



## Teachers' and learners' beliefs about efl writing instruction In higher education: a mismatch?

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### Abstract

At the university level in Algeria, EFL teachers and learners strive for attaining quality education and achieving success; nevertheless, neither of them seem quite satisfied with the outcome. This is particularly true for writing, where students display considerable weaknesses. A possible interpretation of the situation is that there might be a mismatch between teachers' and learners' beliefs about writing instruction. In order to understand the premises and the forms of this disparity, and its consequences on the teaching/learning process, a small-scale investigation was conducted in the English department at Algiers 2 University. Our guiding principle is that writing instruction, and EFL instruction in general should be primarily based on and directed towards students' needs. The results of this investigation are hoped to enlighten the present issue with possible solutions.

**Keywords:** EFL teaching and learning; university writing instruction; teachers' and learners' beliefs; students' needs

### Résumé

Les enseignants et les apprenants EFL au niveau universitaire en Algérie s'efforcent d'atteindre une éducation de qualité et de réussir ; néanmoins, aucun d'entre eux ne semble assez satisfait du résultat. Ceci est particulièrement vrai pour l'écriture, où les étudiants présentent des faiblesses considérables. Cette situation peut être expliquée le décalage observé entre les croyances des enseignants et des apprenants concernant l'enseignement de l'écriture. Afin de comprendre les causes et les formes de cette disparité, et ses conséquences sur le processus d'enseignement / apprentissage, nous proposons d'exploiter les résultats d'une enquête menée dans le département d'anglais de l'université d'Alger2. La principale conclusion de l'analyse de ces résultats est que l'enseignement de l'écriture, et l'enseignement de l'EFL en général, devraient être principalement basés et orientés vers les besoins des apprenants.

**Mots clés:** enseignement et apprentissage de l'anglais comme langue étrangère; enseignement de l'écriture au niveau universitaire; croyances des enseignants et des apprenants ; besoins des étudiants.

### ملخص

يسعى المعلمون والمتعلمون في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الجامعة الجزائرية إلى تحقيق جودة التعليم وبلوغ النجاح؛ ومع ذلك، فإن أيًا منهم لا يبدو راضيا تماما عن النتيجة. وينطبق هذا بشكل خاص على التعبير الكتابي الذي يعاني الطلبة فيه من ضعف كبير. التفسير المحتمل لهذه الحالة هو أنه قد يكون هناك عدم تطابق بين معتقدات المعلمين والمتعلمين. وحول هذه النقطة بالذات تبين نتائج تحقيق أجريناه على مستوى قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الجزائر 2 أن تدريس اللغة الانجليزية بشكل عام ينبغي في المقام الأول أن يستند ويوجه على احتياجات الطلبة.

الكلمات الدالة: تعليم وتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية؛ التعبير الكتابي؛ المعتقدات المعلمين والمتعلمين؛ احتياجات الطلبة.

## Introduction

At the tertiary level, writing sustains a key role in EFL pedagogy. It is not only a predominant testing instrument but also an indispensable vehicle through which teaching and learning could take place. Teachers and students alike are aware of this importance and both affirm doing their best to attain quality education and so achieve satisfactory results. However, neither of them reach their traced objectives, and most importantly, neither seem to know the causes of underachievement. A possible interpretation of the situation is the possibility of a mismatch between teachers' and learners' perceptions about EFL writing instruction.

In fact, in modern pedagogy, teachers and learners are partners in the teaching/learning process, with quite different and yet complementary roles. Yet, these partners may hold different perceptions of what constitutes effective teaching/ learning or successful EFL instruction. In this context, many scholars agree on the necessity of considering these beliefs because of their undeniable influence on the teaching/ learning process (Richardson, 1996; White, 1999; Horwitz, 1987, Gabillon, 2012; Willis, 1996). This is equally maintained for writing, which represents a daunting challenge for foreign language learners and teachers at linguistic, cognitive, and pedagogical levels. Many authors have thus investigated teachers' and learners' beliefs in writing to figure out the encountered difficulties (Lee, 2009; Ismail, 2001).

This paper will deal then with the issue of writing instruction at the university level, to uncover a possible mismatch between teachers' and learners' perceptions about writing instruction. For such a purpose, we conducted a small-scale investigation in the English department at Algiers 2 University, involving teachers of different subject matters and a sample of students from the three levels of the graduation degree. Two main research tools were used: a questionnaire and an interview. The findings are described and cross-compared in order to find out similarities and divergences between teachers' and learners' perceptions about EFL instruction and attempt to understand the consequences of such disparity on the teaching/learning process before suggesting some alternative solutions.

## 1. Literature Review

### 1.1 Writing

At the university level, writing is considered as a vital skill and subject matter in EFL instruction. Writing is too demanding skill in terms of time and energy for both teachers and learners. It is a complex skill, which requires knowledge in grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, structure, and organization, in addition to generating ideas while considering the context and the purpose for which language use (Badger and White, 2000; Harmer, 2001). Writing also represents an act of communicating, thinking, learning, exploring, and problem-solving (Emig, 1977; Elbow, 1994; Galbraith, 2009; Harklau, 2002; Sinclair, 2010). It is even more difficult in an L2 context since learners also need to be proficient in the foreign language and are required to write both accurately and fluently. It thus requires from teachers and learners to build awareness about writing on linguistic, cognitive,

and pedagogical dimensions. Besides, writing instruction is based on knowledge of three variables: content, purpose and audience (Brookes and Grundy, 1990; Harris, 1993; Grenville, 2001); therefore, an eclectic approach which integrates product, process, and genre approaches is often advisable (Fujeda, 2006; Hyland, 2003).

## 1.2 Beliefs

Though there is no agreement on its definition, the term 'beliefs' is generally referred to as "psychologically held understandings or propositions about the world that are held to be true" (Richardson, 1996), or as preconceptions, preconceived ideas or notions (Horwitz 1987, 1988). These beliefs about foreign language instruction/learning emanate from our experience as language learners or teachers (Willis, 1996), expectations of L2 teaching/learning, and learning style preferences between teachers' and learners (Gabillion, 2012), and the perspectives of others (such as colleagues, teacher-trainers and educators, and academic researchers). (Hall, 2011, p.5)

Researchers have noticed that second language learners come to the language class with some preconceived ideas about language and language learning and these beliefs shape their expectations about how language learning/ teaching should be (Horwitz, 1987; Wenden, 1987). In what relates to writing instruction, Russell (2009) posits that teachers and learners exhibit different perceptions about issues of correctness, process, and strategy, which result in failure accompanied with emotional consequences. Ismail (2001: 75) evokes a problem related to contrastive rhetoric stating, "Students usually bring with them to the ESL writing class the whole culture of L1 education including the cultural patterns of L1 writing which may influence L2 writing". N S Lee and Tajino (2008), who maintain that difficulties in L2 writing are related to difficulties in L1 writing and to proficiency in L2, share this idea.

Therefore, numerous studies have been conducted to understand both teachers' and learners' belief systems since they influence classroom behaviour and impact language learning and teaching (Brown, 2009; Horwitz, 1987, 1988; White, 1999). In this context, Horwitz (1987), Brown (2009) and Gabillion (2012) explain that misconceptions or erroneous beliefs may cause learning impairment and lead to a negative attitude towards learning experiences, classroom anxiety, negative self-concepts, and demotivation, which in turn hinders effective instruction. There is a common agreement between educationalists that teachers and learners alike should develop awareness of one another's opinions about what constitutes appropriate instruction for better writing and learning results.

## 2. Methodology

In order to carry out our research, we opted for a small-scale investigation, by randomly selecting informants among teachers and students at the English department during the academic year 2015-2016. We attempted to investigate teachers' and learners' beliefs about EFL writing instruction, to understand the impact of these perceptions on the teaching/learning process, and to suggest ways to conciliate both partners' beliefs for a more effective instruction that leads to successful learning.

### 2.1 Informants

Our subjects consist of 50 students from first, second and third year levels enrolled for a graduation degree in English. They were chosen from different levels in a way to have a more

comprehensive picture of learners' beliefs. In addition, 18 teachers, most of whom are permanent teachers, contributed to the study. They were deliberately chosen as teachers of different subject matters due first to our conviction that writing instruction is not the sole responsibility of teachers of writing, and second, their different specialism and subject matters are believed to bring diversity in terms of beliefs about writing and about EFL instruction in general.

## 2.2 Instruments

Two research tools were used in this investigation: The first is a questionnaire (see appendix) administered to both teachers and students in order to explore their perceptions on the same issues, by answering questions related teaching writing, learning writing, feedback on writing, and writing evaluation. The informants' answers are tallied and then transformed into percentages, which are ranked to facilitate the comparison of results between the two groups of participants.

The second investigation instrument is *an interview*, conducted with 20 students and 8 teachers. The objective of this interview is to consider teachers' and students' perceptions about teachers' and learners' difficulties in teaching/learning writing, and about EFL writing pedagogy at the university level, in terms of the type of instruction, topics, time load, and so on. The students were divided into small groups according to their timetable and were asked questions collectively. As for the teachers, they were interviewed individually. The informants' answers were then analysed separately and cross-compared to come out with similarities and differences.

## 3. Results Description

### 3.1. The questionnaire

- How should teachers teach writing?

**Table 1: Teachers' and learners' perceptions about how writing instruction**

Item	Teachers			Learners		
	nb	%	rank	nb	%	rank
<b>How?</b>						
model reproduction	8	44	3	6	12	5
topic discussion	13	72	2	29	58	1
reading and debating about a text type	7	38	4	23	46	3
writing many drafts before final draft	14	77	1	25	50	2
debating about a picture/video	6	33	5	12	24	5
practice with grammar and vocabulary	6	33	5	28	56	4
using a writing textbook	4	22	7	5	10	7
<b>When and where?</b>						
in class	8	44	2	15	30	2
in and out of university (via technology)	12	66	1	37	74	1

In the first question, teachers and learners seem not to agree on many items concerning 'how teachers should teach writing'. Most teachers favour more writing many drafts through process writing, followed by topic discussion and then model reproduction (following this order: *process- oral- product-reading*). Students prefer discussing the topic first before writing many drafts and then practicing with grammar and vocabulary before model reproduction (following this order: *oral- process-reading- product*). However, both groups of participants believe teachers ought to teach writing in and out of university (with the help of technology).

- How should students learn writing?

**Table 2: Teachers' and learners' perceptions about how students should learn writing**

Item	Teachers			Learners		
	nb	%	rank	nb	%	rank
<b>How?</b>						
Reading	16	88	2	32	64	2
Writing	17	94	1	40	80	1
Internet	11	61	4	11	22	4
from class lessons	15	83	3	26	52	3
writing with peers	10	55	6	5	10	6
writing in a magazine	9	50	7	4	8	7
keeping a writing journal	11	61	4	7	14	5
<b>When and where?</b>						
only at university	5	27	2	6	12	2
In and out university	18	100	1	47	94	1

For the second question, teachers and learners have given similar beliefs about 'how students should learn writing' and so for 'when and where' they should learn writing'. Both comply with the necessity of regular writing practice for developing writing proficiency as well as the importance of reading more than 'class lessons'. They also perceive the importance of technology in promoting writing practice. Yet, they do not equally value keeping a writing journal.

- How should writing feedback and correction be?

**Table3. Teachers' and learners' perceptions about writing feedback and correction**

Item	Teachers			Learners		
	nb	%	rank	Nb	%	rank
<b>How?</b>						
Focus on form (language)	12	66	2	13	26	3
Focus on ideas	11	61	3	35	70	2
Focus on structure and organisation	16	88	1	36	72	1
<b>When and where?</b>						
in class	12	66	2	22	44	2
in and out of class (internet)	13	72	1	24	48	1
<b>By whom?</b>						
Teacher	17	94	1	42	82	1
Peers	14	77	2	7	14	3
Learner (self)	6	33	3	14	28	2

In the third question, a major contrast arises in 'how' feedback and correction should be. Both teachers and students conform to focus more on structure and organization, but teachers centre more on language accuracy while students on more ideas. The informants also agree that feedback and correction should be in and out of class, yet they disagree on who should provide it. Though both hold the teacher as the main responsible for this task, learners seem to trust their peers less.

- How should writing exam/test be?

**Table 4: Teachers' and learners' perceptions about writing exam/test**

Item	Teachers			Learners		
	nb	%	rank	Nb	%	rank
<b>Focus?</b>						
Focus on form (language)	14	77	1	22	44	2
Focus on content (ideas)	12	66	3	36	72	1
Focus on structure and organisation	14	77	1	22	44	2
<b>Purpose?</b>						
Check mastery of language	14	77	2	28	56	2
Check mastery of ideas	10	55	3	37	74	1
Check structure and organisation	16	88	1	25	50	3

In the fourth question which concerns the writing test, teachers' and students' answers are completely divergent. Students still view ideas as the most significant element in writing tests, whether in terms of *focus* or on *purpose*, whereas teachers place the greatest importance on form, structure, and organization.

### 3.2 The Interview

- What are the teachers' teaching difficulties in teaching writing?

*According to teachers*, teachers' difficulties are due to the big number of students and to the insufficient time load devoted to teaching the writing skill, despite the loaded programme. These conditions prevent teachers from providing necessary instruction in writing in the form of writing workshops, process writing or regular and individual feedback. Therefore, teachers may resort to different correction techniques, such as collective or oral correction. Besides, learners' weaknesses relating to grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation cause teachers to spend much time teaching them, and lead students to feel unable to write correctly.

Their poor background knowledge in the target language makes them spend time to generate ideas and even have recourse to translation from their mother tongue. Many of these students are reported not to do their homework and so do not have enough writing practice. *According to students*, teachers' difficulties consist of two kinds of problems. The first kind relates to teaching writing, which they find hard mainly in a foreign language. They believe teachers may encounter challenges in explaining or simplifying difficult lessons to non-native language learners, in understanding learners' handwriting and correcting their numerous mistakes. The other kind of difficulty relates to learners' different writing aptitudes, poor vocabulary, lack of reading, lack of writing practice and inattention of the importance of writing.

- What are students' difficulties in learning writing?

*According to teachers*, students' difficulties are due to the lack of opportunities to write in English because of the limited time load devoted to writing instruction, and the limited feedback given by teachers. In addition, learners do not read enough and do not write regularly to enrich their lexical repertoire or foster their writing competence. They suffer from weaknesses in grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, and resort to translation from Arabic or French resulting in ill-formed sentences. They equally find difficulties in focusing on fluency and accuracy at the same time and rush to the final draft without attempting the other steps of the writing process.

As *for the students*, they report the difficulty of remembering too many rules and information. Some find the writing programme long and the lessons difficult and many allude to the complication of expressing and selecting ideas, linking them, and respecting the right structure of the paragraph. They believe they need more time to think, rewrite, and then correct what they have written. They also confess their lack of reading and writing and their considerable language-related deficiencies.

- Should students write in different modules to learn and improve their writing competence?

*Teachers* believe that students should write in different modules to increase opportunities for writing in different genres (literary critique, historical essay, etc.), to enrich their vocabulary, to get feedback more frequently, to be more motivated, and avoid difficulties during exams.

Nevertheless, they acknowledge that the topics in the writing classes do not often relate to other subject matters in the EFL programme, adding that there should be collaboration between teachers to facilitate this issue.

**Students** share with teachers the conviction about the importance of writing in different modules to improve their learning, provide more writing practice in different subjects, and develop their writing competence.

- Is translating from Arabic or French a possible way of teaching/learning writing?

There is no consensus among **teachers** on the use of a translation as a means for teaching/learning writing. Some teachers see translation as a possible solution to improve learners' writing ability, by drawing their attention to the similarities and differences between the writing conventions and techniques in the different languages. Others believe languages are different in many respects and engaging in translation requires from them to be competent in two or three languages; thus, they prefer using the target language alone. Some **learners** believe that translation could help to understand difficult words and would constitute a good learning exercise to improve writing practice. Yet, the majority of learners reject translation because of the many differences existing between languages in terms of grammatical rules and in terms of meaning carried by words.

- Do you think the actual programme of writing with its time load appropriate to the level of students?

**Teachers** view the writing programme below university level instruction in general, but they think it is appropriate to learners' level in writing, due to their difficulties perceived at basic levels such as sentence structure. They judge the time load devoted to teaching writing skill insufficient because writing is taught in combination with reading, which is a skill that also requires time to foster its strategies in learners. Teachers maintain that the writing programme would be more helpful and beneficial provided students practice writing more regularly outside the classroom setting. Concerning **students**, most of them see the programme of writing within their capacities, while others find it rather long and difficult. The majority of students estimate that the time load attributed to writing sufficient, on the condition of practicing outside the classroom setting.

- What solutions do you suggest to improve learners' competence and achievement in writing?

In order to come around learners' problems and weaknesses in writing, **teachers** suggest reviewing their teaching methodology, as well as analysing their students' weaknesses and needs in writing to devise appropriate solutions. They also believe in the necessity to consider students' weaknesses in language-related aspects such as grammar and vocabulary. In addition, they maintain the importance of providing learners with regular and varied assignments while

choosing attractive topics and providing them with regular feedback, even with the help of technology/Internet.

They strongly hold that students ought to read and write regularly in different genres and that they should be encouraged to write in a diary, a blog, or a magazine. *Students* for their part believe they should read a lot and write regularly in class and out of class, about different topics. They also see the necessity of developing vocabulary through different sources and using the Internet to find lessons and more activities. These learners equally mention the necessity to revise lessons regularly and ask for the teacher's help when necessary.

#### 4. Results Discussion

##### 4.1 The questionnaire

There appear to be a number of discrepancies between teachers' and students' answers relating to the first issue. First, learners' preference of starting with discussing the writing topic may mean learners focus on visualising the topic first to be able to generate ideas, while teachers focus on developing the academic mastery of the writing skill by stressing the process approach. Though writing and speaking are different modes of discourse, speaking and debating over the writing topic offers learners the needed mental representation of the ideas to be expressed, before engaging into the composing practice. In this context, Creme and Lea (2003) advocate the advantage of talking about a topic, explaining that this enables learners to express their ideas freely as well as expand their ideas or correct them along with receiving feedback from the teacher or classmates.

They add that it is a way to raise and explore one's own questions, clarify understanding, and discover other ways of seeing the topic. These learners also seem to favour writing model reproduction over reading and debating over a text. They appear to prefer following a ready-made model and seem unaware of the importance of reading and text analysis. However, that there is a correlation between reading achievement and writing ability, and efficient reading is a prerequisite for success in writing (Hedge, 1988; Kern, 2000); therefore, the teacher should integrate both during language instruction. One would also note the learners' concern with grammar and vocabulary before model reproduction, which may mirror their anxiety to not produce error-free writing.

Teachers for their part seem to favour beginning to write many drafts rather than discussing the topic. They also appear to prefer having their students consider and follow a written model before reading and debating about a text type. Clear differences emerge then concerning perceptions about writing instruction, although both groups of informants consent that this instruction should not be confined to the classroom and should make use of technology when necessary.

Teachers and learners alike also believe that learning to write requires practice in both reading and writing. Hedge (1988) explains, "*Reading is necessary and valuable but it is not sufficient*" and that "*... in order to become a good writer a student needs to write a lot*" (Hedge, 1988,

p.11). Besides, both are mindful of the advantages word processing and Internet use bring to the writer in terms of time and energy saving, collaborative learning and autonomy (Li, 2000). Nevertheless, students neglect the importance of keeping a writing journal. A writing diary serves as writing prompter and progress checker; it can be individual, guided by the teacher or shared with others. The teacher should guide learners hold a writing diary to which he/she ought to respond regularly via comments and recommendations (Arar, 2015: 230-261)

In what concerns the incongruity between teachers' and learners' beliefs about feedback in writing, it is quite essential to consider students' pre-university instruction. According to the secondary education teacher guidebook, teachers should insist on meaning that focus should be on the message rather than the form, thereby tolerating form errors that do not hinder the transmission and the reception of the message (1). One would conclude that focus on *meaning* over *form* is part of these students' past learning experience. Teachers have to be knowledgeable of such a reality in order to understand their learners' difficulties. Learners for their part ought to value of the different feedback practices, with the teacher written comments combined with peer feedback, self-monitoring, teacher-student conference or computer-mediated feedback (Hyland, 2003). It is also advisable for the teacher to vary the correction and feedback practices in a way to change focus every time (fluency, accuracy, coherence, unity...), as well as combine direct and indirect feedback.

Concerning replies about writing evaluation, it seems relevant to link them with those of the previous question; accordingly, students stress on *meaning* (that is on content or ideas) over *form* (language accuracy, structure and organization). Their perceptions are molded during pre-university instruction; consequently, these learners carry on their studies with pre-conceived ideas that are not updated or corrected. Teachers for their part do not work on drawing students' attention to the requirements of effective writing at the university level that are different from those of writing in pre-university levels. It is worth noting that the teachers display inconsistency in their replies: even though they affirm insisting more on process writing and less on language accuracy during writing instruction, they concentrate more on accuracy and structure during writing evaluation. This goes in line with the findings of Lee (Lee, 2009, p.13-22) about mismatches between teachers' beliefs and their own classroom practices. Thus, there seems to be an unbalance between instruction and evaluation, causing as such students' dissatisfaction and even frustration when they see their semestrial results. Hamp-Lyons and Heasley (1987) explain that the problem with summative judgments (at the level of end products) is that they are not reliable. To be fair, evaluation should be based on a number of pieces of writing, at different steps of the writing process (Tribble, 1996), considering equally accuracy and fluency. These pieces should be on a range of topics, of different lengths, and under different conditions (homework/ in class), and preferably over a period.

#### 4.2 The interview

Students' and teachers' answers to the first question revealed an agreement between the two groups of informants about the difficulty of teaching the writing skill, mainly because of

students' weaknesses in grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics and their lack of writing practice. One would notice a contradiction in students' answers: though they all affirm writing can be best developed through literacy skills (reading and writing), they confess not to read/write regularly. This not only hinders the learning process but also renders the teachers' task even more difficult as they have to devote supplementary effort to train learners into writing. Teachers and learners equally agree on the fact that the learners' language-related weaknesses prevent them from expressing themselves easily in the written mode fluently or accurately. They also comply that students do not respect the steps of the writing process. Teachers do not realize, however, that these students find the writing lessons too difficult. They find an obstacle at instruction level before production level, and they need much time to think about the topic and the ways to express their ideas following writing principles. There is a call for teachers to discuss openly learners' difficulties and needs.

In what relates to writing in different modules, there is unanimity between teachers and learners on its advantages, yet neither of them seems to devote effort to make of this technique a regular teaching or learning practice. In fact, writing in different modules would develop writing proficiency and promote the integration of the skills, bridging the gap between the subject matters in the EFL programme within a content-based instruction fashion. Such an instruction requires not only teachers' knowledge about the links between the different subject matters but also demands an informed regular collaboration between teachers to devise well-structured and interrelated lessons, homework, and even tests (Arar, 2013).

Many teachers and students also consent on the advantages that translation may provide to facilitate understanding; however, more learners seem to reject translation than teachers do. Nevertheless, teachers note the students' ill use of translation in their writings (see the answer to interview question 2). This may mean that these students are not aware they do use translation 'unconsciously'. In this context, Carson (2001) highlights the fact that a writer's first language (L1) plays a complex and an important role in Second Language Acquisition, observing that "transfer from the writer's first language is an important cognitive factor in the interpretation of writing error and has been acknowledged from both a syntactic and a rhetoric perspective" (p.196). Wang and Wen (2002) (qtd in Ismail, 2011, p.76) equally confirm that L2 writing process is bilingual in nature since the second language writers have two languages at their disposal (L1 and L2) when they engage into the composing practice. Furthermore, Hamzaoui (2006) notes that while writing essays in either language, the learners transfer the skills and strategies from Arabic to French and English. Therefore, learners' knowledge and experience in L1 learners' do exert an influence on the development of L2 writing. Kern (Kern, 2000, 178) also claims, "Rhetorical resources required in one's native language can also have important facilitative effects on second language writing". Thus, teachers need to have a socio-cultural awareness of L2 writing conditions including L2 writing, writing topics, L1 knowledge, and contrastive rhetoric.

On the other hand, despite their slight difference in the way they perceive appropriateness of the writing programme and the attributed time load, both teachers and learners believe that only out of class writing practice could compensate for any lacks. Nonetheless, one has to remind that this belief does not entail actual writing practice on the part of learners (as demonstrated in the previous interview answers). As a remedy, teachers can assign students short and frequent writing tasks in order to train them into the writing discipline until it develops into a natural habit. These tasks have also to be varied in form (paragraph, essay, project...), different in procedure (individual, pair/group work) and diversified in feedback (teacher-, self- and peer- editing).

While expressing their suggestions for writing proficiency improvement, both groups of informants believe in the necessity for learners to remedy their language weaknesses and to practice reading and writing on a regular basis. They also comply to use technology in order to write out of the classroom setting. It is then necessary for teachers to develop their students' strategies in grammar and vocabulary use in an authentic fashion that would permit them to associate the linguistic aspect with the cognitive aspect of language learning and interaction. Hinkel (2004) suggests a productive teaching of grammar and vocabulary by focusing on constructions typically found in texts. In addition, teachers are recommended to expose learners to different types of texts in order to acquire a large background of grammatical and vocabulary structures to use them in their written products. They can consider as well the interrelationship between the studied type of text and its related grammatical and vocabulary requirements (For example, the *narrative* is characterized by past tense verbs, the use of vivid vocabulary words / expressions relating to the five senses, and the use of dialogues). Besides, activities that may enrich vocabulary knowledge would include index cards, cloze activities, word association games, graphic organizers and diagrams (Cook Hirai *et al*, 2010:45). As for mechanics, students keep making mistakes mainly during exams as they often explain their worry about the correctness of ideas (content) than about mechanics accuracy (form). Therefore, contextual analysis of rules governing the use of punctuation, as well as frequent activities involving the use and self/ peer-review best inculcate the meaningful and more natural application of punctuation guidelines.

What might be agreed on so far is that students necessitate carefully selected thematic writing tasks that require them to employ specific vocabulary items and grammar structures in a way to develop their linguistic competence (which is a requirement for writing competence), together with activities like planning, drafting, and revising. An important related aspect of writing instruction is writing an assessment, which is often linked to the end-product rather, or summative assessment. It is essential to implement formative assessment paired with regular feedback rather than with marks. Technology is yet an undeniably influential component in EFL university instruction. Sullivan and Pratt (1999) and Corbel and Gruba (2004), advocate the necessity of technology to develop literacy and support the positive effects of the use of networked computers in writing classrooms. Thus, Computer-Assisted Writing is seen as a

solution to help students improve their proficiency. A web-based writing instruction, through the adherence to writing laboratories, is believed to help students lessen their anxiety and enhance their motivation as well as increase their written output both quantitatively and qualitatively. Moreover, computer-mediated communication encourages collaborative writing and increases confidence and responsibility on the part of the second language learners, which promotes their autonomy (Li, 2000).

## 5. Pedagogical Implications

The research tools have revealed mismatches between teachers' and learners' beliefs about EFL writing instruction on a number of points, mainly in what concerns focus on meaning or on form during feedback or evaluation sessions. The research findings even provided evidence about discrepancies between teachers' or learners' perceptions and their own teaching or learning practices. While teachers believe in the importance of the process approach to teaching writing, they focus on the end product and adopt summative rather formative assessment in evaluation practices. Similarly, students believe in the necessity of reading and writing to develop their writing proficiency, yet they admit neither reading nor writing regularly. These major differences may explain the unsatisfactory results students have during tests and exams and may provide an understanding of their frustration and reluctance to write in an L2 context. Lack of achievement in writing is also due to their weaknesses, commonly felt by teachers and students alike, in language-related aspects: grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics.

Besides, the different answers have uncovered students' needs for integrating writing instruction with other skills as speaking and reading, and with other content-based subject matters for a more balanced EFL instruction. What is striking is the fact teachers are inattentive to students' different EFL learning/ writing beliefs or needs, and do not consider their socio-cultural context or past learning experiences. Learners for their part do not communicate their difficulties and their opinions to their teachers. This results in a kind of "*communication failure*" between teachers and learners, which worsens possible mismatches in their beliefs. Such discrepancies should then be addressed to remedy the present underachievement in EFL writing at university level.

Both teachers and students should develop 'language awareness'; that is the ability to reflect on language use as well as on learning and teaching strategies. In addition, both should be engaged in self-conscious and self-directed inquiry about the processes, mechanics, and strategies involved in writing (Russell, 1999). Students need regular writing practice and training in learning and writing strategies; they also need training in self-reflection, self-regulation, and autonomy. They must have a clear idea of what is required of them at the level of writing and EFL instruction in general. They should equally understand the importance of writing for EFL learning and the interrelatedness between all the subject matters in the EFL syllabus. Teachers

have to be trained to be active participants in the creation of classroom realities (Hall, 2011, p.5). They ought to be needs' analysts, alert to students' learning and writing differences, needs, and beliefs, to adopt an appropriate 'eclectic' teaching approach.

The writing programme has to consider learners' needs, past learning experiences in L1 and L2 contexts, and actual differences. Nunan (1989, 177) argues, "No curriculum can claim to be truly learner-centered unless the learner's subjective needs and perceptions relating to the process of learning are taken into account". Therefore, a consideration of students' perceptions is crucial to successful learning outcomes (Horwitz, 1988: 283), and so students' perceptions on their writing should be addressed to deal with potential conflicts between student beliefs and instructional practices and to avoid any frustration on the part of teachers or learners.

Moreover, teachers have to guide learners change their perceptions in a way to develop their writing skills. This can be done through discussion over the purpose, conferencing, questioning, or observation, as well as the use of effective types of writing instruction and feedback (including those which may not be preferred by learners), and the promotion of autonomy. Bournot-Trites and S  ror (Bournot Trites, S  ror 2013, and p.151) posit that teachers must have their say in the curriculum development, management and change, and learners should be consulted too. However, Gabillon (2012) notes that there is a need for teacher education programs to equip teachers with necessary knowledge on how to deal teacher and learner discrepancies. Therefore, there is a call for teacher education programmes in higher education to train novice and experienced teachers into reflective teaching, collaboration, research and self-improvement that could help bridge the gap between teacher and learner perspectives.

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to explore teachers' and students' beliefs about EFL writing instruction in higher education in Algeria. The results of the two research tools have revealed not only mismatches between teachers' and learners' perceptions pertaining to writing instruction, learning and evaluation but also enlightened the writing teaching /learning context with valuable information. On the one side, students' language related weaknesses hinder their progress in writing and in EFL learning, and on the other side; teachers' unawareness of learners' different difficulties and even learning styles and perceptions prevents them from making necessary interventions.

This paper has thus certified the necessity to identify and explore teachers' and learners' beliefs and their impact on language teaching and learning, so as to understand teacher and learner difficulties and accordingly devise appropriate roles and practices, for better EFL learning and writing proficiency. There is a felt need for developing positive attitudes about writing by encouraging students to write regularly, training them in skills transfer between L1 and L2, promoting cooperative learning, and exploiting technology in the foreign language classroom. More importantly, teachers and learners should engage in a teaching/learning partnership

through discussion, needs analysis and success commitment by conciliating their beliefs about writing and about EFL instruction/learning in general. Finally, both teachers' and students' beliefs have to be taken into consideration in EFL writing syllabus design and improvement, but this requires training and formal practice in learner autonomy and teacher education development.

- (1) « [la nécessité]... d'insister sur l'importance du message par rapport à la forme en tolérant les erreurs de forme qui ne gênent pas la transmission et la réception du message. »  
(Programme D'Anglais Deuxième Langue Etrangère, 2005, p6)

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