that my teacher uploads into MOODLE.

The students' responses for this statement show that 43.3% of the students neither agree nor disagree, 20% strongly disagree, 20% agree, 13.3% disagree and 3.3% strongly agree.

13th statement: I feel that studying writing on MOODLE and in the classroom is quite exhausting.

For this statement, the answers show that 33.3% of the students neither agree nor disagree, 20% disagree, 20% strongly agree, 16.7% agree and 10% strongly disagree.

3.2. The teachers' interview

Five (5) female teachers have accepted to be interviewed and answered the questions.

Part 1

-How long have you been teaching writing?

The five female teachers have been teaching writing for a number between 2 and 20 of years.

-What licence levels do you teach writing to?



All of the five female teachers teach writing to 1st year licence students. However, three of them have previously taught writing to 2nd year students as well.

Part 2

-To what extent are your students engaged in writing?

The majority of teachers seem to agree that their students are not engaged. According to them, students are not very interested in writing as they prefer receptive skills to productive skills. Moreover, most of the teachers seem to be convinced that their students feel obligated to attend their writing classes because the writing module has a high coefficient. One of the teachers has stated that the only time her students show some engagement is when their marks or bonuses are at stake, or else they are not engaged.

-What evidence do you have that your students are engaged in writing?

According to the teachers' answers, students are engaged when they are active in the classroom. In other words, students come on time or early, prefer to sit in the front seats, listen actively, participate regularly, ask their teacher questions, ask their peers for clarification, use their phones to check words/ideas, enjoy working in pairs/groups, debate their ideas with their teacher and peers, request extra assignments, complete homework on time, ask for and take feedback seriously. However, many teachers have referred to the small number of engaged students that is usually between 3 and 6 per group of 80, of which only 35-40 attend. According to them, these engaged students represent a minority.

-In your opinion, who is more engaged: male students or female students?

For this question, four teachers have mentioned that the big number of female students could be the reason why they seem to be the ones who are more engaged in comparison with male students. However, one teacher has clearly stated that 'gender doesn't matter'.

-From your own experience, how do disengaged students behave in a writing class?

According to the majority of teachers, most disengaged students prefer not to attend or to sit in the back of the classroom because they are not interested in participating. Moreover, if they are not pushed by the teacher (teacher's presence near students' desks), they never write. Disengaged students are also described as reluctant and lazy learners who tend to take all their time to get their notebooks and pens before they pretend to write. And because



these students are usually pushed to write, some of them start delaying the writing process by making their teachers repeat the same instructions several times- as if, they try to gain more time to avoid the activity at hand. In addition, they also like to have side conversations with their peers who are not interested in the lesson as well.

-Do students maintain the same level of engagement throughout the academic year (S1&S2)? Explain.

For this question, most teachers have noticed that some students maintain their engagement throughout the academic year and some do not. However, they tend to be more engaged in Semester 1 (S1). In other words, the majority of teachers think that students feel tired in Semester 2 (S2) due to fasting in Ramadan. Thus, their students tend to be less involved as their concentration diminishes.

-In your opinion, do exams (content/marks) have an impact on students' engagement in writing? Explain.

Most of the teachers agree that marks are the students' main concern. For example, some of the students who usually do well in S1 become so confident that they stop attending or start putting less effort into their S2 classes. This reaction usually has a negative impact on their S2 performance. However, some of the students whose marks in S1 are below expectations may still persevere in S2 despite their disappointment. According to the generated answers, few students are completely discouraged by their bad marks in writing and may even stop trying when feeling helpless. One of the teachers has concluded that most of the students "do not care about writing" as their chief goal is to obtain a passing average (mark) at the end of the semester/year, and that they can unfortunately do so by "compensating their bad marks in writing with their marks in the other modules".

-Does the level of students in your writing classes meet your expectations? Explain

Most of the teachers have had a negative response to this question. According to them, the majority of students do not practice their writing skill enough. Also, students tend to write the way they speak. This makes them unconsciously adapt a free writing style which is rather less academic and very informal. In other words, they do not always follow the process of writing. Moreover, they seem to have a serious problem of ideas and language and that could be due to their lack of reading in English and their



poor attendance. Consequently, many students are barely able to produce three or four complete sentences.

-In your opinion, did the pandemic have an impact on students' engagement in writing? How?

According to many teachers, the students' level has deteriorated. They believe that it had somewhat been better before the pandemic hit the country: students used to attend and write more. Now, they seem to be lost between online and onsite classes. Also, the majority of students do not complete their online assignments due to their fear of writing, lack of enthusiasm and/or of material (internet and computers). There are very few face-to-face classes: about 6 hours per semester to teach both Writing and Reading. This situation has been described as appalling when compared with the amount of pre-covid19 allotted time (3 hours per week). As a result, students cannot practice enough in the classroom and teachers cannot teach all that is included in the syllabus (they only opt for one or two types of paragraphs).

-Do your students need more support than you can give them in class in order to maintain their engagement? Explain.

For this question, most teachers believe that their students' poor English makes them need more support; however, this latter may be hindered by several external factors. For example, the heterogeneous classes, the demanding course load, the hectic schedules and the limited amount of time allotted for writing classes do not allow teachers to make their students practice enough in the classroom and/or give them individual feedback. Moreover, the lack of available classrooms and EFL books prevent some teachers from tutoring their low-achieving students. Finally, the absence of a computer room within the department discourages teachers from organizing face-to-face classes from their homes which they consider as their private life.

Part 3

-What do you do to maintain your students' engagement in writing?

According to the majority of teachers, they maintain their students' engagement by encouraging them to practice more. For example, they select interesting topics, send extra writing tasks, share some available books, correct the few submitted assignments, provide some feedback when possible and ask engaged students to keep a portfolio to help them track their own progress.



-What do you do when your students start showing signs of disengagement?

For this question, most teachers have highlighted the importance of pair work and/or group work while circulating the classroom to make sure their students are doing the assigned writing task. They also recycle knowledge, make use of the whiteboard to attract their students' attention and ask their students to use it as well in order to share their written work with the whole class. In addition, they try to remind their students of any important deadlines and of their end of year objectives to keep them engaged.

-Do you have adequate resources to use when your students are not engaged? Explain.

In terms of knowledge, the responses show that most teachers have enough experience in teaching writing. However, they need support from the department of English in terms of logistics. For example, many teachers have mentioned the lack of up-to-date books in the library, the absence of computers and/or internet connection in the teachers' room, the nonexistence of data shows in classrooms, and the lack of on the job-training by foreign professionals in the field of writing.

-In your opinion, does technology help to engage students in writing classes? How?

Most of the teachers strongly hold that the key to improving writing is practice. However, they think that one cannot even discuss the use of technology to engage students, while the classrooms are not equipped with any computers, data shows, internet and functional electrical wall outlets. They have also mentioned that most teachers utilize their own laptops, tablets, phones, speakers and/or internet connection whenever they include technology in their classes. Moreover, most of them believe that it is essential that teachers be trained periodically to keep up with the latest trends in teaching writing.

-In your opinion, how does blended learning impact students' engagement in writing? Explain and illustrate.

For this question, most teachers agree that blended learning has had a negative impact on their students' engagement in writing. Due to Covid 19, the number of writing lessons has shrunk and the face-to-face classes have decreased. As a result, students have been pushed to work online independently (reading lessons, completing assignments, submitting homework, etc). According to the majority of teachers, students, who have joined the university for the first time, have felt completely lost as they were

not trained to use MOODLE and they used to completely depend on their teachers in high schools. Therefore, the level of disengagement and discouragement has soared among students. According to many teachers, this situation has increased their frustration because of the lack of interaction with their students who almost never work online due to a shortage of material (no computers and/or internet at home) or pure laziness (no interest in writing).

4. Discussion

To have a better understanding of first year students' engagement in EFL writing at licence level, the results of both tools have been triangulated.

4.1 Behavioural Engagement

In terms of behaviour, this section tends to show that most of the students' answers match what the five teachers have reported during the interview: Although a few students do attend their writing classes and enjoy interacting with their teachers and peers, it is always a small minority that displays signs of engagement. Most teachers believe that the students' writing weaknesses could be linked to poor attendance and participation in class. According to them, the majority of students do not attend their classes regularly; this has resulted in a considerable amount of absenteeism which keeps on decreasing students' interaction with their peers and teachers (Chang and Romeo, 2008).

Besides, it prevents them from being up-to-date with what is being taught in the classroom (on site and/or online). Moreover, when some students finally decide on attending some of their writing classes - which usually happens a few days before their exams begin, according to their teachers - they most of the time come unprepared and do not bring with them the necessary materials. This unpreparedness, according to teachers, may hinder their students' participation in the classroom and disturb that of their peers. In this context, it has been noticed that "students who attend school regularly are prepared for and actively participate in classroom activities, and refrain from behaviors that would result in disciplinary action are thought to show good behavioural engagement" (King, 2020, p.135). Therefore, attendance may play an important role in enhancing students' engagement and predict their academic achievement as well (Gottfried, 2009).

4.2 Cognitive Engagement

In terms of cognition, this section displays a mismatch between the student questionnaire results and the teacher interview responses. On the one hand,



the student questionnaire results show that students put much effort into their writing assignments and structure their work thanks to outlining and careful thinking. However, they tend to find the objectives of the writing module quite unclear and this matter confuses them to some extent. In this regard, scholars have highlighted the importance of classroom goal structure (Ames & Archer, 1988; Meece et al., 2006). In other words, if students cannot understand why they are studying the writing skill in the classroom and do not see the relevance of what they are learning to their future, how can they be expected to set personal goals and persist to achieve them?

On the other hand, teachers have reported that most of their students' work does not reflect their paying attention to the process of writing at all as there is invariably a visible lack of ideas, coherence and cohesion. Furthermore, there is poor mastery of English as this latter is an additional language in Algeria. One of the interviewed teachers has linked that matter to her students' lack of reading, saying "our students don't read that is why they lack ideas when they write". The literature has already established a strong association between writing and reading, highlighting the fact that students' written pieces are someone else's reading texts (Spark, 1985). Another teacher stated that most of her students' writing lack structure because "they never start with an outline. It's like free writing for them. They write the way they speak." This situation may be due to students' inadequate and/or lack of use of strategies to monitor their thinking and performance during a writing task (Reschly et al., 2020). These are some of many reasons that may reduce students' cognitive engagement while writing.

4.3. Emotional Engagement

In terms of emotion, the students' questionnaire answers match quite well the teachers' responses from the interview. It seems that most students do not show signs of interest, enthusiasm and/or enjoyment during their writing classes and that their main concern is getting good marks. Although many students claim that they love writing in English, they do not enjoy working on their homework assignments and feel that the topics suggested by their teachers are of less interest to them. Besides, the writing module at university has a high coefficient, leading to heightened anxiety levels among students, many of whom perceive their proficiency in English as only moderately average. Some teachers believe that due to that obsession with marks, students may have developed "a fear of writing in English" or foreign language writing anxiety. According to research, this latter may occur due



to several reasons such as teachers' high expectations, writing under time pressure, fear of negative evaluation/expecting good teacher/peer evaluation, students' self-expectations and peer expectations of their writing, uninteresting writing topics, unfamiliar writing formats, students' lack of confidence, and insufficient writing skills (Cheng, 2002; Cheng, 2004; Ho, 2016; Lin and Ho, 2009; Pasaribu, 2016).

Furthermore, teachers think that most of their students feel the need to write well, but they do not seem to show any positive reaction towards improving it. For students, the blended learning method used to teach writing has made them feel lost. In this regard, scholars have stated that some teachers expect foreign language students to have a good performance in writing. However, students sometimes do not quite understand what their teachers want from their writing (Andrade and Du, 2005). Finally, students may seem to have a good intention to improve their writing skill; however, they probably do not really know about how to proceed, or as most teachers have already reported, "[They] are just lazy" and procrastinate for some reason.

Conclusion

This research work has tried to shed some light on the importance of student engagement as a multi-faceted construct and to explain why this latter may be one of the reasons behind some first-year licence students' lack of engagement in EFL writing.

With regard to behavioural engagement, this study has found that students' poor attendance may be related to students' poor performance in writing. As a result, further investigation should be conducted to determine the reasons behind that in order to know how to improve it. In terms of cognitive engagement, this study has provided teachers with a glimpse into how students perceive their classroom writing goals, teaching formats and teacher-student interaction. The students' perception unfortunately tends to be quite negative. Therefore, some work needs to be put in on setting clear classroom goals, introducing less complicated teaching formats for writing and strengthening the teacher-student interaction. As to emotional engagement, this research has highlighted the importance of managing the students' writing anxiety and selecting up-to-date interesting writing topics in order to motivate students to write. In other words, if students can relate to the writing topics suggested in the classroom, they may feel inspired, motivated and more relaxed to write about those topics. Finally, this research has found out that students are not as engaged as they should and



that several aspects need to be considered in order to improve students' engagement in the EFL writing classroom.

Although these research findings may not be generalized, they can still provide first year university teachers with some understanding regarding how engaged their students are in writing.

Bibliography List

1. Ames C.; Archer J., 1988. *Achievement goals in the classroom: students' learning strategies and motivational processes*, Journal of educational psychology, 80, 260-267.
2. Andrade H.L.; Du Y., 2005. *Student perspectives on rubric-referenced assessment*, Practical assessment research and evaluation, 10(3), 1-11.
3. Astin A.W., 1984. *Student involvement: A development theory for higher education*, Journal of College Student Development, 40(5).
4. Belaid B.; Belmekki A., 2021. *Group work as motivational factor in enhancing students' writing skill: The case of third year EFL students in foreign languages department at Ahmed Salhi University Center, Naama*. Dirassat and abhath the Arabic journal of human and social sciences, 13(2).
5. Bloom B.S., 1956. *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals*. New York: McKay.
6. Chang H.N.; Romero M., 2008. *Present, engaged, and accounted for: The critical importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty.
7. Cheng Y.S., 2002. Factors associated with foreign language writing anxiety. *Foreign language annuals*, 35(5), 647-656.
8. Cheng Y. S., 2004. *EFL students' writing anxiety: Sources and implications*. English teaching and learning, 29(2), 41-62.
9. Fredricks J. A.; Blumenfeld P. C.; Paris A.H., 2004. *School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence*, Review of Educational Research, 74(1), 59-109.
10. Gottfried M.A., 2009. *Excused versus unexcused: How student absences in elementary school affect academic achievement*, Educational evaluation and policy analysis, 31(4), 392-415.
11. Harmer J., 2001. *The practice of english language teaching*. Cambridge, UK: Longman.
12. HEFCE, 2008. *Tender for a study into student engagement*. Bristol: Higher Education Funding Council for England.



13. Ho M., 2016. *Exploring writing anxiety and self-efficacy among EFL graduate students in Taiwan*. Higher education studies, 6(1), 24-39.
14. Korichi A., Bahloul A., 2021. *The impact of motivation on Efl learners' writing performances: The case of EFL students at the department of foreign languages, University Center Of Barika (Batna)*. مجلة العلوم الاجتماعية والانسانية, 11(2), 1381-1400.
15. Kuh G., 2009. *The national survey of student engagement: conceptual and empirical foundations*. New directions for institutional research.
16. Kuh G.; Hu S., 2001. *Being (dis)engaged in educationally purposeful activities: The influences of student and institutional characteristics*. Prepared for Presentation at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Seattle: ERIC.
17. Lin G. H.; Ho M.M., 2009. *An exploration into foreign language writing anxiety from Taiwanese university students' perspectives*. Paper presented at NCUE fourth annual conference on language, teaching, literature, linguistics, translation and interpretation, 307-318.
18. Liu M.; Liu L.; Liu L., 2018. *Group awareness increases student engagement in online collaborative writing*, The Internet and Higher Education, 38, 1-8.
19. Meece J.L.; Anderman E.M.; Anderman L.H.; 2006. *Classroom goal structure, student motivation, and academic achievement*. Annual review of psychology, 57, 487-503.
20. Nguyen H., 2021. *An overview of student engagement*. Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research, 533.
21. Norazmi D., Dwee C.Y., Suzilla J.; Nurzarina A.S., 2017. *Exploring student engagement in writing using the flipped classroom approach*. Pertanika Journals Social Sciences & Humanities, 25(2), 663-674.
22. Nunan D., 2003. *Practical English Language Teaching*. New York: McGraw Hill.
23. *Online Cambridge dictionary*. 2019. Retrieved from [https://dictionary.cambridge.org /fr/dictionnaire/anglais/engage](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/engage)
24. Oxford advanced learner's dictionary of current english, 2000. *sixth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
25. Pasaribu T.A., 2016. *Students' writing anxiety: Causes and effects of a Moodle-based writing course*. In D. Shaffer, & M. Pinto, *KOTESOL Proceedings 2016*. (pp. 87-96). Seoul: Korea TESOL.
26. King K., 2020. *Interventions to Enhance Behavioral Engagement*. In: Reschly, A.L., Pohl, A.J., Christenson, S.L. (eds) *Student Engagement*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-37285-9_8



27. Sokolik M., 2003. Writing. In D. Nunan (Ed.), *Practical english language teaching*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
28. Spack R., 1985. *Literature, reading, writing and ESL: Bridging the gaps*. TESOL Quarterly, 19(1), 575-593.
29. *The American heritage dictionary* (fifth ed.). (2011). Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
30. Trowler V., 2010. *Student engagement literature review*. Retrieved from https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/StudentEngagementLiteratureReview_1.pdf.
31. Zheng Y.; Yu S., 2018. *Student engagement with teacher written corrective feedback in EFL writing: A case study of Chinese lower-proficiency students*. Assessing Writing, 37, 13-24.

