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IText and the State of EFL Academic Writing

The Case of Third Year EFL Learners at Mila University Centre

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to:

My dear father and mother, my everything, for their lifelong love, care, help, constant prayer, and wise encouragement. Words cannot interpret my deep gratitude for their love. Without you two, I would not be the person who I'm now. May Allah bless you always and forever.

My beloved and sweet sisters Wafia, Fatima, and Mouna for their great help and support.

My dear brother Faris of whom I'm so proud.

All my aunts and uncles.

My dear grandparents Youcef and Aziza.

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All those who are dear to me.

I always appreciate your existence and importance in my life.

Keltoum

Dedication

First of all, my deep gratitude goes to Almighty Allah for providing me with the strength to finish this work,

I dedicate this humble work to:

- *My precious mother and father, who have always been my source of strength, my first supporters, and my reason of happiness, Thank you, for making me the person who I' am today.*
- *My lovely sisters, Yasmina and Meryem, who helped and encouraged me always. Also, my sister in law, Hala.*
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- *And especially my little princess, niece "Tasnim"*
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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the digital writing (IText) practices that are commonly used by EFL students when texting. More importantly, the investigation further seeks to find out whether there is a resemblance between these practices and their academic writing. That is why some questions about the state of academic writing in comparison to the features of IText are raised to know how these practices are exported to students' writing. The questions raised in this study are: (1) what are the digital writing practices that are commonly used by third year EFL students? (2) do these writing practices resemble the students' academic writing? In response to these questions, a descriptive method is opted for in the present study. The data are collected through two main research tools; a questionnaire is administered to eighty third year students of English, and an interview is conducted with nine EFL teachers at the Department of Foreign Languages at Mila University Centre. The research findings reveal that third year EFL students use a wide range of digital writing practices. Indeed, the obtained results confirm that students' academic writing resembles digital language (IText). At the end of the research work, a number of recommendations are provided for both teachers and students for a better enhancement of academic writing, and for the sake of maintaining its important features.

Key words: Digital writing, IText, digital writing practices, academic writing, digital language.

List of Abbreviations

AC: Asynchronous Communication

CMC: Computer-Mediated Communication

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

E-mail: Electronic Mail

FB: Facebook

ICT: Information and Communications Technology

IM: Instant Messaging

ITBC: Internet Text-Based Communication

IText: Information and Technology Text

MMC: Mobile-Mediated Communication

MSN: Messenger

SMS: Short Message Service

SC: Synchronous Communication

TMC: Technology-Mediated Communication

TBC: Text-Based Communication

TBMC: Text-Based Mediated Communication

List of Tables

Table 3.1: Students' experience in learning English	62
Table 3.2: Participants' attitude towards English	63
Table 3.3: Students' motivation to write in English.....	64
Table 3.4: Attitude towards writing	65
Table 3.5: Students' evaluation of their writing	66
Table 3.6: Frequency of writing out of the classroom	67
Table 3.7: Kind of writing done out of the classroom.....	67
Table 3.8: Participants difficulties when writing formally	68
Table 3.9: Participants' most corrected aspects of writing	70
Table 3.10: Participants' difficult writing stages.....	71
Table 3.11: Participants' ownership of a smart phone	72
Table 3.12: Frequency of using text-based communication	73
Table 3.13: Use of English text-based communication	73
Table 3.14: People whom English texting is used with	74
Table 3.15: Frequency of using SMS	75
Table 3.16: Use of English SMS	76
Table 3.17: Participants' ownership of email account	77
Table 3.18: Participants' frequency of using email	78
Table 3.19: Students sending and receiving of English emails	78

Table 3.20: Participants' ownership of Facebook accounts.....	79
Table 3.21: Participants' frequency of using Facebook	80
Table 3.22: Use of English while facebooking.....	81
Table 3.23: Use of other social networking tools	81
Table 3.24: The sort of language used on Internet or SMS	82
Table 3.25: Respect of rules and conventions of formal writing while texting	83
Table 3.26: Participants' violated aspects	84
Table 3.27: Participants' practices of digital writing (shortening, grammatical, paralinguistic features).....	85
Table 3.28: The reasons for using shortening forms	92
Table 3.29: The negative impact of texting on students' academic writing..	93
Table 3.30: Formal writing errors and texting habits	95
Table 3.31: Potential damage of text-based communication to participants' writing for classroom purposes	95
Table 3.32: Teachers' experience in teaching at university.....	99
Table 3.33: Teachers' experience in reading and correcting students' writing	100
Table 3.34: Area corrected in students' formal work	100
Table 3.35: Teachers' use of text-based digital communication tools with students.....	101
Table 3.36: Teachers' use of English while texting	103
Table 3.37: Teachers' respect of rules and conventions of formal writing when texting	103

Table 3.38: The most violated aspects of students' writing	104
Table 3.39: Resemblance of students' classroom writing to IText.....	105
Table 3.40: Tolerance of texting features	108
Table 3.41: Sensitization to texting features	109
Table 3.42: Digital writing practices damaging formal writing	110

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: The Correspondence between the Paragraph and the Essay	15
Figure 1.2: The Process Wheel of Writing	24
Figure 3.1: Students' experience in learning English	62
Figure 3.2: Participants' attitude towards English.....	63
Figure 3.3: Students' motivation to write in English	64
Figure 3.4: Attitude towards writing	65
Figure 3.5: Students' evaluation of their writing	66
Figure 3.6: Frequency of writing out of the classroom	67
Figure 3.7: Kind of writing done out of the classroom.....	68
Figure 3.8: Participants' difficulties when writing formally.....	69
Figure 3.9: Participants' most corrected aspects of writing	70
Figure 3.10: Participants' difficult writing stages.....	71
Figure 3.11: Participants' ownership of a smart phone	72
Figure 3.12: Frequency of using text-based communication	73
Figure 3.13: Use of English text-based communication	74
Figure 3.14: People whom English texting is used with	75
Figure 3.15: Frequency of using SMS	76
Figure 3.16: Use of English SMS	77
Figure 3.17: Participants' ownership of email account	77
Figure 3.18: Participants' frequency of using email	78
Figure 3.19: Students' sending and receiving of English emails.....	79

Figure 3.20: Participants' ownership of Facebook accounts	79
Figure 3.21: Participants' frequency of using Facebook	80
Figure 3.22: Use of English while facebooking.....	81
Figure 3.23: Use of other social networking tools	82
Figure 3.24: The sort of language used on Internet or SMS	83
Figure 3.25: Respect of rules and conventions of formal writing while texting.....	84
Figure 3.26: Participants' violated aspects	85
Figure 3.27.a: Participants' shortening forms.....	87
Figure 3.27.b: Participants' grammatical forms.....	88
Figure 3.27.c: Participants' paralinguistic forms.....	88
Figure 3.28: The reasons for using shortening forms	93
Figure 3.29: The negative impact of texting on students' academic writing	94
Figure 3.30: Formal writing errors and texting habits	95
Figure 3.31: Potential damage of text-based communication to participants' writing for classroom purposes	96
Figure 3.32: Teachers' experience in teaching at university.....	99
Figure 3.33: Teachers' experience in reading and correcting students' writing	100
Figure 3.34: Area corrected in students' formal work	101
Figure 3.35: Teachers' use of text-based digital communication tools with students.....	102
Figure 3.36: Teachers' use of English while texting	103

Figure 3.37: Teachers’ respect of rules and conventions of formal writing when texting	104
Figure 3.38: The most violated aspects of students’ writing	105
Figure 3.39: Resemblance of students’ classroom writing to IText.....	106
Figure 3.40: Tolerance of texting features	108
Figure 3.41: Sensitization to texting features	109
Figure 3.42: Digital writing practices damaging formal writing	111

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	i
Acknowledgement.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
List of Abbreviations.....	v
List of Tables.....	vi
List of Figures.....	ix
Table of Contents.....	xii

General Introduction

1. Statement of the Problem	1
2. Aims of the Study	1
3. Significance of the Study	2
4. The Research Questions.....	2
5. Means of the Research	2
6. Structure of the Dissertation.....	3

CHAPTER ONE: Academic Writing

Introduction	5
1.1. Definition of Writing	5
1.2. Characteristics of Academic Writing.....	6
1.2.1. Purpose	7
1.2.2. Audience.....	7
1.2.3. Formal Tone.....	8
1.2.4. Organization.....	8
1.2.5. Unity.....	8

1.2.6. Coherence	8
1.2.7. Cohesion	9
1.3. Mechanics of Writing	9
1.3.1. Grammar.....	9
1.3.2. Spelling.....	10
1.3.3. Punctuation	10
1.3.3.1. Full Stop (.).....	11
1.3.3.2. Question Mark (?).....	11
1.3.3.3. Exclamation Mark (!).....	11
1.3.3.4. Comma (,)	11
1.3.3.5. Colon (:)	12
1.3.3.6. Semicolon (;)	12
1.3.3.7. Quotation Mark (“ ”).....	12
1.3.4. Capitalization	12
1.4. Rhetorical Resources.....	12
1.4.1. Clarity.....	12
1.4.2. Style.....	12
1.4.3. Linking Words and Phrases	13
1.4.4. Creative Writing.....	13
1.5. Forms of Academic Writing	13
1.5.1. Paragraphs	13
1.5.2. Essays.....	14
1.5.3. Dissertations	15
1.5.4. Reports.....	16
1.6. Types of Writing	16

1.6.1. Descriptive.....	16
1.6.2. Argumentative.....	16
1.6.3. Expository	17
1.7. Teaching Academic Writing.....	17
1.7.1. Approaches to Teaching Writing.....	18
1.7.1.1.Product-Oriented Approach	18
1.7.1.2.Process-Oriented Approach.....	19
1.7.1.2.1. The Writing Process.....	20
1.7.1.2.1.1. Prewriting.....	20
1.7.1.2.1.1.1. Choosing and Narrowing a Topic.....	21
1.7.1.2.1.1.2. Gathering Ideas	21
1.7.1.2.1.1.3. Organizing an outline.....	22
1.7.1.2.1.2. Writing.....	22
1.7.1.2.1.3.Revising	22
1.7.1.2.1.4.Rewriting.....	23
1.7.1.2.1.5.Proofreading	23
1.7.2. Teaching Research Skills	25
1.7.2.1.Avoiding Plagiarism.....	25
1.7.2.2.Synthesizing	28
1.7.3. Responding to Students' Writing	29
1.7.4. Assessing Writing	30
Conclusion	31

CHAPTER TWO: IText: New Writing Practices

Introduction.....	33
2.1. Technology-Mediated Communication (TMC).....	33
2.2. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC).....	34
2.3. Mobile-Mediated Communication (MMC).....	35
2.4. Text-Based Mediated Communication (TBMC).....	35
2.4.1. Definition.....	35
2.4.2. Synchronicity of TBC.....	37
2.4.2.1. Synchronous Communication (SC)	37
2.4.2.2. Asynchronous Communication (AC).....	37
2.4.3. Forms of TBC.....	38
2.4.3.1. SMS Messaging	38
2.4.3.2. Email Messaging	38
2.4.3.3. Instant Messaging (IM)	39
2.5. IText	41
2.5.1. Factors of Emergence: Forcing a New Linguistic Form to Appear.....	42
2.5.2. Features of Texting Language: Towards Making an Identity	43
2.5.2.1. Linguistic Features	43
2.5.2.1.1. Acronyms vs. Initialism	44
2.5.2.1.2. Creative Homophones	44
2.5.2.1.3. Abbreviations, Contractions, and Clippings	45
2.5.2.1.4. Non-Conventional Spelling	46
2.5.2.2. Grammatical Features	46
2.5.2.3. Paralinguistic Features	47
2.5.2.3.1. Smileys and Emoticons	48

2.5.2.3.2. Non-Conventional Punctuation and Capitalization	50
2.5.2.3.3. Repetition of Letters	52
2.6. Raising Educational Concerns about the Future of Academic Writing.....	53
Conclusion.....	54
 CHAPTER THREE: IText and the State of EFL Academic Writing: The Field Work	
Introduction	56
3.1. The Aims of the Research.....	56
3.2. The Participants	56
3.3. Data Collection Tools	57
3.4. The Students' Questionnaire	59
3.4.1. Description of the Students' Questionnaire	59
3.4.2. Administration of the Students' Questionnaire	62
3.4.3. Analysis of the Students' Questionnaire	62
3.5. The Teachers' Interview	96
3.5.1. Description of the Teachers' Interview	97
3.5.2. Administration of the Teachers' Interview	98
3.5.3. Analysis of the Teachers' Interview	98
3.6. Discussion and Interpretation of the Main Findings	111
3.7. Pedagogical Recommendations	112
3.7.1. Recommendations for Students	112
3.7.2. Recommendations for Teachers	113
3.8. Limitations of the Study	113
Conclusion	114
General Conclusion	115
Bibliography	117

Appendices

Appendix A The Students' Questionnaire.....	123
Appendix B The Teachers' Interview.....	128
الملخص.....	131
Résumé	132

General Introduction

1. Statement of the Problem

Writing is one of the four skills that should be acquired by any foreign language learner. This skill has lately been affected greatly. The Information and Communication Technologies revolution gave birth to Computer-Mediated Communication, which, in turn, provided a multiplicity of options for its users. In fact, over the last three decades, the world has witnessed a massive explosion of new types of communication gadgets such as computers of all types, mobile phones, BlackBerries, and more recently the internet and the social media platforms as means to exchange thoughts through writing.

The use of text messaging (or IText) to communicate has been widely and quickly adopted by the youth of whom students constitute a large proportion. Having grown up using computers and internet, EFL students, like the rest of the worlds, shifted their interest from voice-based to text-based communication to the extent that it has become a vital part of their social lives. More importantly, one cannot fail to notice that this social group has started to create a digital world with its novel form of language use that stands in its own right as a new linguistic variety, very different from the conventional writing. As such, this deviation from the conventions of standard language raises the issue of examining the futurez of academic writing in the electronic age.

2. Aims of the Study

The present study aims at investigating the common digital writing (IText) practices used by third year EFL students, and determining whether there is any resemblance between these practices and their academic writing. This study seeks also to raise students' awareness of the issue at hand.

3. Significance of the Study

This study is meant to raise educational concerns about the future of EFL academic writing in a world that is hugely absorbed by texting language/IText.

4. The Research Questions

The current research seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the digital writing practices that are commonly used by third year EFL students?
- Do these writing practices resemble the students' academic writing?

5. Means of the Research

This study sets out to investigate the resemblance, if any, between the digital writing practices used when texting and the state of EFL academic writing. As such, the research does not intend to establish any causal relationship between the two variables under investigation.

For the sake of gathering information, the study uses both a questionnaire for students and an interview with teachers. The students' questionnaire is administered to third year EFL learners of English at the Department of Foreign languages, Mila University Centre. The target population is 129 third year students, from whom 80 students were selected. The questionnaire aims to find out the digital writing (IText) practices commonly used by the students while texting. The teachers' interview, on the other hand, is conducted with nine teachers of different modules that require students to compose pieces of writing running from one paragraph to a composition of paragraphs. The purpose of the teachers' interview is to see whether the digital writing practices are exported to the students' classroom writing.

6. Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is composed of three chapters. The first and second chapters constitute the theoretical background of the study; both of them, that is, cover the literature review. The third one is the practical part of this work. The first chapter focuses on academic writing. It first highlights the nature of writing in general and of academic writing in specific. Then, it turns to discuss the characteristics of academic writing, the mechanics of writing, and its common forms and types. At this point, the chapter takes writing into classroom settings in the sense that it accounts for the teaching of writing and research skills. First, it gives an overview about two common approaches to teaching writing, namely the product and the process approaches, with a special focus on the stages that make up the writing activity. Then, it addresses some basic skills required to produce acceptable academic writing. Finally, it deals with the issue of responding to and assessing students' writing. The second chapter turns attention to another aspect of writing, namely IText, starting by some general aspects before hitting to the subject of the whole discussion. It begins by defining technology-mediated communication, computer-mediated communication, mobile-mediated communication, and text-based mediated communication. Then, it sheds light on the nature of IText in terms of a definition of the term, an exploration of the factors that have pushed IText to emerge, and a detailed description of IText features. Next, the chapter combines the two variables under investigation: IText and the state of EFL academic writing. It, furthermore, endeavours to raise some educational concerns about the future of academic writing in an age that is predominated by textual communication in a digital format. The third chapter, the practical part, tackles the research problem, addresses the raised questions, and attempts to achieve the aims of the research. It is devoted to the description of the research design, the analysis and discussion of the data collected through the students' questionnaire and the teachers' interview along with

an interpretation of the main findings. The chapter ends up with some pedagogical recommendations for both teachers and students to consider together with the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER ONE: Academic Writing

Introduction

Learning a foreign language is based on acquiring its four skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Writing is considered to be a necessary skill students need to develop for better academic achievement; they are required to build a good level in communicating their ideas when writing.

The current chapter aims at making students aware of the characteristics of writing. The first section starts by defining some notions about writing in general, and academic writing in specific. Then, it spots the light on its common features before it addresses its mechanics, and some major rhetorical resources. Next, it shifts attention to the most common forms academic writing can take, and discusses basic writing types. The second section, on the other hand, sheds light on teaching this productive skill. It starts discussing the main approaches that help teachers promote their students' ability to write effectively. After that, it deals with some basic skills students need to successfully compose an acceptable piece of writing. Finally, the second section attempts to outline the major types of assessment, namely, the formative and summative, and ends up by highlighting the importance of feedback.

1.1. Definition of Writing

Writing is considered as a crucial skill that should be mastered by any language learner. As such, learners need to maintain a good quality of writing for higher achievement in their learning progress. Byrne states that writing is “an act of forming graphic symbols” (1991, p. 1). That is, writing is a matter of letter combination to form words and sentences. Besides, the same author states that “writing involves the encoding of a message of some kind: that is we translate our thoughts into language” (p. 34).

To put it differently, writing is a process whereby a person transfers ideas to a written form and arranges them (into paragraphs and essays) to reach given functions.

According to Badger and White (2000), “writing involves knowledge about language, knowledge of the context in which writing happens and especially the purpose and skills in using the language” (pp. 157-158). Therefore, the writer, to write effectively, needs to master the conventions of academic writing. In this regard, the mastery of writing as a skill is very important for students who are learning a foreign language to be able to use it for communication.

Academic writing is seen by Bailey (2003) as a flexible activity that can be practiced by students to master their studies. It exists within an academic context to be developed. Thus, writing practice is one of the important stages for improving a writer’s piece of writing. This is achieved through continuing to write.

Oshima and Hogue (2007) describe writing as “the kind used in high school and college classes” (p. 3). Similarly, Whitaker (2009) identifies academic writing as “the type students have to do for ‘their university courses’” (p. 2). That is, writing is the sort they are obliged to write throughout their academic journey such as: essays, reports, dissertations, and research papers.

1.2. Characteristics of Academic Writing

Language learners are required to deal with different writing assignments, which have a number of characteristics (Phyllis & Lea, 2008). Some of these characteristics are explained in the coming paragraphs.

1.2.1. Purpose

A piece of writing must be purposeful. Purpose refers to the meaning of what is written, the aim behind introducing a given idea in the writer's point of view, way of thinking, or what he wishes to achieve when communicating via writing. A piece of academic prose is usually produced to inform, to present and explain, and to persuade.

In addition to the purposes mentioned above, Bailey (2011, p. 3) identifies the following as the most common reasons for academic writing:

- To report on a piece of research the writer has conducted.
- To answer a question the writer has been given or chosen.
- To discuss a subject of common interest and give the writer's view.
- To synthesize research done by others on a topic.

1.2.2. Audience

Audience, the second characteristic of writing, refers to the person or people who will read the written work. In the foreign language classroom, it refers to teachers who give students different writing assignments (Swales & Feak, 2012). However, if it is out of the classroom context, it is quite important to know who the piece of writing is intended to. This requires the writer to know what language to be used that clearly delivers the message. The writer should also deal with a topic that interests the audience and about which they have little knowledge.

Elbow (2000) classifies audience into four types. First, there is an audience with authority over the writer, which is the teacher. In this type, students write to get good grades and see whether their language is accepted or not. Second, an audience of peers is the classmates. Students feel less stressful to write for their classmates. Third, there is an audience of allies: "The simplest definition of an ally reader is someone who cares more about the

writer than about writing” (Elbow, 2000, p. 35). Thus, an ally is someone who supports and encourages the writer no matter how his writing is. Fourth, the audience of self-private writing is used to improve students’ writing; in this type, students are not worried about any judgment that might be made to their writing, because their intention is to develop the habit of writing.

1.2.3. Formal Tone

Tone is defined by Oshima and Hogue (2006) as the “style or manner of expression” (p. 3). It is determined by the audience and the subject or theme of a piece of writing. In academic writing, the tone tends to be serious and formal. Formality refers to the use of technical words and the avoidance of a personal tone. It means that a writer uses an academic language rather than using an informal, friendly style. Anderson and Poole (1994) state that “personal pronouns such as I, we, you, me, our, and us should not appear except in quotations” (p. 6).

1.2.4. Organization

It is about the format of any piece of writing. It refers to setting a framework for writing. Moreover, organization shows the reader how the writer’s ideas fit together.

1.2.5. Unity

Unity, an important feature of academic writing, means that all sentences of a written work must deal with the same major idea. In other words, the sentences should discuss and serve a single main point.

1.2.6. Coherence

Another necessary element of a good academic work is coherence. The Latin verb “cohere” means “hold together”. Therefore, coherence signifies the smooth and logical flow of thoughts throughout a piece of writing. To put it differently, the ideas are linked together

logically, clearly, and are easily understood. It is worth noting that flow is very important for communication in the sense that it links one statement to another which helps the readers to keep reading.

1.2.7. Cohesion

Cohesion refers to the use of conjunctions and reference words to link a text together to make it understandable. Reference words consist of pronouns (possessive, objective, demonstrative), phrases, and the like (Bailey, 2011).

Longman dictionary defines cohesion as the grammatical and lexical relationship that exists between parts of a sentence and/or a larger piece of writing. Cohesion requires the use of cohesive marks to accomplish relationships between sentences, and they help readers to keep following with the writer's ideas.

1.3. Mechanics of Writing

Writing is a productive skill that requires enough time and practice in order for it to be developed. This skill has some areas that need to be mastered for it to be effective; these are commonly known as the mechanics of writing. Before getting involved in these mechanics, there is a need to define the concept first. This has to do with the appearance of words and how they are used and punctuated, such as the indentation of a word at the beginning of a paragraph and the use of capitalization (Kane, 1988).

1.3.1. Grammar

Grammar is about the rules that constitute the spoken and written language. According to Galko (2001), grammar refers to the rules of language and how sentences are composed. It is quite important to be familiar with these rules when writing in order not to be accused of breaking or disrupting the basic unit of language- the sentence.

Two example sentence errors which are grammar problems should be avoided, because most students tend to commit them consciously or subconsciously; these are run-on sentences and sentence fragments. The former refers to linking two or more sentences with a comma instead of a semicolon or a coordinating conjunction; the latter refers to the use of incomplete sentences such as relative clause or a subordinating clause. Run-on sentences, for example, can be corrected in a number of ways such as separating the two sentences with a period, a semicolon, a comma plus a conjunction, or changing one of the two sentences into a dependent clause by inserting a subordinating conjunction (Galko, 2001).

1.3.2. Spelling

A good writer needs to be good at spelling. Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary (2008) describes spelling as the "act of forming words correctly from individual letters" (p. 427). Starkey points out that "essay readers have described spelling mistakes as making the writer seem 'sloppy', 'unprofessional', 'not as smart', 'lazy', and even 'foolish'" (2004, p. 45). That is to say, spelling mistakes are totally refused by readers. Therefore, spelling has a very significant role to play in the goodness of any piece of writing. There are some teachers who may even take off points if they see words that are wrongly spelled. Additionally, misspelling words might affect the reader. Galko (2001) suggests that it is preferable to use a computer spell checker, or a dictionary to help the writer spell correctly.

1.3.3. Punctuation

Punctuation has a very powerful role in writing. A writer can say a lot using punctuation. It is very important to be familiar with the use of punctuation in any piece of academic writing. Being accurate in using punctuation marks helps the audience to clearly

understand what is meant by a given writing structure. In the same context, Harmer (2004) states that:

Many people judge the quality of what is written not just the content, the language and writer's handwriting but also their use of punctuation. If capital letters are not used correctly this cannot only make a negative impression but can also make a text difficult to understand. (p. 49)

1.3.3.1. Full Stop (.)

A full stop is known also as a 'period'. A full stop is used to separate sentences that have complete meanings. It is also used to indicate abbreviations.

1.3.3.2. Question Mark (?)

A question mark is used at the end of a direct question. It is used also to indicate the use of an interrogative statement, clause or phrase.

1.3.3.3. Exclamation Mark (!)

Most of the time, exclamation marks are used after interjections, or to show emphasis. An exclamation mark is used to indicate strong feelings or high volume, or even for warning such as 'Watch out!'

1.3.3.4. Comma (,)

According to Penguin (1997), commas have mainly four uses: a listing comma, a joining comma, a gapping comma, and a bracketing comma. The first comma type is used to separate items in a list where the last item is commonly preceded by 'and'. The second one is used to combine two dependent clauses that are connected by a conjunction. The third use is to demonstrate that there is no need to repeat the words that were already mentioned. The fourth use is for items that can be removed without changing the meaning of the sentence.

1.3.3.5. Colon (:)

The colon is used to introduce a quotation, to give a list of items, or to reveal an explanation of what comes before it, which is most of the time a complete sentence.

1.3.3.6. Semicolon (;)

The semicolon is used for different reasons such as to show the link between two phrases, to separate independent clauses.

1.3.3.7. Quotation Mark (“ ”)

A quotation mark is used to illustrate the work of another writer. Also, it is used to show a direct speech.

1.3.4. Capitalization

In English, capital letters are used in proper nouns, days and months, nationality words, and at the beginning of the word in a sentence.

1.4. Rhetorical Resources

1.4.1. Clarity

Clarity is about conveying the writer's message to the reader in a clear manner. For more explanation of this point, Starkey (2004) provides some helpful guidelines. First, a writer should avoid ambiguity, by not using a language that might contain more than one idea. Second, he uses modifiers to sound clearer such as adverbs and adjectives. Third, it is better to provide the reader with the exact word directly. Fourth, the writer should be concise and avoid using redundant words or details because this makes the reader feel bored and lose attention.

1.4.2. Style

A good writer should have an attractive style to convince the reader. Style is, therefore, one key of successful writing. Galko (2001) mentions some strategies to help the writer

accomplish a good style which are: being natural in writing, varying sentence structure, and trying out different types of figurative language.

1.4.3. Linking Words and Phrases

Linking words and phrases are very useful because they keep ideas unified. There is a number of linking words with different purposes such as: addition (moreover, in addition to), cause and effect (because, due to), clarification (that is, in other words), contrast (while, unlike, in contrast), illustration (for example, for instance) and the list is open for different types of writing modes (Swales & Feak, 2012).

1.4.4. Creative Writing

According to Hale (2008), creative writing refers to the language that is used to demonstrate emotional thoughts using stylistic language. Creative writing can be illustrated in a number of types such as journals, diaries, personal essays, poetry, storytelling, and letters.

1.5. Forms of Academic Writing

Writing is used for a variety of purposes, and produced in many different ways (Harmer, 2004). Academic writing has many kinds ranging from one to thousands of pages long, among which, the most common ones are outlined below.

1.5.1. Paragraphs

A paragraph is a set of related sentences which discuss one main idea about a single topic. In academic settings, a typical paragraph is usually five to ten sentences long; nevertheless, it is the nature of the main idea which decides about the length of a paragraph.

A paragraph is recognized to have a structure. It consists of three basic parts: a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. Usually the first sentence of a

paragraph, the topic sentence introduces the topic of a piece of writing and states the core idea. Zemach and Rumisek (2003) point out that “it [a topic sentence] is the most general sentence of the paragraph” (p. 12). The supporting sentences come after the topic sentence to provide support, elaboration, explanation, illustration, or development of the main idea. Thus, the supporting sentences are more specific sentences in comparison with the topic sentence. Finally, there comes the concluding sentence. It is usually the last sentence of a paragraph. It may restate the main idea of the topic sentence in a different way, summarize the main points of the whole paragraph, or provide a point of view about the theme.

It is very important for students to know how to write a paragraph as it is recognized to be the building block of longer pieces of academic discourse (Bailey, 2011). That is, all other types of assignments in academic writing are based on it. That is why it is essential to know the organization of a good paragraph (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008).

1.5.2. Essays

A common kind of academic writing, an essay includes several paragraphs instead of one or two. A typical academic essay is at least five paragraphs long. In this sense, it is much longer than a paragraph. Still, an essay exhibits a pattern of organization that is quite similar to that of a paragraph. First, like the paragraph, it is devoted to discuss one main idea about a single topic. However, the core idea of the essay is too complex to be discussed in one paragraph; as a result, the central idea must be divided into several paragraphs, each of which tackles one major point or aspect. Therefore, similar to a paragraph, an essay has a major idea contained in a sentence called a thesis statement. This is coupled with other introductory sentences which altogether constitute the introduction. Each paragraph of an essay is analogous to a supporting sentence in a paragraph. Together, these supporting paragraphs form

the body of an essay. Again, as a paragraph has a concluding sentence, an essay has a final paragraph which brings the discussion to an end, and it is referred to as the conclusion.

The following figure sums up the basic points that have been discussed concerning the relationship between the paragraph and the essay:

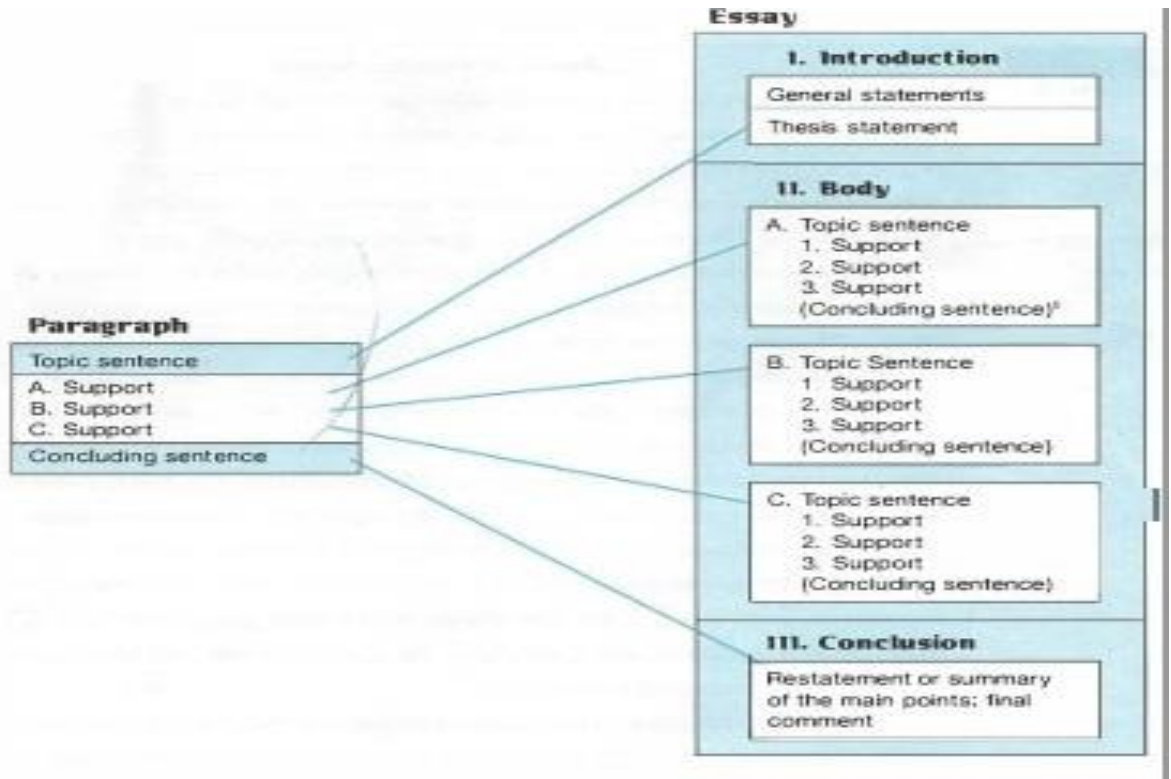


Figure 1.1. The Correspondence between the Paragraph and the Essay (Oshima & Hogue, 2007, p. 147).

1.5.3. Dissertations

A dissertation is an academic piece of writing that is very long, based on the writer’s research, and presented for getting a degree (bachelor, master or doctoral). It is structured on a number of contents to be included such as: title, acknowledgements, literature review, etc.

One very important feature of dissertations is the reference list that provides readers with the source of information.

1.5.4. Reports

“A report should be concise” (Field, 2009, p. 124), provided with examples and illustrations to explain the ideas of the report. Contrary to the essay, a report requires having headings for the included sections. It needs to be organized in a plan. In any report, there is some structure that should be included such as the title page, the name of the researcher, the population to whom it is directed. Additionally, it should be followed by the table of contents, the introduction and the whole work. This should follow a logical order.

1.6. Types of Writing

Academic work frequently includes a description of a concept, an introduction of a thesis with a support by a range of arguments, or an expository account developed by a number of techniques. Therefore, it seems quite important for students to be familiar with these writing types.

1.6.1. Descriptive

Zemach and Rumisek (2003) state that a descriptive piece of writing “explains how someone or something looks or feels” (p. 25). It portrays how a person, a thing, or a place looks, sounds, smells, or tastes by discussing, for example, defining characteristics and features.

1.6.2. Argumentative

Sometimes referred to as opinion writing, an argumentative piece of writing expresses a personal point of view or a belief about a particular subject and attempts to convince the reader that it is true via providing some arguments that are usually accompanied by facts. Hence, the aim of argumentative writing is to persuade the reader.

1.6.3. Expository

This writing type aims at explaining or showing how something functions, or it may report and express factual information. It exhibits a high degree of logical organization. An expository account can be developed by one of several techniques such as: examples, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, definition, and classification. Comparison and/or contrast is widely recognized to be the most common technique that is used to develop an expository account.

A comparison and/or contrast piece of writing discusses the similarities and/or differences that lie between two items. Moreover, it has a specific organization; it can be structured in one of two ways: the block pattern and the point by point pattern. With reference to the former pattern of organization, the similarities are discussed in one paragraph while the second block is devoted to deal with differences between the two concepts in question. With regard to the latter organizational technique, the writer, firstly, compares and/or contrast “one point about the two topics, then a second point, then a third point” (Zemach & Rumisek, 2003, p. 45) until all the required aspects of comparison/contrast are covered.

1.7. Teaching Academic Writing

People are not born good writers; that is, writing is not an innate faculty like speaking. Writing should rather be developed through conscious and intentional practice and training. In fact, this productive skill is one of the key skills English as a foreign language (EFL) students need to master in their academic study. For this reason, effort has been taken in an attempt to devise effective approaches to teaching writing.

1.7.1. Approaches to Teaching Writing

In English language learning, there have been mainly two approaches to teaching writing, namely the product approach and the process approach.

1.7.1.1. Product-Oriented Approach

As the name suggests, the product-oriented approach to teaching writing focuses, mainly, on the final product which is the written text itself; moreover, it makes use of it as a medium of teaching writing. In other words, the final product is considered as a model to follow. This approach to teaching writing gets its theoretical basis from two schools of thought, namely Structuralism and Behaviourism. The former is an assumption about the nature of language in Linguistics while the latter is a learning theory in Psychology.

With reference to the first theoretical background, writing activity is looked at, merely, as a matter of drawing and combining marks on a surface or a screen; moreover, this combination is governed by a set of rules (Hyland, 2003). In other words, writing is simply an act of applying and adhering to the grammatical rules and standards of any language to produce well-formed sentences and structures, the thing that makes the product-oriented approach pay much attention and give much priority to mechanics of writing such as grammatical and syntactical structures. Thus, it is primarily concerned with the correctness and form of the final product. Indeed, the traditional approach puts an end to the problem of accuracy in terms of rules and structures; however, what this trend has failed to recognize is that writers write for an audience and for a purpose and that ideas are generated and encoded while working on a piece of writing. Indeed, the product approach misses the focal point that writing is a complicated business, a complex process, and a mental activity.

With regard to the second theoretical basis, learning writing is perceived as a matter of imitating and adopting model texts. Firstly, students are informed about the type of text they are required to produce, for example, a narrative paragraph. Then, they are given a model to analyze and imitate in terms of both content and structure; both the content and the form which the students deal with are largely controlled by the model text the teacher brings into the classroom. In other words, it is the teacher who decides on how the final product is to look like in terms of both ideas and structure. Therefore, this approach kills students' creativity and neglects the importance of having the power to think and generate ideas. In addition, errors are avoided as they are seen as signs of lack of learning.

All in all, the traditional approach holds a wrong belief about the nature of writing, and how it is carried out, the thing that the process approach has succeeded to catch and emphasize.

1.7.1.2. Process-Oriented Approach

This approach came as a reaction to the long lasting traditional approach, namely the product approach.

The process-oriented approach does not view writing as an act of applying grammatical rules to produce correct written sentences; rather, it adopts another perspective. In the eyes of its proponents, writing is seen as a journey of meaning discovery and shaping (White, 1988). Therefore, unlike the product approach, the process approach to teaching writing appreciates people's creativity in writing. The proof is the fact that it gives students considerable freedom to decide on what to include in their writing in terms of ideas (content) and how to express them verbally (form) (Hyland, 2003). Students are encouraged to search for ideas, reflect upon their personal experiences, express their own attitudes and viewpoints,

and defend them with whatever arguments they, themselves, prefer to include in their written work. In this sense, teachers avoid imposing their own opinions, ideas; moreover, they do not bring model texts into the classroom for students to follow. Rather, they undertake another job. They stimulate and encourage their students' thinking power to generate ideas and draw on personal memories and experiences.

More importantly, in the process approach, focus has shifted from the final product to the writing process. Harmer (2004) defines the writing process as “the stages a writer goes through in order to produce something in its final written form” (p. 4). That is to say, to come up with a final product, the writer has to follow a set of steps. Thus, attention has turned from *what* to write to *how* to write. The point is that students are encouraged, guided, and trained by their teacher to go through the different stages of writing to produce good and well-formed written work (Hyland, 2003) rather than merely imitating a model. Given that this is so, it seems important to shed some light on these phases that make up the writing activity.

1.7.1.2.1. The Writing Process

Writing is a sophisticated and a complex cognitive task. It comprises many stages, which are prewriting, writing, revising, rewriting, and proofreading.

1.7.1.2.1.1. Prewriting

The first of the five stages of writing, prewriting is a compound noun; it is made up of the prefix ‘pre’ which means ‘before’ and ‘writing’ which is the act of writing. It consists of some sub-stages, which are: choosing and narrowing a topic, gathering ideas, and making an outline.

1.7.1.2.1.1.1. Choosing and Narrowing a Topic

At this stage, the teacher or the student decides on an idea or a theme to write about. Once the topic is defined, the next task is to decide which aspect of that topic the piece of writing will discuss.

1.7.1.2.1.1.2. Gathering Ideas

It is sometimes referred to as brainstorming, denoting the act of searching for, finding, and collecting as many ideas about a writing topic as possible. Zemach and Rumisek (2003) identify three types of brainstorming: making a list, free-writing, and mapping.

In making a list, ideas are transcribed into single words, phrases, or sentences and arranged one under the other to form a list. When writers freewrite, they write down all the ideas that come to their minds about their topics without stopping, no matter how these ideas are organized, expressed, spelled, or punctuated. What is of much importance is that writers put all possible ideas that strike their heads on page. Mapping, also called Clustering (Oshima & Hogue, 2006), is another technique for generating and collecting ideas. It refers to the act of drawing a map, a diagram, or a scheme on a sheet of paper. First, the writer writes his topic “in the middle, with a circle around it” (Zemach & Rumisek, 2003, p. 8). Then, he writes whatever ideas come to his mind in “balloons” around the topic, above or below it. Finally, to establish links among the generated ideas, the writer “connect[s] the circles with lines” (Zemach & Rumisek, 2003, p. 8). The three types of brainstorming are equally important. Zemach and Rumisek (2003) explain:

There is no best method of brainstorming. Some writers like to use lists because they don't have to write complete sentences. Some writers like freewriting because they can write quickly and ideas come easily. Some writers prefer mapping because they can easily see the relationship between ideas. (p. 8)

Thus, the preference of one method over the rest is an idiosyncratic issue (proper to the individual).

1.7.1.2.1.1.3. Organizing an Outline

In this phase, the ideas that have been gathered at the preceding stage are subjected to editing. The writer goes back to them and starts a careful revision to decide which of these ideas are kept and which may be omitted or excluded. Moreover, the list is open to include other points as well (ibid). Next, the final collected ideas undergo a process of rearrangement that allow them to fit into a given frame called an outline. The outline displays both what the writer will include (content), and how this information will be arranged (ideas organization) in a piece of writing. Zemach and Rumisek (ibid) make an analogy between an outline of a piece of writing and the skeleton of a human body, asserting that as a skeleton supports the human body, an outline provides a structure to a written discourse. In the same vein, Oshima and Hogue (2007) compare an outline to an architect's plan for a house; before starting to build, an architect should draw an overall plan of the elements of the house. Making an outline in advance is very important. Zemach and Rumisek (ibid) argue that making an outline before starting to compose an essay is very useful.

1.7.1.2.1.2. Writing

Often referred to as drafting, this second stage of writing activity is the act of composing a piece of written text or, more technically, a draft. Harmer (2004) refers to a draft as “the first version of a piece of writing” (p. 5).

1.7.1.2.1.3. Revising

Once the written work is done, there comes the step of revising. After the writer finishes writing his work, he goes back to it and starts checking it. In fact, this phase aims at

polishing the written work; it invites some modification, change, and improvement in terms of omission, addition, clarification, and rearrangement of ideas.

1.7.1.2.1.4. Rewriting

Based on the ideas and/or suggestions the writer may obtain from a partner reader of his first draft, or the ones he gets when he reads through his own work, he rewrites the text. He writes a new version(s) of the original work but with significant modifications in terms of both content and organization.

1.7.1.2.1.5. Proofreading

Proofreading is the last of the five stages of the writing process. This is a kind of Revising; however, it is a surface reviewing of the final product. The writer reads his final draft to check it for accuracy in terms of mechanical features of writing such as spelling, punctuation, grammar, as well as word choice.

It is worth noting that the writing process should not be understood as being linear, that is, as a series of steps that have to be followed chronologically, each one leading to the following in a unidirectional sequence. Rather, it is a recursive process in the sense that the writer can move backward and forward along the stages. Furthermore, the sequence is not always fixed. Some writers may prefer to start, for example, by drafting, and then go to prewriting, or by revising before going through planning (Harmer, 2004). The process wheel that follows clearly explains and summarizes the idea of a recursive process.

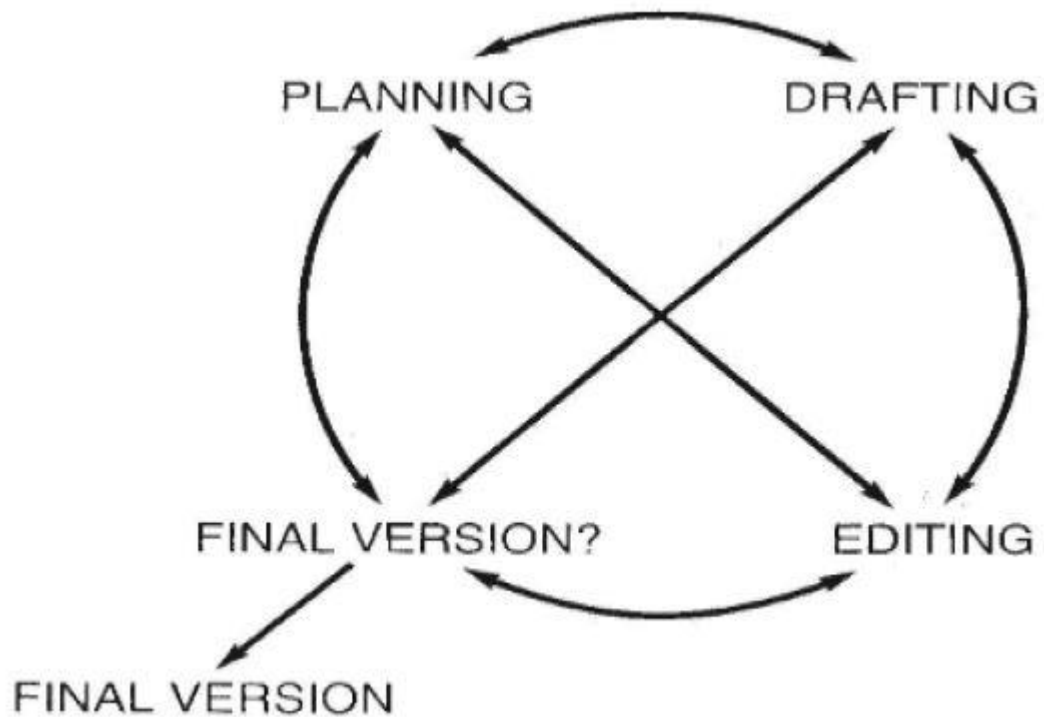


Figure 1.2. The Process Wheel of Writing (Harmer, 2004, p. 6)

Again, different from the product approach, this orientation acknowledges the very fact that the writer has a specific objective to achieve and a targeted reader to address whenever he engages himself in a writing activity. It is believed that it is determining the audience and purpose in advance which decide on the degree of formality and shape the type (e.g., argumentative, descriptive) of the written work. As clarity is a prerequisite to successfully figure out the purpose of a piece of writing, the writer endeavours to make his ideas as clear and organized as possible, the thing that makes the message transparent to his reader. The fact that this approach gives much attention to the general coherence of the product does not mean that it neglects totally accuracy; it deals with this issue at a late stage of the writing process. Students are engaged in the process of choosing and narrowing a topic, brainstorming,

outlining, writing, revising, and rewriting in which the primary emphasis is placed on conveying a written message that is well formulated to ensure that it would convey the intended meaning to the target reader in the most effective way possible. Only when firm grounds in meaning are secured can students start dealing with the issue of correctness and grammatical accuracy. To cut it short, the priority is given to meaning and content rather than form and mechanics of writing. Despite the contradictory attitudes and beliefs the two approaches hold, the use of both ways in teaching writing may yield invaluable outcomes.

1.7.2. Teaching Research Skills

Learning how to write a correct, effective piece of writing is not sufficient for an EFL student to succeed in his academic career. In fact, academic writing goes beyond that as it usually makes use of a wide range of others' ideas and points of view which provide support for major theses that writers develop. Moreover, it requires a high capacity of pulling together different ideas in a meaningful and coherent way.

1.7.2.1. Avoiding Plagiarism

University students are often asked to write assignments such as reports, classroom presentations, research papers, dissertations and the like. Although these are different kinds of writing, still, they have something in common; all of them are based on the facts and ideas gathered from a variety of sources and works of other writers (Bailey, 2011). This very fact calls for an ability, on the part of the student writer, to know how to insert outside material into his own work. This can, of course, be done through a number of techniques.

Quoting, one of these techniques, is the act of copying the material exactly as it appears in the source. That is, a quote is an identical version or copy of the original passage in

one's written work without making any changes, save enclosing it within quotation marks (Bailey, 2011). Quoting is an excellent technique for referring to others' work; nevertheless, it should not be overused. That is, it should be employed on certain occasions only; otherwise, it may lose its effectiveness.

Another technique students can opt for to integrate outside information into their own writing is paraphrasing, which is the skill of restating one's own idea in another way. It means rephrasing the original passage. Bailey (ibid) points out that "paraphrasing involves re-writing a text so that the language is substantially different while the content stays the same" (p. 33). In other words, paraphrasing requires changing the form without altering the meaning at all. Thus, to paraphrase means to convert the same idea into a different form or wording. Moreover, this technique does not aim to shorten the original text; rather, it seeks to restate it differently. For a paraphrase to be acceptable, it should meet certain criteria. According to Bailey (ibid), an effective paraphrase is one which:

- has a different structure to the original
- has mainly different vocabulary
- retains the same meaning
- keeps some phrases from the original that are in common use. (p. 51)

This means that when paraphrasing, both the words and the sentence structure of the original passage must be changed while the meaning must be kept as it is; however, the key terms remain there in the paraphrase.

Paraphrasing is usually used alongside another technique called summarizing. Like paraphrasing, summarizing restates the original material in a different way; however, different from paraphrasing, it seeks to condense the original passage keeping the main ideas and excluding the secondary ones (ibid).

Learning how to incorporate outside information into one's own work is coupled with the ability to "document" its original source, put otherwise, to cite it. It means "to tell where you got the information" (Oshima & Hogue, 2006, p. 41). This is extremely necessary for it prevents a serious offense, commonly known as "Plagiarism", from occurring. Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary (2008) defines the verb plagiarize as "copy[ing] another person's work, words, ideas, etc and pretend[ing] that they are your own" (p. 334). Thus, plagiarism is the act of using the work of another without including the source of information. In other words, the writer is said to be guilty of plagiarism whenever he incorporates the work of another author into his own and presents it as if it were his own product. In effect, intentional or accidental, plagiarism is a dishonest way of writing, and it is considered as a kind of literary/scientific theft. Additionally, it may lead to failure or exclusion from a course of study.

The established values and standards for acknowledging sources generally require that all sources from which material is used in writing a research paper must be cited in two places in the research work: within the body of the paper, whenever and wherever the source(s) is/are used, through a brief description of the reference(s), and at the end of the research work, on a new page by giving detailed and complete information about the consulted and used source(s). It is worth mentioning that citations in the text of a paper point to the alphabetical list of references that appear at the end of the paper, and together, the in-text citation and the references list work to give complete credit to, full information about, and possible access and retrieval of the exploited source(s).

1.7.2.2. Synthesizing

At high education levels, EFL students are often required to write research papers and dissertations. These pieces of academic writing are based on the author's own thoughts and findings as well as facts and ideas gathered from various sources. Thus, EFL students are expected to show an ability to combine different ideas generated by many authors to support their own points of view. This skill is referred to as synthesizing, and it is clearly an important and necessary part of EFL students' education (c.f. Alexander, Argent, & Spencer, 2008).

Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary (2008) defines the verb synthesize as "make[ing] sth[something] by combining separate things" (p. 450). Therefore, synthesizing, in our context, involves combining two or more elements from two or more different sources. Nevertheless, synthesizing is not merely a matter of collecting, juxtaposing, and reporting others' material as a sequence. Rather, it is a tool for putting or drawing together particular elements that are selected by the writer for the purpose of explaining, developing, defending, or illustrating his own points. Moreover, the writer has the power to reorganize the borrowed material in many different ways. Still, this combination should be carried out in a meaningful and careful manner in the sense that he is required to create an internal, logical, and clear link between his ideas and those of other authors as well as a meaningful connection among the borrowed elements themselves. More importantly, the magic recipe for making a good synthesis is, perhaps, to be able to infer relationships among sources. This implies that synthesizing is, in essence, a process of making a comparison among these elements. It means examining how they agree, disagree, explain, reinforce, or contradict one another within the frame of one's thesis. The process also involves identifying areas of contact between the writer's own point and those of the other authors. The ability to discover the link among

different works is, then, a necessary and essential condition for making a successful synthesis. Indeed, demonstrating an ability to synthesize plays a vital role in the life of students.

1.7.3. Responding to Students' Writing

Becoming a good writer cannot happen overnight. It requires work, effort, and extensive training. Alexander et al. (2008) point out that “becoming an academic writer requires a long period of development” (p. 187). More importantly, writing, like any other skill, is a process that involves making mistakes and inducing misunderstanding. In fact, errors are viewed as “an important aspect of learning virtually any skill or acquiring information” (Brown, 2000, p. 216). They are considered to be the driving force behind development. However, this progress cannot be achieved unless learners realize that they have been mistaken. Therefore, feedback on students' written output constitutes a valuable resource for them to improve their writing.

To respond to a student's writing means to give a comment or reaction to his work, to provide a response to his performance. In this sense, responding is equivalent to feedback.

Feedback is “a reaction, a response that is usually triggered [...] by the teacher” (Ypsilandis, 2002, p. 169). Similarly, Ur (1991) points out that feedback is “the information that is given to the learner about his or her performance of a learning task, usually with the objective of improving this performance” (p. 242). In other words, it is the reaction that students get from others when they carry out something, and the aim behind is the development of learners' performance. In this sense, it is a kind of formative assessment. Feedback includes the comments, information, points of view, suggestions, pieces of advice, and critiques someone receives from someone else concerning his performance.

Although there are many ways of reacting, reactions often belong to one of two major classes: responding or correcting (Harmer, 2004). Responding includes a discussion of accuracy aspects of writing as well as its content and design. Harmer asserts that, when responding, teachers establish “a kind of affective dialogue with students” (p. 108). That is, teachers engage in a productive discussion with their students concerning their achievement; here, instructors act as readers or partners rather than judges or examiners. Correcting, on the other hand, is the act of analyzing and studying a piece of writing, detecting erroneous forms, and bringing some correction. Aspects of writing which can be subject to such kind of treatment are syntax (word order), spelling, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, collocations, word choice...etc. In addition, Feedback on writing can be offered either while working on a piece of written discourse, or after the final product is produced (Harmer, 2004).

1.7.4. Assessing Writing

Language teaching and assessment are strongly tied to each other to the extent that they are inseparable. According to Alexander et al. (2008), assessment “involves making judgements about students’ current or future abilities” (p. 303). That is, it involves making claims about learners’ knowledge and capacity. In the same context, Hyland (2003) defines assessment as “the variety of ways used to collect information on a learner’s language ability or achievement” (p. 213). It refers to the range of practices examiners carry out in order to know about or measure the capacity of learners in a given task. Assessing students’ writing, therefore, refers to deciding on the value or quality of their written performance. It involves measuring their abilities in writing and assigning grades to their written production

Broadly, there are two main types of assessment, namely norm-referenced assessment (NRA) and criterion-referenced assessment (CRA). NRA compares a student’s achievement

against that of a group of students who have taken the same test. Each student's performance is compared to that of his peers who are considered to be the "norm" for assessing and ranking students. CRA, on the other hand, involves setting up, in advance, a list of criteria, a group of standards which constitute a sound basis for deciding on the value or worth of students' performance. That is, the assessor measures students' achievement against a set of criteria and checks whether the examinee has met all those standards.

Assessing writing plays a crucial role in the academic life of students. When taken seriously, test scores may indicate to students whether they have a rapid progress or not, whether more work is needed, where more effort should be made, or whether they have learnt all what is expected to be learnt in a course of study.

Conclusion

Writing is one of the key skills EFL students need in their academic journey. To ensure success, they are expected to use formal English, commonly referred to as academic English. It enjoys a set of features that distinguish it from other kinds of writing. Moreover, it is commonly acknowledged that it follows a range of norms and conventions that make it respectful.

Writing academically has never been an easy task to accomplish for natives as well as foreign language students. In addition to the very fact that writing is a skill that is built through hard work and intentional training, writing academically goes beyond composing well-structured written work. Moreover, the process of learning writing generally involves making mistakes, a major aspect of learning any skill. In effect, students are eager to receive feedback with which they can make new attempts that approximate desired aims; they seek to profit from their mistakes by using them to obtain reaction from the environment. Thus, teachers of

writing are encouraged to provide their students with this valuable resource for learning and development throughout their academic career.

In the chapter that follows, we will turn our attention to another aspect of writing, namely IText and the use of technologies.

CHAPTER TWO: IText: New Writing Practices

Introduction

Upon observation, the way English is used in writing has changed over the last couple of decades. This is especially true with the coming of the age of the internet and new communication technologies, such as mobile phones, computers, iPods, which provide people with different platforms to communicate. Educational environments are also likely to be affected by new features of language use, i.e., there are at play new conventions of using the written language such as abbreviations, contractions, acronyms, shortenings and the list is open for other types that will be illustrated more in the coming sections of the present chapter and the chapter that follows.

2.1. Technology-Mediated Communication (TMC)

In addition to face to face interaction, communication has developed other shapes and features; technology is one of the reasons for this change. Distance is no longer a problem for communicating with others because computers and mobile phones facilitate the task. Therefore, it is very important for users of information and communication technologies (ICT) to have some basic literacy about how to use them appropriately and effectively.

According to Gilster (1997), digital literacy refers to the skillful comprehension and use of information in a variety of forms that are gathered from different sources through the use of ICT. That is, ICT users should know how to use word processing and how to exchange information through emails, web forms, and any kind of communicating forms. The term ICT has various definitions, but basically the acronym stands for information and communication technology. The aforementioned requires the use of computers as a significant tool for

communication, which includes different applications and software such as internet, network platforms, and online conferences.

TMC, or ICT in general, has four main features which play a significant role in the new forms of language use (Bodomo, 2010). The first feature is multimedia integration that helps its users to apply different types of media for communication. The second is flexibility of use which provides users with various options for communication, synchronous or asynchronous. That is, the user can communicate on the spot, or make a delay in responding. The third is connectivity which makes a group of people from different areas able to meet virtually. Interactivity is the fourth and most important feature because interaction and exchange of information between users happen.

2.2. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) became noticeable in the middle of the twentieth century. Herring (1996, p. 1) states that “CMC is communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers”. CMC can be either synchronous or asynchronous. The latter mode refers to a type of communication in which people are distant from each other and which requires users reply on messages at any time, not immediately (Coffin et al, 2003). Baron (2010, p. 1) asserts that “in synchronous CMC, transmission is essentially instantaneous, and interlocutors are assumed to be physically present to read and respond to messages, whereas in asynchronous CMC, neither of these assumptions holds”. Synchronous, however, refers to a type of immediate communication where people interact at the same time. It can happen through messages or online contact. That is, at the instant moment. Crystal (2006, p. 267) explains that “the asynchronous context gives

student time to read, understand and respond, without the pressures of real-time interaction”. This context is possible in SMS, blogs, forums.

2.3. Mobile-Mediated Communication (MMC)

Developments in technology have led to so many inventions among which we find the mobile phone. Nowadays, smart phones are available for almost every individual. The appearance of this small, intelligent device has given way to a new feature of communication between people. Letters writing or phone calling are no longer used as before, because there is now what is known as texting or messaging.

Mobile phone, cellular phone, Tablet, BlackBerry etc have different appellations but almost the same functions. That is to say, this small device is used mainly for making calls and sending messages; however, with technological developments, its use extended to other platforms such as internet-based applications.

The massive explosion of different tools of communication has then generated what is widely known as mobile-mediated communication (MMC). MMC is defined as the process of exchanging thoughts, opinions, and attitudes via the instrumentality of mobile gadgets (Kelsey & Amant, 2008). In fact, the adoption of these devices has made interpersonal communication much easier.

2.4. Text-Based Mediated Communication (TBMC)

2.4.1 Definition

The concept of text-based mediated communication (TBMC) has undergone significant changes since it first emerged in the 1990s. Therefore, many definitions have been provided throughout its history. Initially, it was known as “text messaging”, meaning “the transmission of short text messages between mobile phone users” (Bodomo, 2010, p. 112). The online

dictionary “Dictionary.com” defines a text message as “an electronic message sent over a cellular network from one cell phone to another by typing words”. More recently, the concept of text-based communication (TBC) came to be adopted; it stands for the “interaction and transfer of information through the medium of the computer and related digital devices mainly in the written word” (ibid, p. 315).

To elaborate further, the concept “text-based communication” was, originally, restricted to those electronic written messages that are composed, sent, and received over the *short message service* (SMS) using mobile phones. However, with the constant technological advancement and research, the concept has been extended to include e-mail messages and instant messages essentially through the medium of the Internet. Thus, this form of communication refers to the act of typing/composing, sending, and receiving written messages between two or more participants through the instrumentality of mobile devices such as cell phones, smart phones, personal computers, tablets...etc. Moreover, these electronic messages can be transported over a cellular network (e.g. SMS) or via an internet connection. That is, the Internet has come to be a major medium of exchanging written messages besides cellular networks.

It is worth noting that ever since the emergence of text messaging, the tendency to communicate using electronic written messages has dramatically increased to the extent that this pattern of communication has invaded and dominated human life. In other words, it is commonly recognized that TBC has become the most preferred form of interacting among people, and voice-based communication seems to be in its last days, for it has fallen out of favour.

2.4.2. Synchronicity of TBC

There are basically two modes of TBC, namely ‘synchronous’ and ‘asynchronous’ communication.

2.4.2.1. Synchronous Communication (SC)

Etymologically speaking, the word ‘synchronous’ derives from the Greek word *synchronos*; *syn* means ‘with’ whereas *chronos* is an adjective which is related to ‘time’. A synchronous text-based communication is, thus, an online interaction that occurs between two or more interlocutors at the same time. Aldrish (2008) puts it this way:

[Synchronous communication is] communication where sender and receiver are operating in the same interval, the message exchanged is synchronized, the sender and receiver don’t have to be in the same place, but do in essence have to be in the same time frame. (pp. 12-13)

Therefore, a synchronous text-based communication is analogous to face-to-face conversation where there is immediate turn taking. The only difference is that in a text-based interaction, the messages are not spoken but written.

2.4.2.2. Asynchronous Communication (AC)

From an etymological perspective, the word ‘asynchronous’ descends from the Greek term *asynchronos*; *asyn* means ‘not with’ while *chronos* is an adjective which is related to ‘time’. Aldrish (2008) defines asynchronous communication (AC) as “communication where a sender can transmit a message in one time interval and the receiver can read and listen to it in the next time interval” (pp. 12-13).

From the above definition, text-based interaction is said to be asynchronous when there is a time interval between sending a written message and reading it. For instance, a message sender may send a piece of written information to his friend in the morning (e.g., “the teacher

of Ling informz u that u wont hav a td session this week”), and the message recipient reads it in the evening or in the morning of the next day. In other words, the interlocutors act not only in different locations but in different time frames as well. Thus, it is a delayed communication.

2.4.3. Forms of TBC

Recently, “text-based communication” has been put forth as an umbrella term to include different forms, namely SMS messaging, e-mail messaging, and instant messaging.

2.4.3.1. SMS Messaging

Often referred to as text messaging, SMS messaging is meant to be a “communication practice in which two or more people exchange messages by coding and decoding texts received and sent from their cell phones” (Bodomo, 2010, p. 110).

In this sense, SMS messages are short typed messages that are exchanged between two or more mobile phone users via the Short Message Service network. This electronic medium of communication requires its users to have any cell phone, not necessarily smart phones. It is usually listed as an asynchronous tool of textual communication.

Constant technological innovations have offered a new communication technology, commonly known as Internet text-based communication (ITBC). ITBC is the act of composing and receiving written messages within digital gadgets, and over the Internet networking connection; otherwise, no textual communication can be carried out. There are, commonly, two types of ITBC: Email messaging and instant messaging.

2.4.3.2. Email Messaging

A mimic to real world snail mails (letters) exchange, emailing refers to the process of sending and receiving electronic mails (emails) between two or more users via a

communication network. In addition to sending, receiving, and sharing up-to-date news, pieces of information, and documents, this technology allows its users to exchange typed messages. That is why email is considered as an electronic medium of communication and a predominantly asynchronous mode of TBC.

2.4.3.3. Instant Messaging (IM)

Instant messaging (IM) is one of modern ICT merits. As the name suggests, it allows for a real-time, synchronous textual communication through the Internet. Although they do not usually operate in the same place, the participants, necessarily, communicate within the same time frame. Ochonogor, Alakpodia, and Achugbue (2012) state that IM is “a form of computer ‘chat’ that allows one to have a real time, typed ‘conversation’ with one or more buddies while connected to the internet”(pp. 1-2).

In fact, this modern communication medium has rapidly gained enormous population, especially among the youth, to the extent that it has replaced SMS and email texting. That is, it has grown to become the most fashionable form of textual communication. IM services include social networking tools (such as Facebook, Instagram, Viber and What’s Up) and Messenger (MSN).

Social networking tools refer to the range of the Internet sites/websites that are mainly used for socializing. As the name indicates, they serve the purpose of bringing people together, of creating and maintaining ties or relationships among people from all over the world. Additionally, they encourage people to create their own digital communities, virtual worlds that have their unique interests. These sites allow people to share and exchange multiple format information (ideas, latest news, pictures, documents, videos, audio material). Moreover, they constitute excellent platforms as they permit people to exchange ideas and

information mainly in the written form and via Internet connection. They allow one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-one, and many-to-many textual interactions. They encourage their users to create private online rooms where they immerse themselves in real-time typed discussion with people they know or share common interests, aims, and occupations with. Social networking websites have come to be the most fashionable media of communication especially among the young to the extent that they occupy an essential part of their lives. As for Messenger (MSN), it is a free instant messaging service that allows Internet users to communicate and exchange their ideas, thoughts, feelings, and pieces of information with their family members, relatives, friends, or colleagues in real time and mainly in written form (typed messages). MSN first appeared as a service within Facebook (FB); however, with constant technological advancement, MSN has become independent from FB and has developed as a standing-alone instant messaging service.

It is worth noticing that along with constant technological development, the boundaries between synchronous and asynchronous media of textual communication seem to be difficult to sustain (Bodomo, 2010). Although e-mail and SMS texting are commonly conceived of as asynchronous media, their users can engage in real-time, immediate turn taking typed conversation. Likewise, synchronous textual communication applications, originally devised for real-time online typed interactions, can turn into asynchronous media. This can occur when the typed conversation is interrupted by an external factor. The following dialogue, carried out via MSN application, illustrates the situation:

A: hi☺ how r u doin?

B: im fine 10nx... what about u?

A:.....(no message)

B: (is waiting but no reply is received)

A: (after ten minutes) fine thnx 4 inquirin dear☺

In this example, B did not receive an immediate response from A, perhaps because the latter was busy doing something when he received the message “im fine 10nx...what about u?”

In short, the nature of any medium of textual communication is determined by the user himself as well as external conditions. Thus, it is the speed of providing responses which has become the norm of categorization.

To conclude, TBC boundaries are said to be elastic as they are expected to include other forms alongside the never stopping research and technological innovations.

2.5. IText

The interaction between ICT tools and traditional written text has given birth to a new, innovative type of written language, namely IText (Geisler, 2001; Geisler et al., 2001). Different appellations have been offered to the concept in the literature on IText (language Play, Electronic Discourse, Electronic Language, The Language of ICT, Textese, Netspeak, Netlanguage). IText refers to the kind of writing that is composed, sent, and received in a digital environment via communication technologies (tools such as smart phone and media like SMS networking and Internet networking). More importantly, digital text no longer conforms to the conventional rules and norms of writing (Vosloo, 2009; Odey, Essoh, & Endong, 2014). Besides, IText has further developed its unique rules, norms, and conventions that have made it stand in its own right as a new linguistic variety, distinguishable from

traditional form (Vosloo, *ibid*; Odey, Essoh, & Endong, *ibid*). Initially appearing in text messaging, this new form of language has rapidly crept into more recent technological tools and media of TBC such as IM and chat rooms. In short, it has invaded almost all media and gadgets of textual communication.

2.5.1. Factors of Emergence: Forcing a New Linguistic Form to Appear

The ICT revolution marks a new page not only in man's history, but in the history of language as well. In fact, it is commonly acknowledged that technology is ranked as one of the major factors to speed up language change. The impact of technology on language does not stop at introducing a new jargon into man's language dictionary (e.g. CD, tablet, mobile phone, Google, the Internet, messenger, texting, download...etc.); it goes much further to change the features of human language. As Halliday (1985) predicts, and Bodomo (2010, p. 43) quotes:

When new demands are made on language... [it] changes in response to them. ...[W]e are making language work for us in ways it never had to do before, it will have to become a different language in order to cope. (p. 82)

The foregoing means that language change occurs in order to meet different social and human needs. In fact, the ICT revolution has brought with it new demands that have strongly motivated language to change in response to them. The ICT tools and media of communication constitute new needs. In line with this, Bodomo (2010) points out that the embracement of new media of interaction may have a great influence on the way people use language, both spoken and the written. Written language, in particular, has been profoundly affected by the introduction of digital tools and media of communication. When traditional written interaction is carried out within digital environments (e.g., SMS network, IM media such as MSN), it is surrounded by a wide range of circumstances. These include space limit,

time limit (brevity), the nature of the addressee, the feeling of privacy, the desire to create lively typed conversation (much more like face-to-face discussion). In order to respond to these demands, written language changes its features to become a different one.

2.5.2. Features of Texting Language: Towards Making an Identity

Experts become enthusiastically interested in analyzing, studying, and understanding IText defining characteristics. Rosen, Chang, Erwin, Carrier, and Cheever (2010), for example, distinguish two categories of texting language: linguistic textism and contextual textism. Linguistic textism includes letter/ number homophones, abbreviations, contractions, clipping, non-conventional spelling, acronyms and initialism. Under the heading of contextual textism, there are emoticons and smileys, non-conventional capitalization and punctuation, and repetition of letters in words. Other researchers identify three types of textism features, namely linguistic features, grammatical features, and paralinguistic features.

2.5.2.1. Linguistic Features

The linguistic features of textism refer to the range of practices (abbreviating, clipping, non-conventional spelling...etc) that are employed on verbal written language in digital environment. That is, they have a direct influence on verbal language.

In textual communication situations, participants usually need to be quick in typing their messages so that interaction is carried out at an acceptable rate. To this end, texting users have developed new ways to condense linguistic messages. Bodomo (2010) brings together all these shortening strategies under one cover term: “Shortenings”. Shortenings comprise several practices that aim at shortening single words as well as longer linguistic units such as phrases, clauses, and whole sentences.

2.5.2.1.1. Acronyms vs. Initialism

The term acronym refers to the act of combining the initial letters of every word in an expression or a phrase to form a word. For example, APA is an acronym for American Psychological Association; BBC is an acronym for British Broadcasting Corporation. Besides exporting this traditional type of acronymy to electronic contexts, it has been noticed that IText users have extended this practice to touch phrases and sentences that are commonly used in real life communication such as OMG (oh my God), BTW (by the way), GTG (got to go), TTYL (talk to you later), BRB (be right back). This practice has given birth to a new type of acronymy, generally known as Initialism. In this sense, Initialism is not purely original as it follows the same principle of its ancestor ‘Acronyms’; however, different from it, it is more informal. It is worth noticing that this new type of acronymy has become widely popular among texting users; thus, it has become a defining feature of texting language.

2.5.2.1.2. Creative Homophones

Homophones, by definition, are two or more words within the same language which sound the same, but they are spelt differently. Besides, they have different meanings. For example, there are words like ‘see’ and ‘sea’, ‘right’ and ‘write’, ‘tail’ and ‘tale’. It is interesting to note that texting users have enriched the area by devising new types of homophones (Bodomo, 2010), mainly letter/number homophones and symbol homophones. This process of creating new homophones is known as “Homophony”.

To elaborate on the first type, a letter homophone is an alphabetical letter which is pronounced in the same way a word or a part of a word is pronounced. Therefore, instead of typing the whole word or part of a word, texters prefer to replace it with a letter homophone. For example, there is ‘U’ instead of ‘you’, ‘R’ to stand for ‘are’, ‘B’ for ‘be’, ‘c’ for ‘see’, ‘Y’

to represent ‘why’, ‘Ur’ to refer to ‘your’. Number homophony, on the other hand, denotes the use of a number as an alternative to a whole word or a part of it, for they have the same pronunciation, for instance, the use of ‘2’ instead of ‘to’ or ‘too’, ‘4’ standing for ‘for’, ‘18’ for ‘late’, ‘w8’ for ‘wait’, ‘in2’ for ‘into’. Letter and number homophony requires the combination of both innovative practices. Texters, that is, make use of a letter homophone to refer to a part of a word, and a number homophone to represent the second part of the same word. A common example is the use of ‘b4’ to mean ‘before’.

Second, symbol homophony, another creative shortening method, “uses typographic characters and mathematical symbols to replace the target word that has the same or similar pronunciation” (Bodomo, 2010, p. 329). For instance, the typographic characters ‘&’ and ‘@’ represent the words ‘and’ and ‘at’, and ‘#’ stands for ‘number’. In addition, texting users have developed a new type of homophones that makes use of mathematical symbols such as ‘/’ to represent ‘or’, ‘+’ to replace ‘add’/ ‘and’/ ‘in addition’, or ‘moreover’.

2.5.2.1.3. Abbreviations, Contractions, and Clippings

Abbreviation refers to the shortening of words; words which have lost their final letters. To abbreviate, that is, means to cut a word into two parts in which the first chunk remains while the second is left out. A common example is ‘Sept’ for ‘September’.

Contraction is another method of shortening words, but instead of omitting the second part of a word, it requires the elimination of middle vowel letters. Only consonant letters remain, for they are considered more powerful in conveying meaning when compared with vowels. For example, ‘txt’ stands for ‘text’, ‘gvrnmnt’ for ‘government’, ‘hwvr’ for ‘however’, ‘msg’ for ‘message’.

Another way of shortening words is clipping which has two main categories: “G” clipping and other clippings. The former refers to the process of dropping out the final “g” in words ending in “ing” like ‘going’, ‘coming’ to become ‘goin’, ‘comin’, respectively. The latter refers to words in which the final letter, especially a consonant, is omitted, for example, ‘wil’ for ‘will’, ‘shal’ for ‘shall’ as well as the elimination of final silent vowels in words such as ‘have’ to become ‘hav’, ‘give’ to become ‘giv’, ‘tomoro’ for ‘tomorrow’.

2.5.2.1.4. Non-Conventional Spelling

To misspell means to spell a word in a wrong way. It has been noticed that texters break the norms and conventions of English spelling, not by ignorance, and create new ways of representing words in writing (Crystal, 2001). It is commonly acknowledged that Standard English spelling is marked by a lack of sound-spelling correspondence. Nevertheless, texters attempt to break this norm. Aventajado (2016) points out that “non-conventional spellings follow legitimate letter-sound correspondence” (p. 9). For example, texters use ‘kud’ for ‘could’, ‘wud’ for ‘would’, ‘skool’ for ‘school’, ‘thanx’ for ‘thanks’, ‘fone’ for ‘phone’, ‘iz’ instead of ‘is’, ‘nite’ for ‘night’, ‘rite’ for ‘write’, ‘sum’ for ‘some’. Thus, this deviated spelling makes new English spelling practices in correspondence with pronunciation, meaning that texting users tend to spell words in the same way they are pronounced (Crystal, 2001). A common example is the use of ‘coz’/ ‘bcz’/ ‘cz’ instead of ‘because’, ‘bt’ instead of ‘but’, ‘fgiv’ instead of ‘forgive’, ‘gd’ to stand for ‘good’, ‘yep’ instead of ‘yes’.

2.5.2.2. Grammatical Features

The grammatical features of textism refer to the different digital writing strategies people use when texting; these have a direct impact on the grammar of the language they use

when typing their messages. This is a common feature of instant messaging (Bodomo, 2010). Grammatical features include, mainly, subject omission.

In a text-based interaction, typed messages are characterized by a frequent omission of the subject; only the predicate remains. A common example is a typed message like “hope 2 c u soon ☺” where ‘I’ is omitted.

2.5.2.3. Paralinguistic Features

In a face-to-face interaction, people do not just exchange thoughts and information through the medium of verbal language; they also convey non-verbally their feelings, emotions, mood, and attitudes alongside verbal messages. These non-verbal concepts, usually, have to interact with linguistic channels (messages) to shape and modify the intended meaning. To these ends, people use a wide range of signs which are not linguistic in nature (Harmer, 2004); rather, they accompany verbal language, working in tandem to make the message transparent and clear to the listener to grasp, while conveying the interlocutor’s feelings, emotions, and mood. They are referred to as “paralanguage”. Harmer (2007) distinguishes two major types of paralanguage, namely vocal paralinguistic features and physical paralinguistic features. The former, as the name suggests, involve voice, encompassing stress, tone, intonation, rhythm, voice volume. The latter involve the body, i.e., the use of body parts to help convey a message; that is why it is called “body language”. It includes facial expressions, gestures, and manners.

Because interlocutors in a text-based communication cannot see and hear each other, their feelings, emotions, and mood are not easily conveyed; moreover, the intended meaning runs the risk of being completely distorted, wrongly interpreted, or tightly changed as in the example:

“A: hav u attended the meetin?”

B: no

A: r u stupid or something? ☺”

If A did not use the smiley ☺ in the last message, B might perceive it as a serious offense.

The above is a reasonable and possible scenario mainly because writing, in contrast to speaking, has a smaller range of devices to convey the intended meaning. Such devices consist, mainly, of punctuation marks such as question marks, exclamation marks, commas, and semicolons. In effect, texting users have developed a wide range of new techniques to cope with the situation. These innovative practices seek to borrow some features that are, originally, typical of spoken communication. Therefore, this mixture of written and spoken communication features has resulted in a new language variety, commonly referred to as “Netspeak” (Crystal, 2001). Thus, to gain insight into this new writing practice, it is apparently important to shed light on those paralinguistic features apart from the linguistic and grammatical ones.

2.5.2.3.1. Smileys and Emoticons

In fact, the term ‘emoticon’ is a mixture of two words: ‘emotion’ and ‘icon’. Oxford Learner’s Pocket Dictionary (2008) defines ‘emoticon’ as a “group of keyboard symbols that represent the expression on sb’s [somebody’s] face” (p. 146). Similarly, Bodomo (2010) describes ‘emoticon’ as “a set of symbols which uses keyboard strokes” (p. 48). Crystal (2001) sees emoticons as “combinations of keyboard characters designed to show an emotional facial expression” (p. 36). From the above definitions, it is clear that an emoticon represents a sign

or a symbol that is already available on a technological gadget's keyboard (cell phone, smart phone, tablet...etc.), used to denote a facial expression that would, in turn, transmit some feeling or emotion. For instance, ':-)' represents a smiling or happy face ':- (' expresses sadness, the feeling of regret, or pity for somebody or something. Smileys, on the other hand, are ready-made pictures that show different possible expressions on a person's face such as anger, laughter, happiness, sadness, in addition to gestures. Therefore, conventionally placed at the end of typed messages, emoticons and smileys are conceived of as "vehicles", the purpose of which is to convey feelings, emotions and other "kinesic [sic] features intended by the author" (Bodomo, 2010, p. 49).

However, this conception of emoticons and smileys portrays only a part of the whole picture. Emoticons and smileys are not limited to just conveying and indicating affective states. Harmer (2004) states that they are worth using because they enrich and modify meaning. Additionally, Dresner and Herring (2010) contend that they can fulfill important pragmatic functions other than the emotive one. They argue that they often work in collaboration with the linguistic channel to help the typed message recipient figure out the speech act performed by the message sender when composing the message. It can include asking a question, making a request or promise, threatening, begging, commanding...etc. In this sense, emoticons/smileys and linguistic channels (written messages) do not always stand on separate paths as the former usually becomes a part of the latter in order to shape and trustfully transmit the linguistic content intended by the message author.

Emoticons and smileys have grown to become an outstanding and defining feature of IText. Harmer (ibid) notes that emoticons have become a common, popular, and necessary tool among people who use e-mail and short message service (SMS) while Crystal (2001)

observes that emoticons and smileys have crept into real-time online textual chatrooms as well. On his part, Bodomo (2010) states, implicitly, that they have become a necessary feature of all forms of text-based communication.

Emoticons and smileys are not the only “vehicle” through which feelings and emotions can be conveyed when producing ITexts. Texters have created other strategies which are described below.

2.5.2.3.2. Non-Conventional Punctuation and Capitalization

Because they want to convey their emotions, feelings, attitudes, and mood to each other during the course of interaction, IText users tend to break the conventional norms of punctuation and capitalization. For instance, there is use of an exclamation mark instead of a question mark at the end of a question message:

A: u wer @ the party last nite.

B: How did u know!

B used ‘!’ instead of ‘?’ to convey a feeling of astonishment. Another example is the use of three exclamation marks successively in an expression like ‘wow!!!’/ ‘cool!!!’ to convey a feeling of surprise and admiration. In other situations, texters tend to use two different punctuation marks in succession. For instance, they might employ ‘?’ and ‘!’ in a message like “u went there?!” to express a feeling that is a mixture of both surprise and uncertainty. Bodomo (2010) outlines some main functions the non-conventional ways of using punctuation fulfill:

“For the ease of communication” (p. 48): To facilitate the smooth flow of communication and prevent it from breaking down.

“To indicate hesitation and thoughts” (p. 48): For example, there is use of ellipsis in “well...even the blu 1 iz gud” to express hesitation.

“To express emotion and mood of the author” (p. 48): For example, ‘!!!!’ is used in “cool!!!!” to express admiration, ‘?!’ in “what?!” to express a feeling of shock and astonishment.

“To indicate incompleteness of sentences” (p. 48): Here is an example: “A: r u tired?” B: yep im VERY...bt im stil alive”.

“To show informality and familiarity in informal situations” (p. 48): To make an informal interaction (with family members, relatives, friends...etc.) looks informal, close, and friendly.

With reference to capitalization, it is worth noting that IText users tend to neglect the conventional rules of capitalization. Although the norm in English states that the first person singular pronoun ‘I’ is always capitalized no matter which position it can take in a written sentence (at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end), texters have a tendency to substitute ‘I’ with ‘i’ whenever they type their messages. Here is an example: “i missed the call. Sorry. Wt’s up?” (Bodomo, 2010, p. 79), “coz i will come back tmr morning” (Bodomo, *ibid*, p. 79). Moreover, texting users often do not capitalize the initial letter of the first word of a sentence, of proper nouns (names of people, countries...etc.), nationality (e.g., algerian, german)...etc. The use of capital letters is kept to a minimum as they appear only on special occasions. This practice has been accepted among texters to become a defining norm that makes up the identity of IText.

However, non- conventional punctuation and capitalization is not limited to just the violation of standard norms; it goes further to the creation of new ones (Bodomo, 2010). For example, with regard to punctuation, Crystal (2001) discovers that ellipsis (...) is used in

digital textual communication worlds to indicate pauses. Similarly, Bodomo (2010), in examining the way ellipsis is used in a personal Email message, finds that the author of the message developed a new rule for using ellipsis when writing; ellipsis is used to “indicate the end of (a part of) a sentence” (p. 47). Additionally, Both Crystal (ibid) and Bodomo (ibid) note that ellipsis does not, usually, appear in the conventional form “...” (three dots). As for capitalization, when IText users want to put emphasis on a given idea, a feeling like shock, or a state like anger or fatigue, they tend to use uppercase letters to convey them:

“A: i didnt finish it B: WHAT? r u crazi?”, “MISS U VERRY VERRY MUCH DUNNO HOW TO TELL U” (Bodomo, 2010, p. 116), “I AM ANGRY”, “I AM TIRED”.

2.5.2.3.3. Repetition of Letters

Letter repetition is another strategy of conveying or emphasizing a feeling, emotion, attitude, or mood. IText users tend to repeat a certain letter in a word, for example, “nooooo”, “pleeeeeeeaz”, “i hvnt seen u 4 a looooooong time”. Moreover, the frequency of reoccurrence of a letter in a word depends heavily “on the ferocity of the emotion” (Crystal, 2001, p. 112). That is, the more a given emotion is fierce or violent (e.g. gratitude), the more times a letter is repeated (“10nk u sooo much”/ “10nk u soooooooooo much”). Nevertheless, it seems unclear whether there is a definite rule that states which vowel or consonant letter must be repeated (Bodomo, 2010). A common example is the word “please”. To express begging and a strong desire to have/do something, some texting users tend to repeat the letter “e” in “pleeeeeeeeeaz” while others the letter “a” in “pleaaaaaaaaz”.

Indeed, there is no fixed number of practices or definite rule of writing messages in digital contexts. Rather, it is observed that each person has his unique style of texting. As long as textual communication phenomenon continues to stimulate its users’ creativity, new forms

and strategies are expected to emerge at any point in time. Therefore, IText, an area of inquiry, is still in its infancy, and it will continue to attract the attention of many scholars worldwide.

2.6. Raising Educational Concerns about the Future of Academic Writing

Although the widespread of ITexting as a fashionable means of interacting has given students the chance to practise writing more outside the classroom, it has equally the potential to harm their writing skills. Texting is perceived to be a double-bladed sword. In fact, the time students engage themselves in Text-Based Digital Communication, chiefly by means of social media platforms and Instant Messaging applications, exceeds the time they spend reading a book, or an article. Moreover, they dedicate much of their time to the creation of ITexts or say electronic typed messages. This practice maximizes their exposure to the language of texting and minimizes exposure to academic English, the thing that makes the rules they have stored in their mental reference book about grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and orthography of formal English more likely to be overwritten with those of IText. When they compose their messages, students seek to get their intended meanings across, and as fast as possible; therefore, they tend to neglect the rules of punctuation and capitalization, and to shorten words in order to gain time and to facilitate the process of textual interaction. To add to the situation, students have the tendency to intentionally misspell words and to create new norms of orthography. As long as they are constantly engaged in this practice, they are likely to forget the conventional form of words and to lose the conventional rules of punctuation and capitalization. Furthermore, as they use texting practices extensively and on a daily and regular basis, students might build the habit of subconsciously and automatically importing digital writing practices into their academic writing. They might also mislead themselves due

to the overuse of informal English while texting; that is, they no longer differentiate between contexts which require formal usage and those which necessitate the use of informal style.

The above raises some educational concerns about the future of academic writing in a world that is characterized by the predominance of IText, which can be translated into the following questions:

- Can we say that academic writing is in danger?
- Is it true that we are losing it?
- Will we witness utter change of the nature and structure of academic writing in the long term?
- What should we do to maintain academic writing from distortion?
- What actions should be taken to protect it?
- By whom?

Conclusion

Textual communication, a fairly recent phenomenon, has drawn the attention of many scholars who have become increasingly interested in discovering and analyzing its digital language. Moreover, they seek to find out and understand the different possible motives behind its emergence. This new linguistic variety no longer adheres to the rules and conventions of formal writing; rather, it sets up its unique 'norms'. It comprises a wide range of innovative practices that are new to conventional writing.

While these forms are quite common and popular in digital environments of text-based communication, formal settings like classrooms do not permit such practices.

The following chapter, which is the field work, takes a step further; it examines whether these digital writing practices have found their way into the formal writing of EFL students or not.

CHAPTER THREE: IText and the State of EFL Academic Writing:

The Field Work

Introduction

While the first and the second chapters have attempted to provide a theoretical background on the variables of the present research through a review of the literature, the third chapter takes a different orientation. It is practical as it is mainly concerned with our own investigation. It is directed to address the problem, to answer the questions, and to achieve the aims of the study. Thus, the present chapter dedicates itself to the presentation and analysis of the obtained results. It begins with a description of our research design which includes the aims of the study, the participants, and the selected data collection tools before it engages itself in a detailed analysis, discussion, and interpretation of the gathered information and the main findings. Then, it ends up with suggesting some pedagogical recommendations for both teachers and students.

3.1. The Aims of the Research

The present study sets out to explore the digital writing practices commonly used by third year EFL students when exchanging written messages. It also attempts to know whether these practices have crept into their academic writing. Besides, it seeks to build some awareness in EFL students concerning the extent to which texting features interfere in their writing for classroom purposes.

3.2. The Participants

The present study is carried out in Mila University Centre, Institute of Letters and Languages, Department of Foreign Languages. The population under our survey involves EFL

students and EFL teachers. They are third year students of English in their academic year 2018/2019. The population of this study is 129 students, who are assigned to four groups. The first group contains 32 students, and the second one is composed of 28 students. The third group is made up of 35 students while the fourth group includes 34 students. Eighty (80) of the students are the sample. The rationale behind choosing third year students instead of first or second years students is that it is assumed that at this level, in comparison with first and second years, students have built larger baggage of English vocabulary in addition to an acceptable competence in the target language, not to mention their familiarity with the English language in general, and writing paragraphs and essays in specific.

3.3. Data Collection Tools

In an effort to answer the research questions and achieve the aims of the present study, we opted for the questionnaire and the interview as the data collection instruments.

The data collection process utilizes a qualitative approach that is used in analyzing the data: a questionnaire was designed to obtain information about students' digital writing practices, and to see whether these practices are exported to their formal academic writing.

Another tool is the interview that was conducted with teachers to shed more light on students' practices and to see whether they are abused of texting language features in their classroom writing. In addition, we aimed to know teachers' reactions to, and attitudes toward, these practices, while prompting them to suggest some solutions to avoid this phenomenon, or reducing it to a minimum.

3.3.1. Students' Questionnaire

The questionnaire is one of the crucial means of research that is conducted to gather data from a variety of people. According to Brown (2001, p. 6), “questionnaires are any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from existing answers”. That is to say, a questionnaire is a series of written questions an investigator gives to certain people to answer for the sake of gathering information. It is widely considered as the most commonly used means of collecting research data. This is particularly the case because it enjoys some merits. It allows investigators to gather a huge amount of data in a relatively short period of time. In this sense, it saves time and effort. Moreover, it permits researchers to target as many participants as acceptable. In addition, it elicits information that cannot be easily gained through observation like personal opinions and attitudes. It can equally draw data on other phenomena like strategies for carrying out a certain activity, background information about the research subjects, such as the years they have spent studying a given language, their motivation to learn it or to conduct a given task using it (Seliger & Shohamy, 2007). The questionnaire, usually, contains three types of questions: close-ended, multiple-choice and open-ended questions.

3.3.2. Teachers' Interview

An interview is a conversation between the researcher and the respondent to know his opinion about and attitude towards a given topic. Gillham (2000, p. 1) states that “an interview is a conversation, usually between two people. But it is a conversation where one person – the interviewer- is seeking response for a particular purpose from the other person – the interviewee”. An interview is then another instrument for gathering data. It is a kind of face-

to-face or online meeting between the investigator and the participants, the aim behind being to elicit responses from participants by giving a set of oral questions.

In this sense, the questionnaire and the interview are very similar to one another. Perhaps, the only difference is that “in questionnaires the answers are usually expressed in a written form, whereas in interviews they are oral” (Seliger & Shohamy, 2007, p. 172).

In this study, an interview is conducted with nine teachers of English at the Department of Foreign Languages, Mila University Centre. That is, we selected those teachers who rely on paragraph and essay writing in their exams. The teachers’ experience in dealing with students’ writing ranges between seven years to twenty years, and they are currently teaching at the same university.

3.4. The Students’ Questionnaire

3.4.1. Description of the Students’ Questionnaire

The Students’ questionnaire aims at investigating the common digital writing strategies employed by third year students of English when using the different digital platforms. The students were informed that the questionnaire was anonymous and voluntary, and they were kindly requested to answer the questionnaire sincerely. Furthermore, they were promised that their responses would be used only for research purposes. Also, they were asked to tick the appropriate answers and to give full explanations where necessary.

The items are a mixture of close-ended and multiple-choice questions and just a small number is open-ended. The questionnaire consists of three parts: the first part is devoted to background information about the students; the second one is about students’ actual writing experience, while the last one is about text-based digital communication.

The questionnaire consists of thirty (30) items divided into three sections. The first section, entitled “Background Information”, comprises three questions which seek to get personal information about the sample’s experience in learning English, their motivation to study it and to write using it. Section two, “Writing Experience”, includes seven items, and collects information on the respondents’ experience in writing academically. It attempts to capture their difficulties and weaknesses whenever they write academic work in terms of both aspects of writing and stages of the writing process. The third and last section, termed “Text-Based Digital Communication”, is the largest of the three sections; it contains twenty items. This section turns attention to another aspect of writing, which is IText or digital writing. It tries to know whether third year students use text-based communication tools like Facebook and SMS, and if they use English when typing and exchanging their messages. It further inquires whether the respondents remain loyal to the rules and conventions of formal English. If the answer is in the negative, the participants are invited to fill in a table which suggests a list of the common digital writing strategies employed when communicating digitally. The questionnaire ends up by trying to determine if there exists a relation between the two aspects of writing; whether digital writing features have made their way into third year EFL students’ academic writing by devoting the last three questions to inquire about this issue.

Concerning the first section, it is composed of three questions about the students’ background information. The first question asks about the number of years they have been studying English. The second one seeks to know whether they like it or not. The third question aims at knowing their motivation concerning writing.

Moving to the second section, it consists of seven questions about students’ writing; the first one is a close-ended question while the six remaining are multiple-choice ones.

The first question asks the students if they see writing as an easy task. The second one is an attempt to know their level in writing. The third one aims to know how often students write out of classroom. The fourth question seeks to figure out what kinds of writing they write out of the classroom. The next question highlights the difficulties that students suffer from when writing academically. The sixth question is mainly related to the previous one and aims to identify the aspects that are corrected the most in their writing. The final question of this section targets the writing stages that prove difficult to students.

As for the third and last section, it is about text-based digital communication, whose aim being to investigate the new writing practices students might experience in their academic writing. It consists of twenty questions; eleven of them are close-ended and the eight remaining are multiple-choice in type. The first question asks whether the students have a smart phone which might explain their text-based communication. The second question seeks to determine the frequency of students use of text-based digital communication, and the third aims to know whether they use English while texting. Question four seeks to identify whom students use English text-based communication with. The fifth and sixth questions shed light on SMS use, its frequency of use, and whether it is used in English. Questions seven, eight, and nine highlight whether students have an email account, how frequent they use it, and whether they use English. The next three questions address the use of Facebook, its frequency, and whether English is used while face-booking. The thirteenth question seeks to know whether students use other social networking platforms. Question fourteen investigates the type of language used on internet. The fifteenth question aims at knowing whether the students respect the rules and conventions of formal writing, and what aspects are violated while texting in English. For question sixteen, a table is presented to illustrate most of the practices

of digital writing; the students are asked to indicate whether they use some of them and to contribute their own examples, if any. Question seventeen is an attempt to know why students use shortenings if at all. Question eighteen is about the digital features that interfere with students' academic writing. Furthermore, the next question focuses on the errors made by students and whether they are related to the overuse of texting. Finally, question twenty aims at exploring students' opinion about English text-based digital communication so as to know whether or not it damages their formal writing practice.

3.4.2. Administration of the Students' Questionnaire

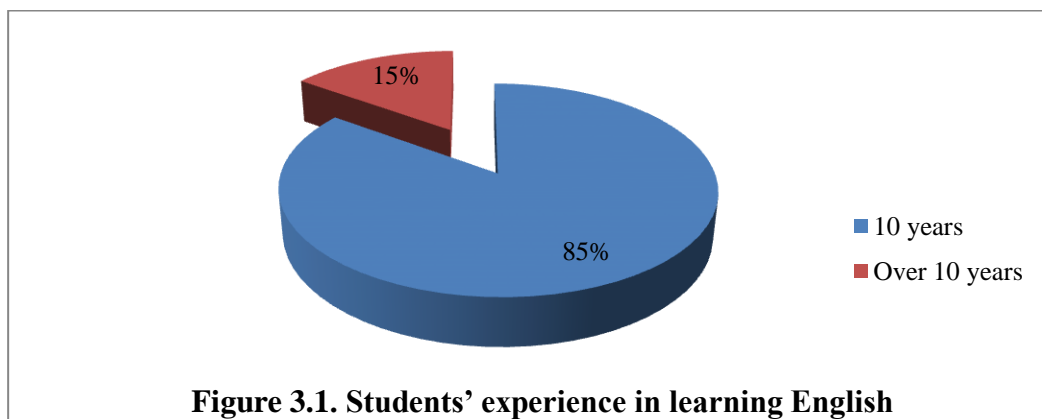
The process of administering and collecting the questionnaire took about one week, because the students were not attending their lectures due to some administrative issues – going on strike.

3.4.3. Analysis of the Students' Questionnaire

Q1: How long have you been learning English?

Options	Number	Percentage
10 years	68	85 %
Over 10 years	12	15 %
Total	80	100 %

Table 3.1. Students' experience in learning English

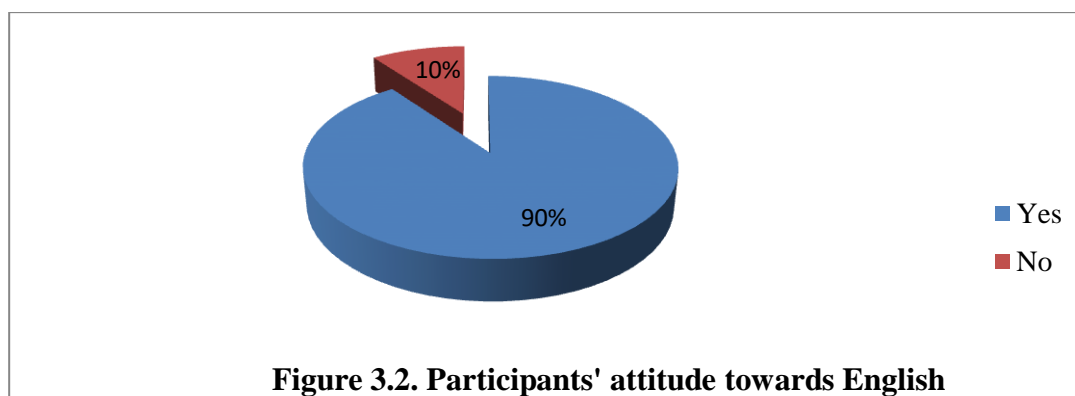


The aim of this question is to know the number of year students have spent learning English. A quick glance at table 3.1 reveals that the overwhelming majority of the respondents (85%), which is equivalent to 68 students out of a total of 80, has been learning English for ten years whereas a minority (15%), representing twelve students, has been studying English for more than ten years. They explain that they started counting from the middle school up to their third year at university.

Q2: Do you like English?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	72	90 %
No	8	10 %
Total	80	100 %

Table 3.2. Participants' attitude towards English



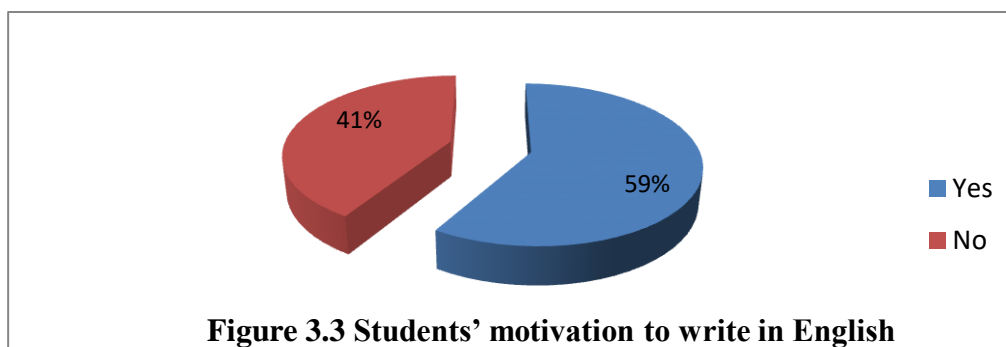
The table above differentiates between two groups of students, those who like English and those who have a negative attitude towards it. A striking majority (90%) of the subjects, i.e., 72 students, show that they have a positive attitude towards English. Only eight respondents, who constitute a numerical minority (10%), reveal that they do not like English.

Some subjects add saying that English is an easy way to express their ideas. Others say that they enjoy it; they find learning English an enjoyable experience. Some go further saying that they like English from their childhood, and they want to be future English teachers. Other respondents say that it is a very interesting language, being global and international, needed for professional and occupational purposes.

Q3: Are you motivated to write in English?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	47	58.75 %
No	33	41.25 %
Total	80	100 %

Table 3.3. Students' motivation to write in English



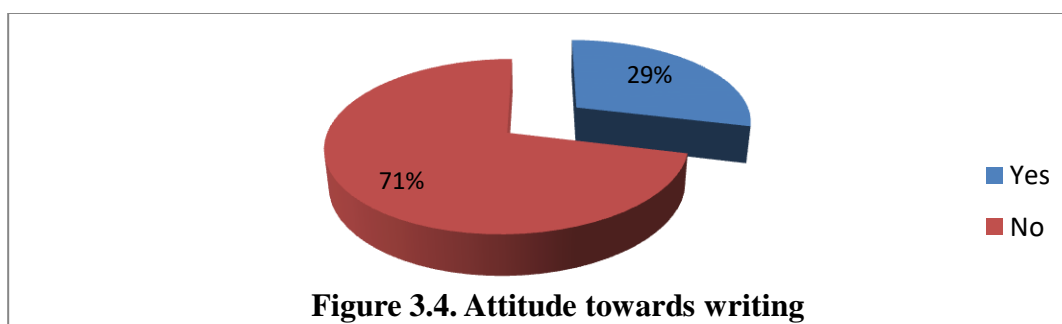
Because motivation, an affective factor, is commonly recognized to play a crucial role in successfully acquiring any skill or performing any given task, we deem it is important to ask such a question in relation to writing. That is, this might have serious implications in relation to the quality of the writing students do in the classroom. The table above indicates that most of the respondents (58.75%), i.e., 47, are motivated to write in English while thirty three students, representing (41.25%), show that they lack motivation when it comes to writing in English.

In explanation, they mention some reasons that have made them interested in writing in English: having good vocabulary, having the ability to express their ideas to the world. Others mention that it helps them in developing their skills through learning new words. Some state that writing in English is interesting and that it is a universal language, being more expressive than other languages. On the other hand, those respondents who show their dislike of writing in English justify their option on the basis that they lack vocabulary, are not interested in writing, or have problems with punctuation. Some add that they do not read enough, which makes them poor in writing.

Q1: As a student, do you think that writing is an easy task?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	23	28.75 %
No	57	71.25 %
Total	80	100 %

Table 3.4. Attitude towards writing



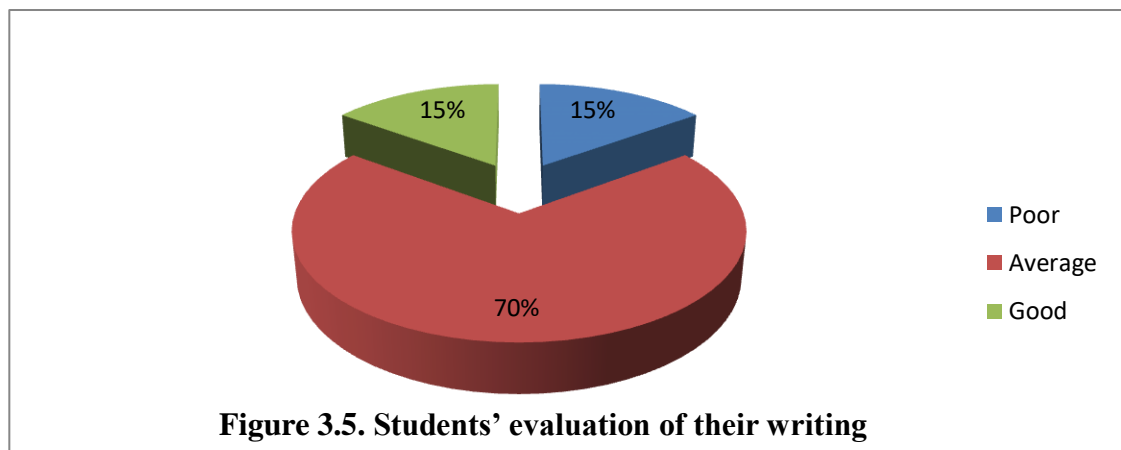
The majority of the informants, representing fifty seven (71.25%) out of the total, opt for the ‘No’ answer; they do not think that writing is an easy task. The remaining twenty three

students (28.75%) select the ‘Yes’ answer; they do not consider writing a challenging task to do.

Q2: How would you describe your writing?

Options	Number	Percentage
Poor	12	15 %
Average	56	70 %
Good	12	15 %
Total	80	100 %

Table 3.5. Students’ evaluation of their writing

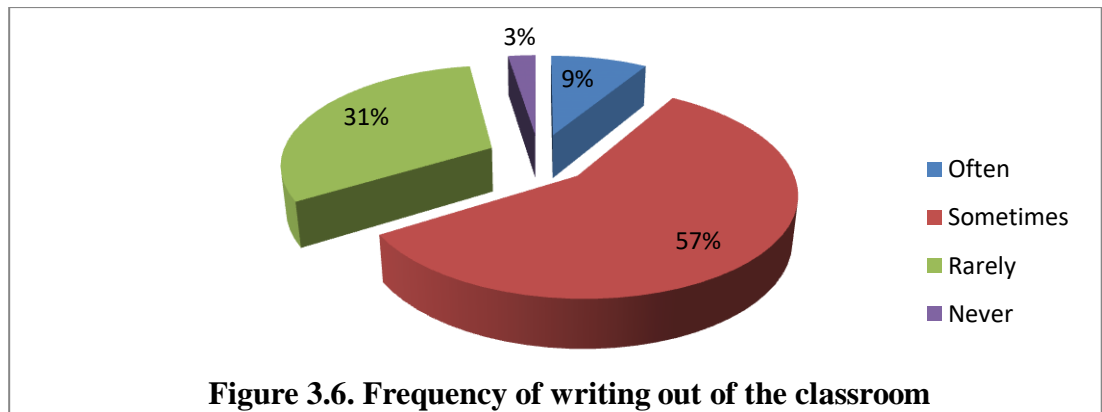


When it comes to describe their level in writing, the majority of the subjects (70%) opt for the ‘Average’ option. This represents fifty six students. The remaining percentage (30%) is equally divided between two groups; those who believe that they have good writing performance (15%), and those who claim that their writing is poor (15%).

Q3: How often do you write out of the classroom?

Options	Number	Percentage
Often	07	8.75 %
Sometimes	46	57.5 %
Rarely	25	31.25 %
Never	02	2.5%
Total	80	100%

Table 3.6. Frequency of writing out of the classroom

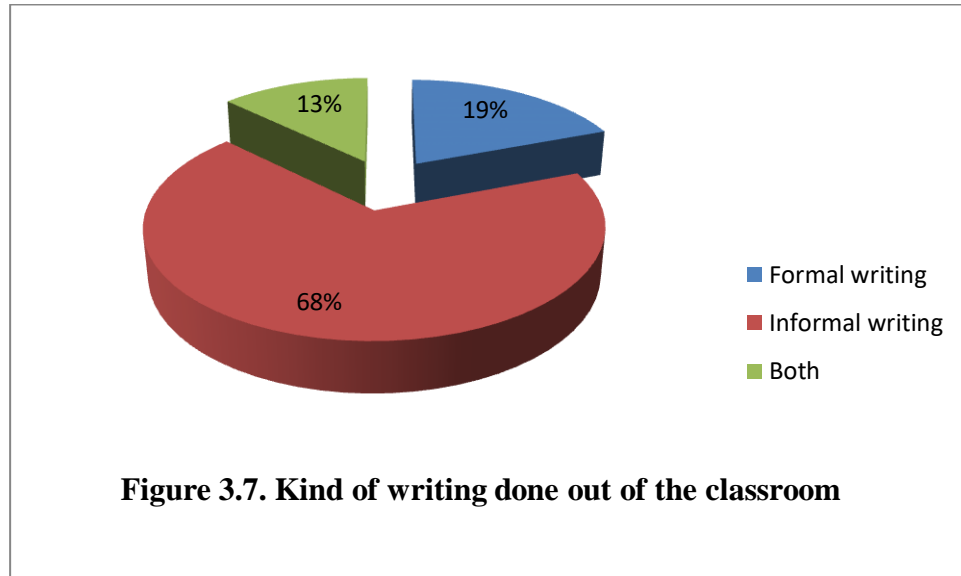


As the results in the above table display, more than half of the respondents (57.5%), i.e., 46 students, say that they write out of the classroom only sometimes. Twenty five students, accounting for (31.25%), declare that they rarely write outside the classroom. Only seven respondents (8.75%) often practice writing beyond the classroom walls. A minority of two students (2.5%) confess that they never write in non-classroom settings.

Q4: What kind (s) of writing do you prefer?

Options	Number	Percentage
Formal writing	15	19.23 %
Informal writing	53	67.95 %
Both	10	12.82 %
Total	78	100%

Table 3.7. Kind of writing done out of the classroom



Upon analysis, fifty-three respondents representing (67.95%) choose informal writing as the most practised kind of writing out of the classroom. It is followed by fifteen respondents representing (19.23%) who select formal writing. The remaining ten respondents representing (12.82%) choose both formal and informal writing. It is worth mentioning here that two of the respondents, in question three, have opted for the ‘Never’ option that is why the total sample in this question is 78 respondents rather than 80. These answers illustrate clearly that when it comes for students to write out of the classroom, students tend to write in an informal way in order not to be restricted to the rules of formal writing.

Q5: Which of these do you have difficulties with the most when writing formally?

Aspects	Frequency
Spelling	26
Grammar	24

Punctuation	33
Sentence Structure	20
Organizing Ideas	38
Outlining writing	7
Producing writing	15
Revising writing	8
The Lack of Vocabulary	1

Table 3.8. Participants' difficulties when writing formally

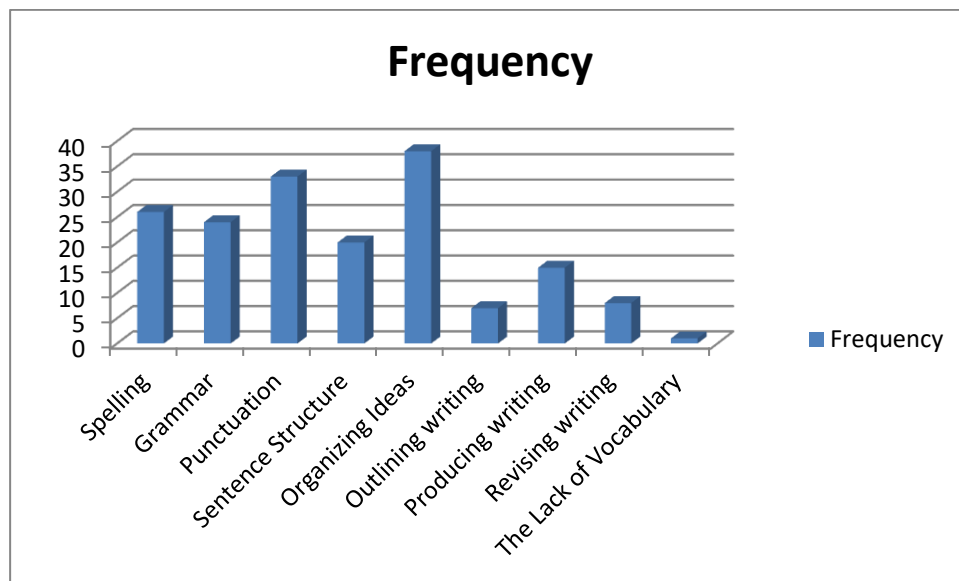


Figure 3.8. Participants' difficulties when writing formally

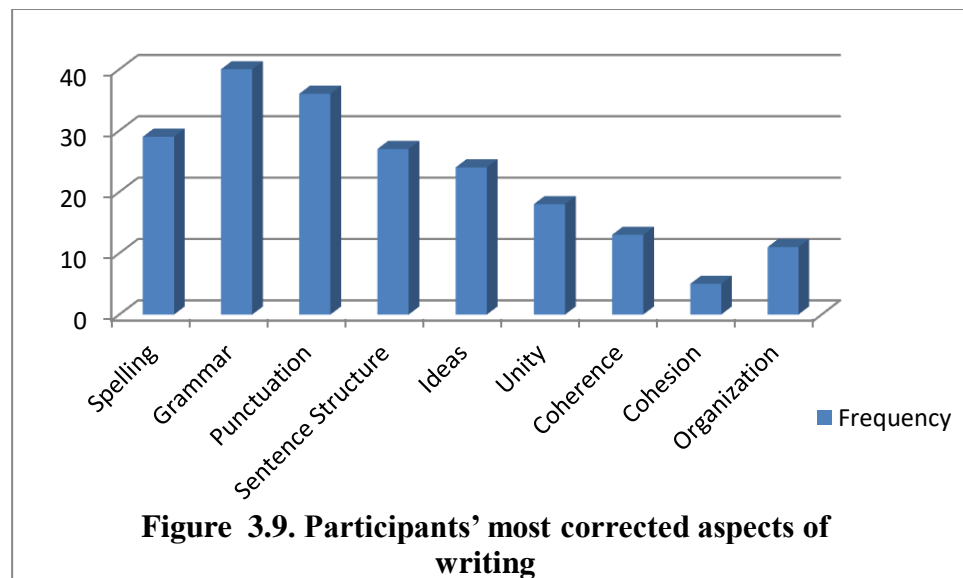
The aim behind devising this item is to know the writing areas that prove difficult to students when they write formally. From the above figure, it is clear that the most difficult task for students is 'Organization of ideas', with a frequency of 38. 'Punctuation' is ranked the second, receiving 33 ticks from the respondents. 'Spelling' has been chosen by 26 participants to occupy the third position in the list, followed by 'Grammar' with 24 ticks, 'sentence Structure' with 20, 'Producing writing' with 15, 'Revising writing' with 8, 'Outlining writing'

with 7 ticks. ‘The Lack of Vocabulary’ constitutes the least difficult aspect of writing, stated by only one respondent.

Q6: Which aspects of your writing are corrected the most in class?

Aspects	Frequency
Spelling	29
Grammar	40
Punctuation	36
Sentence Structure	27
Ideas	24
Unity	18
Coherence	13
Cohesion	5
Organization	11

Table 3.9. Participants’ most corrected aspects of writing

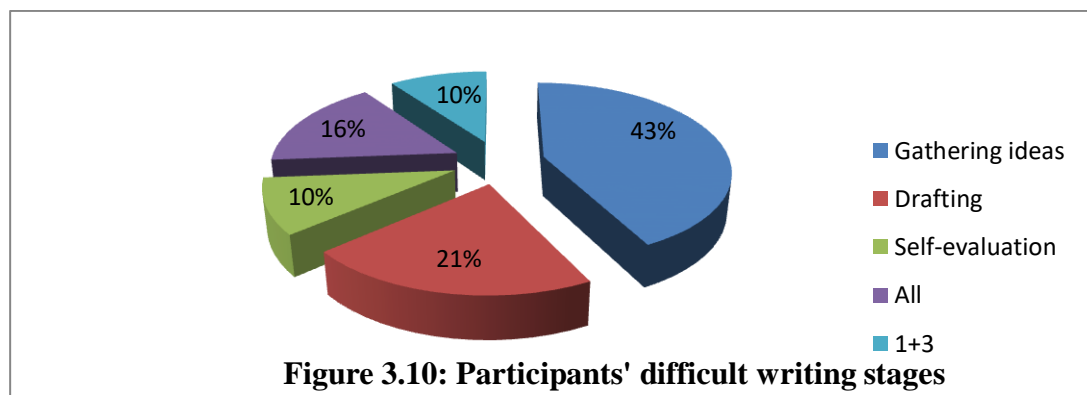


This item aims at discovering the aspects of writing the respondents have a high tendency to violate when they write formally. The figure above reveals that ‘Grammar’ is the most common area of writing the respondents violate the most, for it has got 40 ticks. Then, ‘Punctuation’ follows with a frequency of 36, not very far from ‘Grammar’. ‘Spelling’ is ranked the third with 29 ticks, followed by ‘Sentence Structure’ which has been selected by 27 respondents. After that, ‘Ideas’ come, receiving 24 responses, followed by ‘Unity’, with 18 responses, ‘Coherence’ with 13, ‘Organization’ with 11. ‘Cohesion’ occupies the last position in the row as it has been selected by only 5 participants.

Q7: Which of the following stages prove difficult to you?

Options	Number	Percentage
Gathering ideas	34	42.5 %
Drafting	17	21.25 %
Self-evaluation	08	10 %
All	13	16.25 %
1+3	08	10 %
Total	80	100 %

Table 3.10: Participants’ difficult writing stages

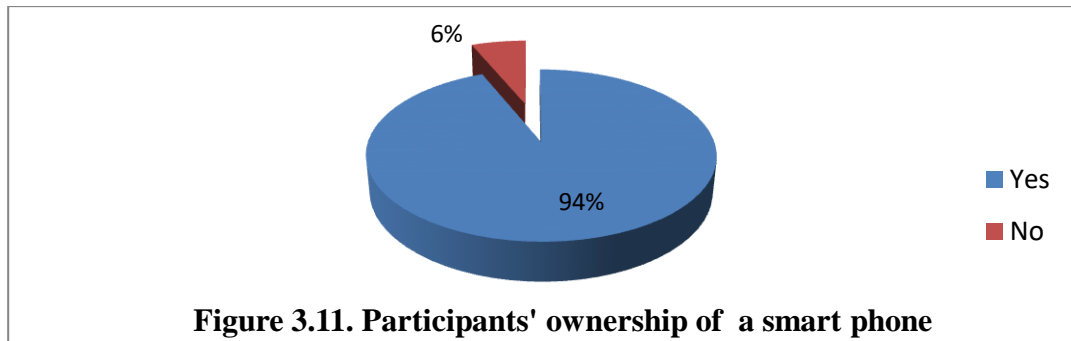


The results obtained above reveal that the largest number of participants opt for the ‘Gathering ideas’ stage as the most difficult one with a percentage of (42.5%). Then, the ‘Drafting’ stage follows with a percentage of (21.25%), where the ‘All’ option represents (16.25%). ‘Self-evaluation’ stage and ‘Gathering ideas + Self-evaluation’ stages receive the same percentage (10%) with eight students for each. The results drawn from this item denote that students encounter difficulties, mainly, in ‘Gathering ideas’ and ‘Drafting’ stages.

Q1: Do you have a smart phone?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	75	93.75 %
No	5	6.25 %
Total	80	100 %

Table 3.11. Participants’ ownership of a smart phone

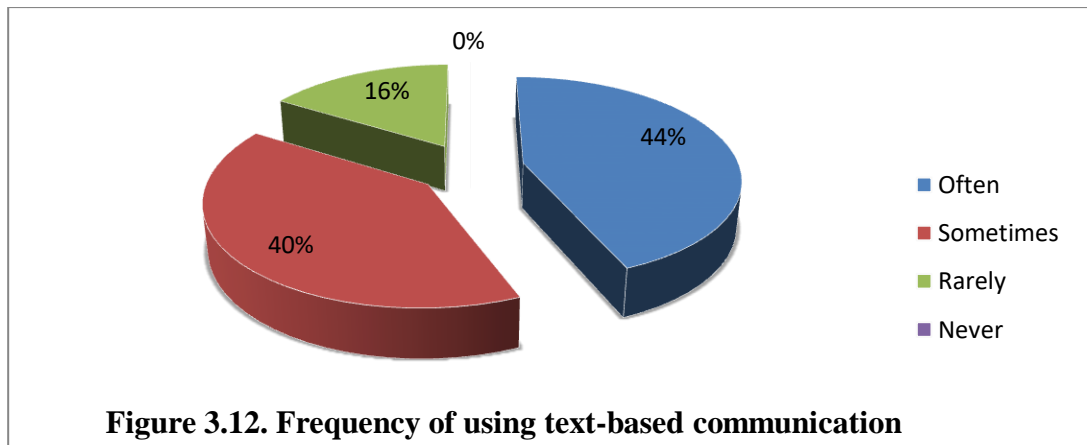


The results obtained on the table above illustrate that the overwhelming majority of participants representing (93.75%) have smart phone, while few of them, representing a percentage of (6.25%), do not own smart phone. These results show the likelihood of using mobile text-based communication.

Q2: How often do you use text-based communication?

Options	Number	Percentage
Often	35	43.75 %
Sometimes	32	40 %
Rarely	13	16.25 %
Never	00	00
Total	80	100 %

Table 3.12: Frequency of using text-based communication



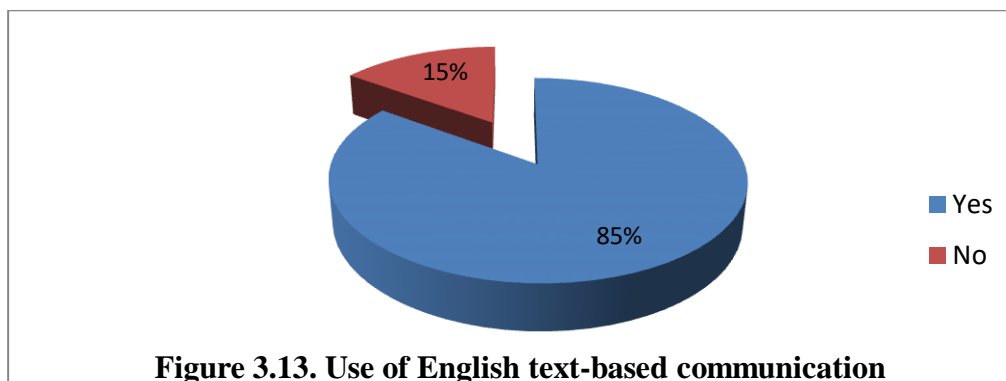
As it is shown in table 3.12, the results indicate that all the subjects use text-based communication with differing degrees. The largest portion of the students (43.75%) often use it and (40%) have selected the ‘Sometimes’ option; ‘Rarely’ is an option which has recorded the lowest percentage (16.25%), whereas ‘Never’ has not been selected at all. The fact that ‘Often’ and ‘Sometimes’ receive the highest percentages reveals that students are truly users of text-based digital communication.

Q3: Do you use English text-based communication?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	68	85 %
No	12	15 %

Total	80	100 %
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Table 3.13. Use of English text-based communication



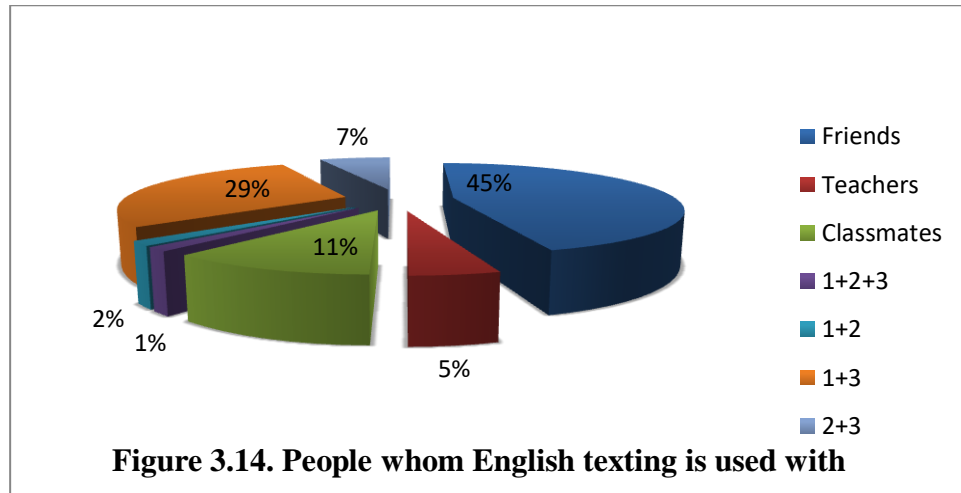
The results reported in table 3.13 indicate that the majority of students (85%) tick ‘Yes’ as an option to answer this item; they do use English text-based communication. However, a minority of twelve respondents, representing (15%), indicate that they do not use English-text based communication.

Q4: With whom do you use it?

This question is addressed to those students who indicate that they use English text-based communication.

Options	Number	Percentage
Friends	28	41.17%
Teachers	03	4.41 %
Classmates	07	10.29%
1+2+3	07	10.29%
1+2	01	1.48%
1+3	18	26.47%
2+3	04	5.89%
Total	68	100 %

Table 3.14. People whom English texting is used with



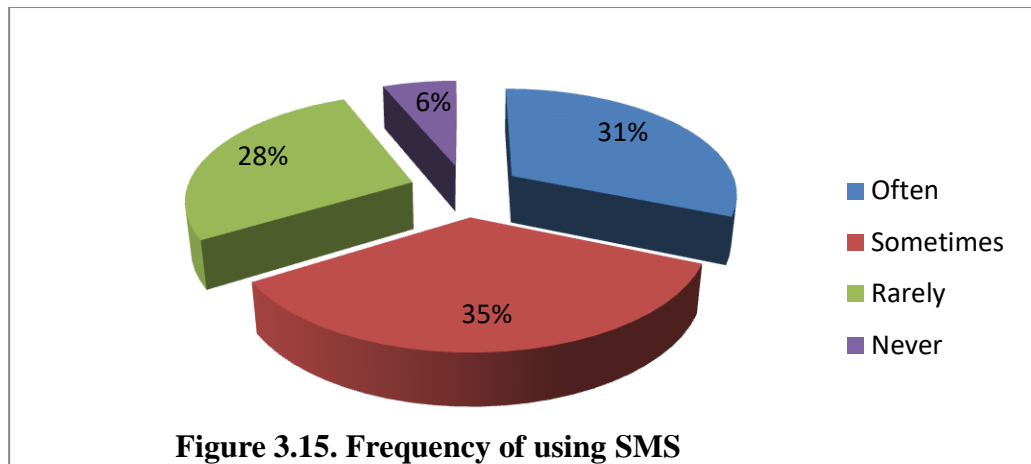
Findings on table 3.14 show that twenty eight respondents (41.17%) use English text-based communication with their friends. Eighteen respondents (26.47 %) opt for the option ‘1+3’, i.e., ‘Friends and Classmates’. Moreover, all the options together ‘1+2+3’, i.e., ‘Friends, Teachers, and Classmates’ and ‘Classmates’ option represent the same result of (10.29%). Additionally, a small number of the participants (4.41%), i.e., three students, indicate that they use English textual communication with teachers only, while four students select ‘Teachers and Classmates’. Only one subject, representing (1.48%), uses English text-based communication with friends and teachers.

Q5: How often do you use SMS?

Options	Number	Percentage
Often	25	31.25 %
Sometimes	28	35 %
Rarely	22	27.5 %

Never	05	6.25
Total	80	100 %

Table 3.15. Frequency of using SMS

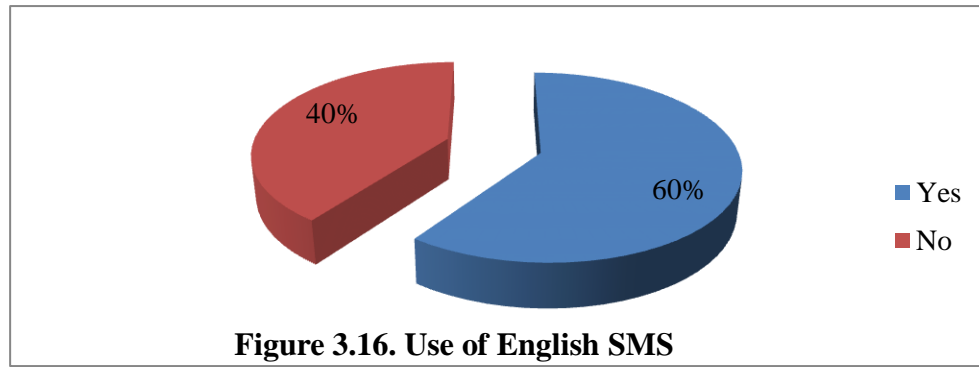


When asked how often they use SMS, some participants (35%) indicate that they use SMS sometimes; others (31.25%) use it more often. Still, other informants (27.5%) tend to use it rarely, while the remaining (6.25%) seem to never use it.

Q6: Do you use English SMS?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	48	60 %
No	32	40 %
Total	80	100 %

Table 3.16. Use of English SMS

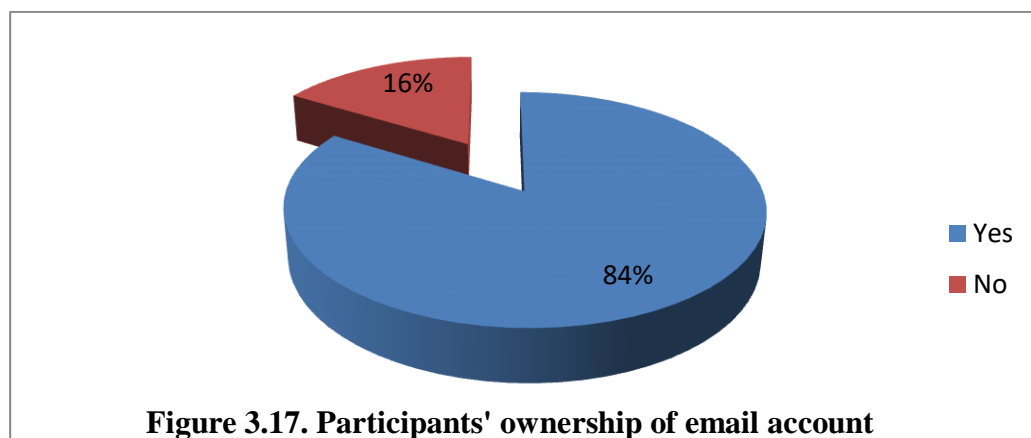


This item demonstrates that most of the students (60%) use English SMS, while (40%) do not use it.

Q7: Do you have an email account?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	67	83.75 %
No	13	16.25 %
Total	80	100%

Table 3.17. Participants' ownership of email account

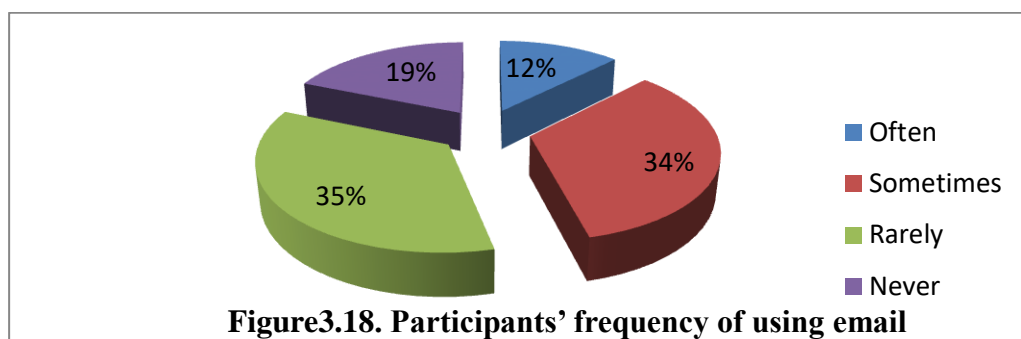


A quick glance at table 3.17 reveals that a majority of sixty seven informants (83.75%) have email account, whereas thirteen out of eighty say that they do not have it.

Q8: How often do you use it?

Options	Number	Percentage
Often	10	12.5 %
Sometimes	27	33.75 %
Rarely	28	35 %
Never	15	18.75 %
Total	80	100 %

Table 3.18. Participants' frequency of using email

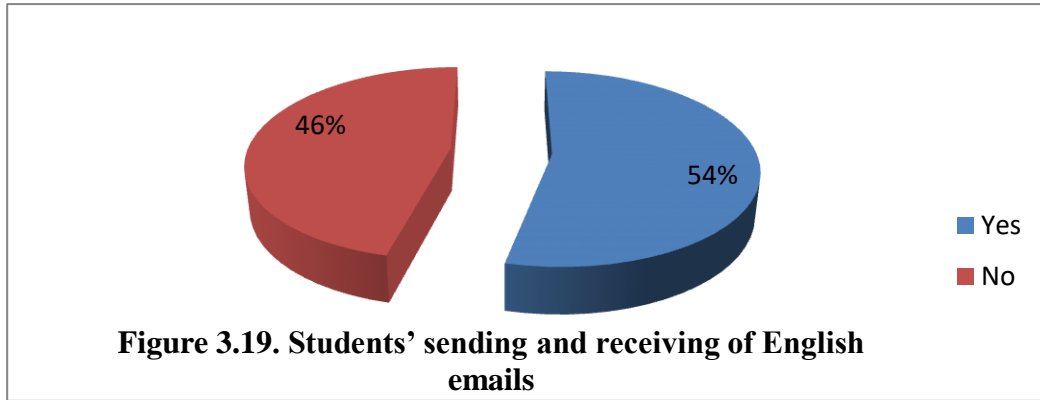


This question is related to the previous one in the sense that it has been asked to know participants' frequency of using email. The results show that both 'Sometimes' and 'Rarely' options have approximately the same percentage; that is, (35%) opt for 'Rarely' and (33.75%) for 'Sometimes'. Other informants (18.75%) select 'Never' and (12.5%) opt for 'Often'.

Q9: Do you send and receive English emails?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	43	53.75 %
No	37	46.25 %
Total	80	100%

Table 3.19. Students' sending and receiving of English emails

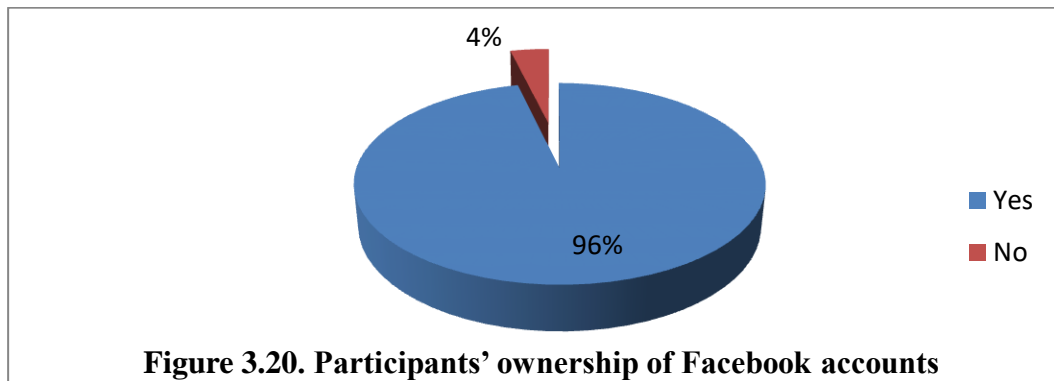


The results of this item reveal that (53.75%) informants state that they send and receive English emails, and the rest (46.25%) confess that they do not do so.

Q10: Do you have a Facebook account?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	77	96.25 %
No	03	3.75%
Total	80	100 %

Table 3.20. Participants' ownership of Facebook accounts



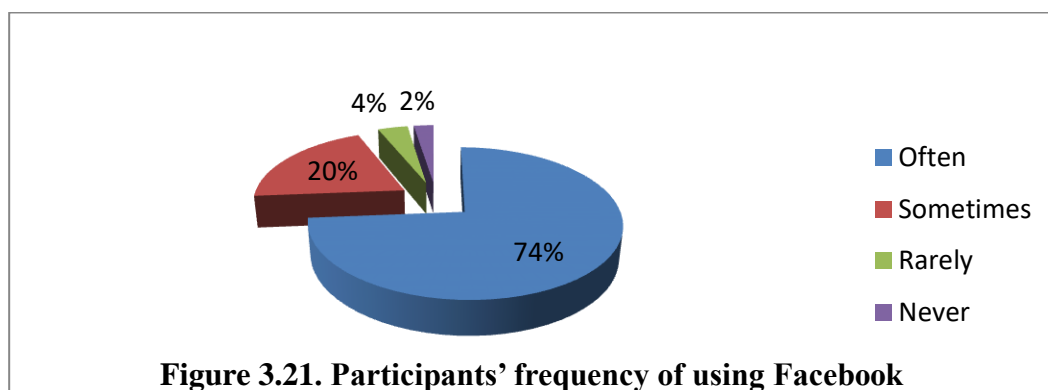
As it is indicated on the table and figure above, the overwhelming majority of participants (96.25%) select 'Yes' as an answer to whether they have a Facebook account.

This may be due to the fact that Facebook, as a social network platform, has become widely spread among people. On the other hand, only (3.75%) of the participants opt for ‘No’ option.

Q11: How often do you use it?

Options	Number	Percentage
Often	59	73.75%
Sometimes	16	20%
Rarely	03	3.75%
Never	02	2.5%
Total	80	100 %

Table 3.21. Participants’ frequency of using Facebook

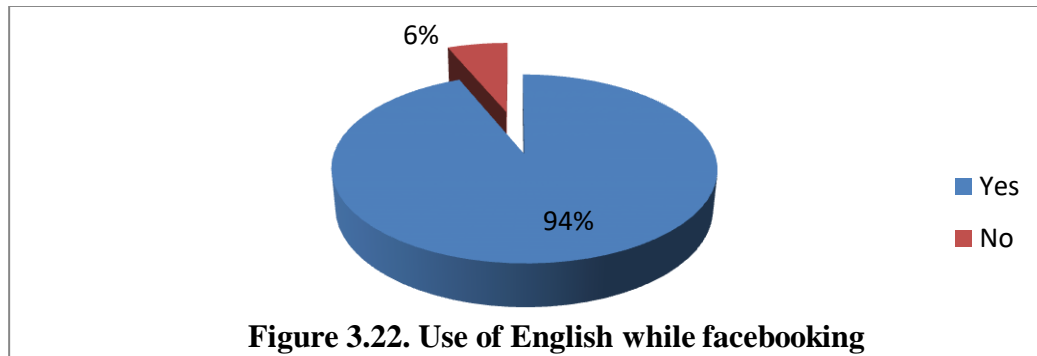


A quick glance at the above table reveals that the majority of the respondents (73.75%), i.e., fifty-nine students, often use their Facebook accounts while sixteen (20%) students use it sometimes. ‘Rarely’ and ‘Never’ options have received the lowest percentages, (3.75%) for ‘Rarely’ and (2.5%) for ‘Never’. This might mean that third year EFL students are on the whole overusers of Facebook.

Q12: Do you use English while facebooking?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	75	93.75 %
No	05	6.25%
Total	80	100 %

Table 3.22. Use of English while facebooking

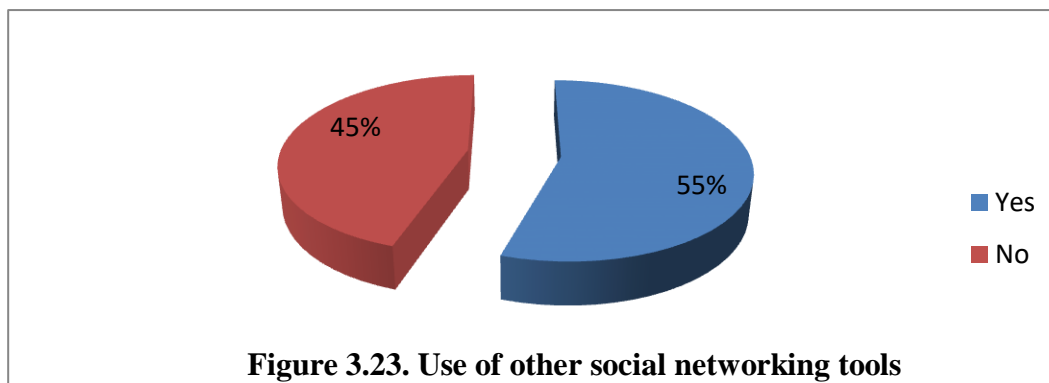


As can be noticed from table 3.22, the overwhelming majority of the respondents (93.75%), i.e., 75 students out of a total of 80, say that they use English when facebooking. Only five students, who constitute a minority of (6.25%), select ‘No’ as an answer to the present item. This indicates that almost all the respondents make use of English in Facebook.

Q13: Do you use other social networking tools? If yes, please mention them.

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	44	55 %
No	36	45%
Total	80	100%

Table 3.23. Use of other social networking tools

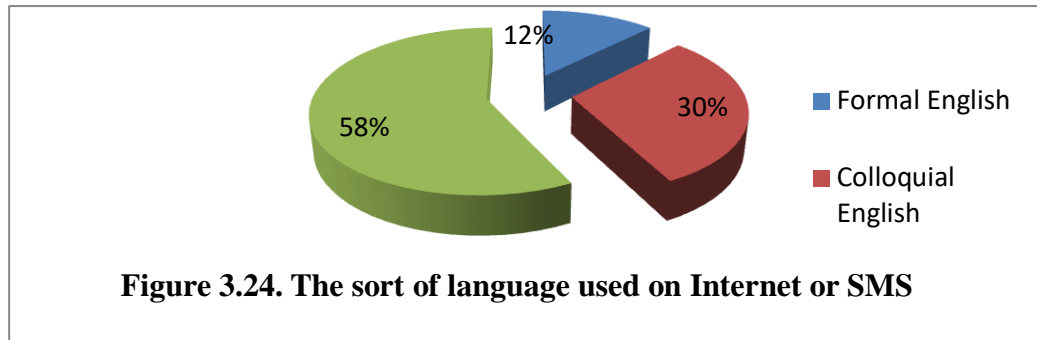


As it is shown in table 3.23, we have recorded forty-four students (55%) whose answers to whether they use other social networking tools are in the positive. Thirty-six respondents (45%) declare that they do not use other social networking tools besides Facebook. These results suggest that social networking tools are quite popular among the youth. In explanation, when asked to mention those other social networking tools, the respondents in question add Instagram, Twitter, Snapshat, Skype, Viber, Imo, and What’s app.

Q14: What sort of language do you use when using Internet or SMS?

Options	Number	Percentage
Formal English	10	12.5 %
Colloquial English	24	30 %
Both	46	57.5%
Total	80	100 %

Table 3.24. The sort of language used on Internet or SMS

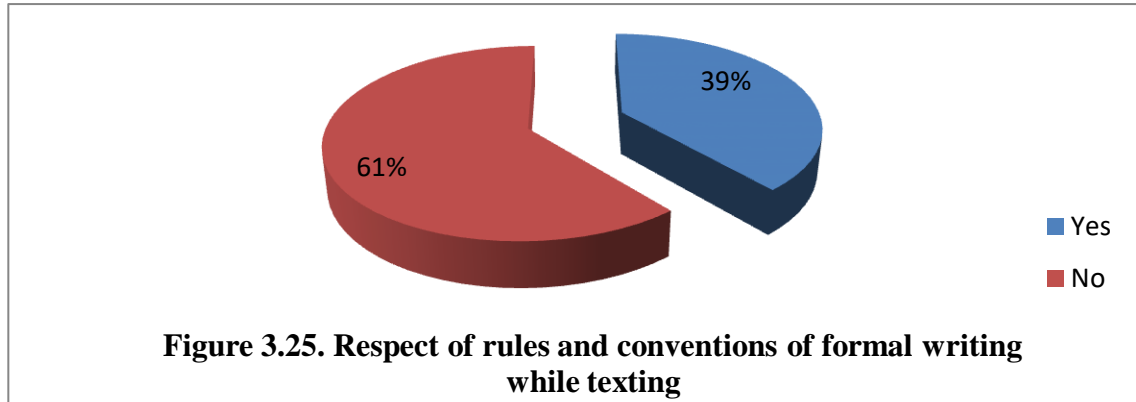


As the table above shows, the largest proportion of the respondents, 46 out of 80, representing (57.5%), declare that they use both formal and colloquial English when using Internet and SMS, while a smaller percentage (30%) reveal that they use colloquial English only. Only ten students, constituting a numerical minority (12.5%), use only formal English.

Q15: Do you respect the rules and conventions of formal writing while texting in English?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	31	38.75%
No	49	61.25%
Total	80	100%

Table 3.25. Respect of rules and conventions of formal writing while texting



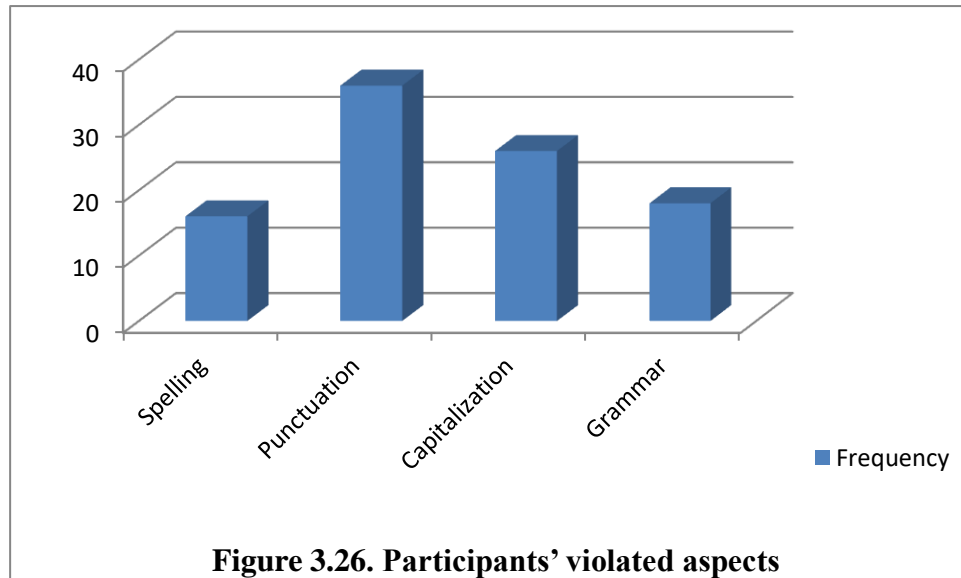
The table above reveals that most of the respondents (61.25%), i.e., 49 students, do not respect the rules and conventions of formal writing when texting in English. The rest of the informants, 31 (38.75%), do conform to the respective rules and conventions.

If no, which of the following aspects do you violate?

This question is directed to those respondents who admit that they do not respect the rules and conventions of formal writing while texting in English.

Aspects	Frequency
Spelling	16
Punctuation	36
Capitalization	26
Grammar	18

Table 3.26. Participants' violated aspects



This item of information seeks to discover the most common aspects of writing violated by the respondents. As the figure above shows, ‘Punctuation’ is the most violated aspect among the participants with 36 ticks. ‘Capitalization’ is ranked the second with a frequency of 26, followed by ‘Grammar’ which has been selected by 18 students. ‘Spelling’ is conceived to be the least common aspect the respondents tend to violate when they type their messages, for it has been picked up by only 16 participants.

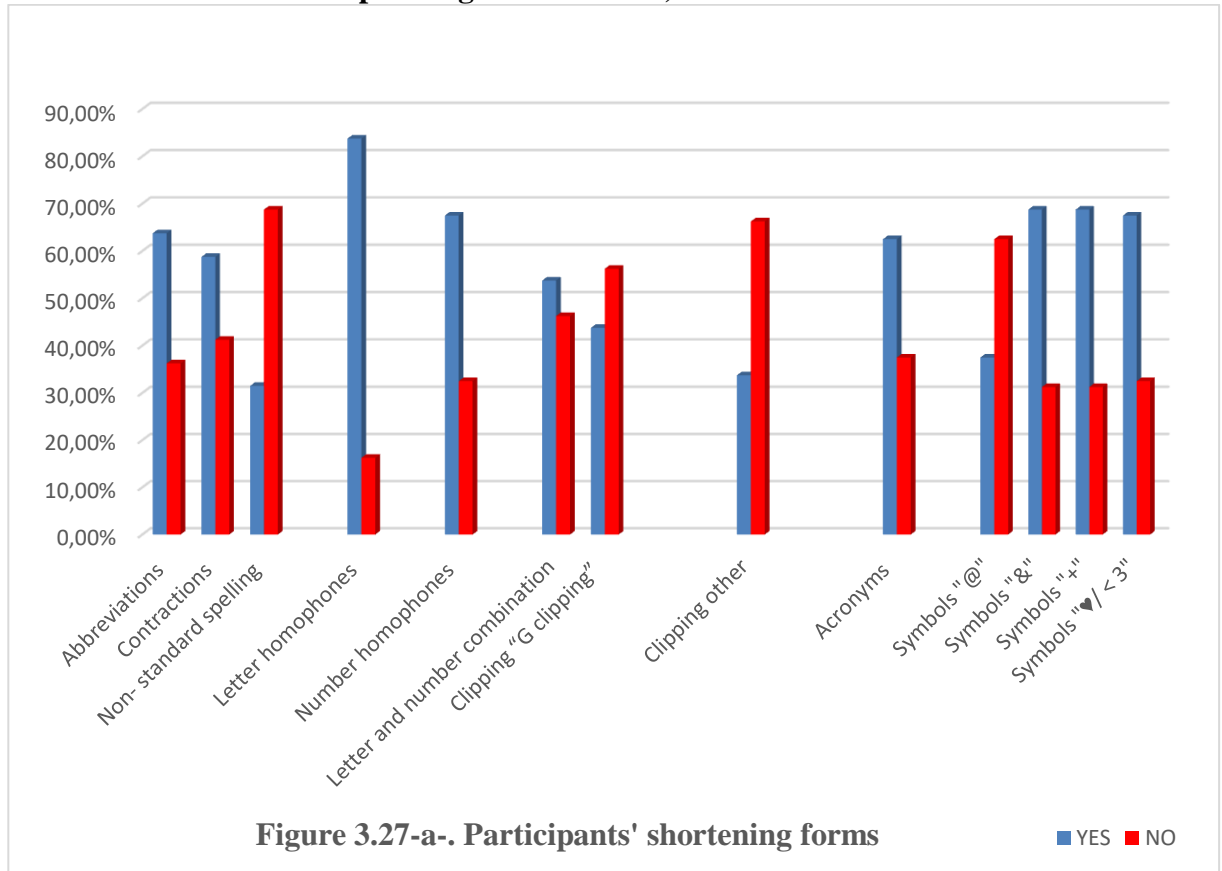
Q16: The following table illustrates some of the practices used by students while texting; tick and add your own.

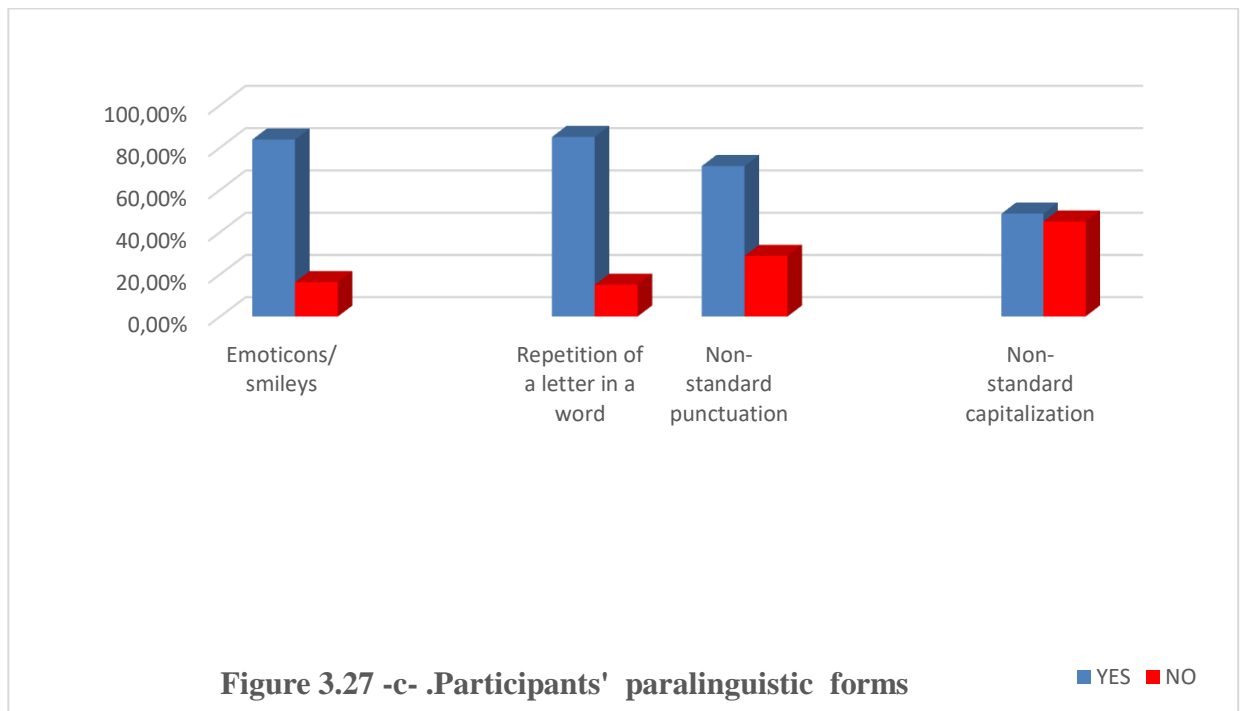
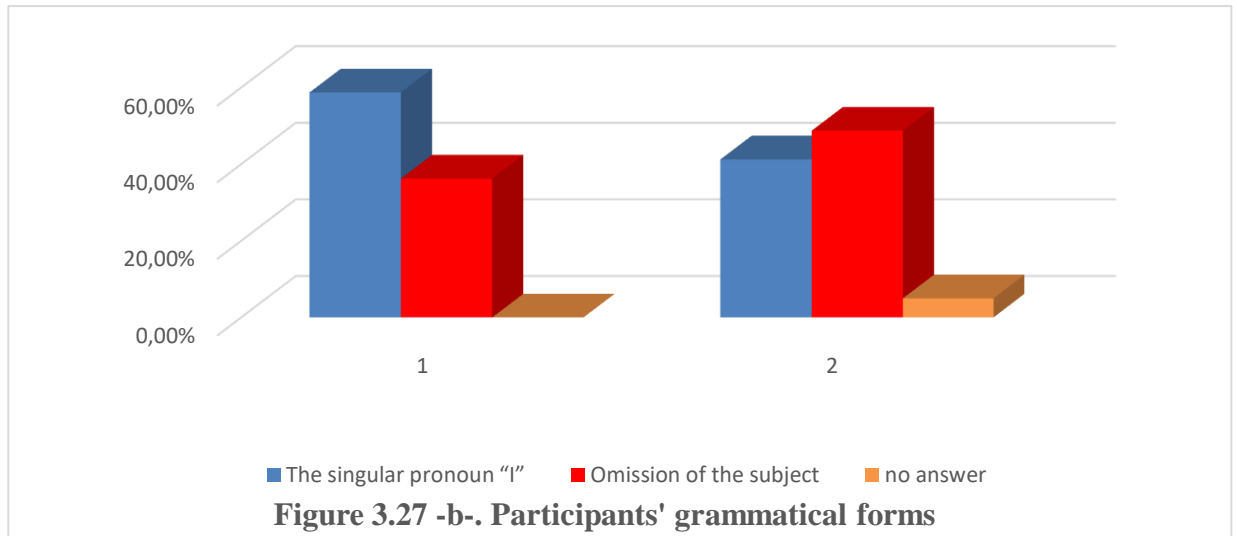
Digital writing						
Shortening forms		Number		Percentage		Total
	examples	Yes	No	Yes	No	N°(%)
Abbreviations	“Sept” for September	51	29	63.75 %	36.25 %	80 (100%)
Contractions	“txt” for text	47	33	58.75% %	41.25%	80 (100%)
Non-standard spelling	“skool” for school “iz” for is	25	55	31.25 %	68.75 %	80 (100%)
Letter homophones	“U” for you “Ur” for your	67	13	83.75 %	16.25 %	80 (100%)
Number homophones	“2” for to /too			67.5 %	32.5 %	80

	“L8” for late	54	26			(100%)
Letter and number combination	“b4” for before	43	37	53.75 %	46.25 %	80 (100%)
Clipping	“G clipping” “goin” for going	35	45	43.75 %	56.25 %	80 (100%)
	“Other clippings” a- Omission of final silent letter: “hav” for have b- Omission of final consonant letter: “wil” for will.	27	53	33.75%	66.25%	80 (100%)
Acronyms	“BTW” for by the way “GTG” for got to go	50	30	62.5%	37.5%	80 (100%)
Symbols	“@” instead of at	30	50	37.5%	62.5%	80 (100%)
	“&” instead of and	55	25	68.75%	31.25%	80 (100%)
	“+” for and/ in addition	55	25	68.75%	31.25%	80 (100%)
	“♥/ < 3” for the verb love	54	26	67.5%	32.5%	80 (100%)
Grammatical forms						
The Singular pronoun “I”	“i” instead of “I”	47	33	58.75%	41.25%	80 (100%)
Omission of the subject	“hope 2c u soon” instead of I hope to see you soon	37	39	46.25%	48.75%	80 (100%)
	No answer		04		5 %	
Paralinguistic forms: for conveying feelings, emotions, mood, attitudes, gestures, and facial expressions						
Emoticons/ smileys	“☺”/ “:)” for happiness “:.” for surprise	67	13	83.75 %	16.25%	80 (100%)
Repetition of a letter in a word	“pleaaaaaaase” for begging	68	12	85%	15%	80 (100%)
Non-standard punctuation	“How did u know??!!” “Cool!!!!!!!!!!”	57	23	71.25 %	28.75%	80 (100%)

Non-standard capitalization	‘I’AM ANGRY’	39	36	48.75 %	45.25%	80 (100%)
	No answer	05		6.25 %		

Table 3.27. Participants’ practices of digital writing (shortening, grammatical, paralinguistic features)





The table 3.27 summarizes the different digital practices the participants tend to use when texting. It shows that most of the subjects (63.75%), representing 51 students, tend to abbreviate words (e.g., ‘September’ becoming ‘Sept.’). The rest of the respondents (36.25%), equivalent to 29 students, declare that they do not use such a strategy when writing electronic

messages. When asked to add their own examples, students have written: ‘*prob.*’ for ‘problem’, ‘*lib.*’ for ‘library’.

As for the use of contractions, the results are no different from those drawn from the previous item. The largest part of the respondents (58.75%), i.e., 47 students, say that they use contractions when they type their messages while the remaining thirty-three participants (41.25%) state that they do not practice this method of shortening. Students have added their examples: ‘*gd*’ (good), ‘*bcz*’ (because), ‘*fbk*’ (facebook), ‘*msg*’ (message), ‘*abt*’ (about), ‘*bk*’ (book), ‘*sptmbr*’ for (September), ‘*plz*’ for (please).

Another shortening strategy is non-standard spelling. As it can be revealed from the same table, nearly the majority of the students (68.75%) show that they keep writing words in the conventional way when it comes to texting. Only twenty-five students, or (31.25%), confess that they tend to break the conventional rules of spelling while texting. One respondent adds that he uses ‘*luv*’ for ‘love’.

As for letter homophones, the overwhelming majority of the respondents (83.75%) tend to use this shortening strategy when they type their messages. Besides the examples that have been provided for the participants, they add their own: ‘*C*’ for ‘see’, ‘*U’re*’ for ‘you are’, ‘*R*’ for ‘are’, ‘*U*’ for ‘you’, ‘*Y*’ for ‘why’, ‘*K*’ for ‘ok’. Only thirteen students out of a total of 80 (16.25%) reveal that letter homophones are not a defining feature of their electronic messages.

Moving to the use of number homophones, the results do not differ too much from those of the preceding item of information in the sense that almost the majority of the subjects (67.5%) say that they tend to employ number homophones as a strategy when texting; they

add their examples as follows: '29' for 'tonight', '4' for 'for', '2' for 'two', '9' for 'night', '3' for 'free'. However, (32.5%) declare that they do not use such a texting strategy.

According to the results shown in table 3.27, it can be revealed that most of the students (53.75%), i.e., 43, declare that they use letter and number homophony as a technique when texting such as: '4U' for (for you), '2mrw' (tomorrow), 'gdn8t' for 'goodnight', 'f2f' for 'face to face', '2gther' for 'together', '2n8t' for 'tonight', 'gr8t' for 'great', 'n8' for 'night'; the remaining 37 students (46.25%) state that they do not use this strategy.

The next shortening strategy is clipping which includes two types, namely 'G clipping' and 'Other clippings'. Regarding the former, most of the respondents (56.25%) reveal that they do not use this practice. Still, (43.75%) answer in the positive. The examples they have given us are: 'mornin' for 'morning', 'workin' for 'working', 'comin' for 'coming', 'followin' for 'following'. Concerning the latter, the largest proportion of the participants (66.25) answer in the negative. Almost thirty-four percent state that other clippings exist in their electronic messages; their examples include 'som' for 'some', 'lik' for 'like', 'com' for 'come', 'shal' for 'shall', 'gues' for 'guess'.

Moving to acronyms, the results obtained indicate that most of participants (62.5%) do use them; they have mentioned some of the common ones such as 'IDK' for 'I do not know', 'CUS' for 'see you soon', 'BRB' for 'be right back', 'HAGD' for 'have a great day', 'TYL' for 'text you later', 'OMG' for 'oh my God', 'TBH' for 'to be honest', 'LOL' for 'laugh out loud', to name but a few. However, (37.5%) of the participants say that they do not use acronyms.

As for symbols, most of the subjects (62.5%) reply that they do not use '@' instead of 'at'. On the other hand, (37.5%) show that they substitute 'at' with '@' whenever they write

electronically. Furthermore, approximately the majority of the students (68.75%) declare that they use ‘&’ and ‘+’ instead of ‘and’ and ‘and/ in addition’, respectively. However, a minority of (31.25%) states that they do not use such a practice. Most of the informants (67.5%) confirm that they use ‘♥/ <3’ whenever they want to write the verb ‘love’, whereas (32.5%) admit that they do not use this symbol at all.

The singular pronoun ‘i’ instead of ‘I’ is another feature of digital writing that (58.75%) of the participants happen to use, but (41.25%) of them state that they do not.

It is noticed that (48.75%) do not use subject omission, whereas (46.25%) of the informants do use it; some instances, they indicate, include: ‘got2go’ and ‘gotta go’ for ‘I have got to go’, ‘want2talk’ for ‘I want to talk’, ‘miss you too’ for ‘I miss you too’, ‘Luv you too’ for ‘I love you too’. The remaining (5%) have not answered.

Emoticons and smileys seem to be a defining feature of texting language (IText). The overwhelming majority of the participants (83.75%) answer that they use emoticons and smileys. They have further illustrated this practice by offering some examples like: ‘;)’ for wink, ‘): / ‘_’ for sadness, ‘;’(for cry, ‘*_’ for excitement, ‘♥_♥’ for expressing affection. Only a small number of the respondents, 13 students, representing (16.25%) admit that they do not attach these typographic symbols to their typed messages.

Pushing further, the overwhelming majority (85%) reports that they use repetition of a letter in a word; they identify some of their own examples such as: ‘gooooooooood’, ‘thank youuuuuuuuuuu’, ‘yeeeeeeeees’, ‘noooooooooo’ ‘suuuuuure’, ‘sorrriiiiiiiiii’ ‘sooooooryyyy’, ‘pleeeeeeease’, ‘woooooooooow’, ‘hiiiiii’, ‘pliiiiiz’ for begging, ‘whaaaaat!’ for are you crazy?.

However, a minority of (15%) answers in the negative, meaning that they do not use this form of texting.

As for the conventional rules of punctuation, findings show that the majority of students (71.25%) do not consider them. Examples have been provided as follows: ‘*omg!!!*’ to express surprise towards an unexpected event, ‘*really?!!!*’ to show astonishment. It may be worth mentioning that one participant states that he rarely uses punctuation. A minority of (28.75%) answers in the negative.

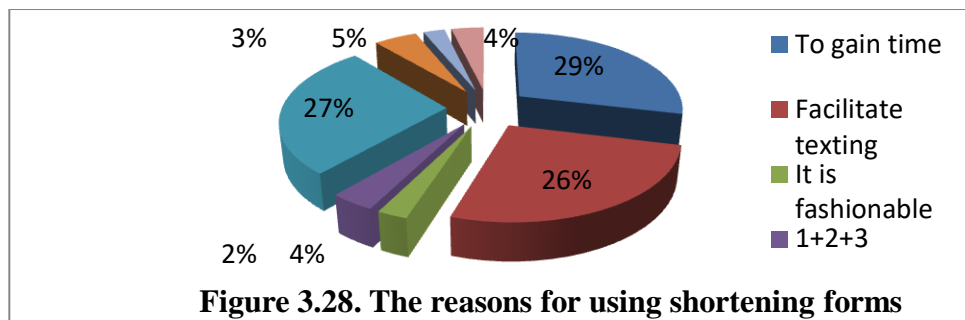
As regards non-standard capitalization, the results are different from the previous ones in the sense that ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ options have received approximately the same percentages. That is, while (48.75%) of the informants state that they use non-standard capitalization, (45.25%) report that they do not do so. However, five participants (6.25 %) have not responded to the use of non-Standard capitalization practice. Those whose answers are in the positive add: ‘*T’M TIRED*’ to emphasize tiredness, ‘*LEAVE ME ALONE*’ to express anger, ‘*REALLY*’ to show astonishment, or chock towards an unexpected event.

Q17: Why do you use shortening forms, if at all?

Options	Number	Percentage
To gain time	23	28.75 %
To Facilitate texting	21	26.25 %
It is fashionable	02	2.5 %
1+2+3	03	3.75 %
1+2	22	27.5 %
1+3	04	5 %
2+3	02	2.5 %

No answers	03	3.75 %
Total	80	100%

Table 3.28. The reasons for using shortening forms



The aim behind designing this item is to discover what pushes the respondents to use shortening forms, if they ever use them. As table 3.28 shows, ‘To gain time’, ‘To facilitate the process of texting’, and ‘To gain time + To facilitate texting’ have received the highest percentages, which are approximately equal, (28.75%), (26.25%), and (27.5%), respectively. The remaining percentage is divided among ‘To gain time + It is fashionable’ (5%), ‘To gain time + To facilitate texting + It is fashionable’ (3.75%), ‘To facilitate texting + It is fashionable’, just like ‘It is fashionable’, receives (2.5%), and ‘No answers’ representing (3.75%).

Q18: What does texting impact negatively in your academic writing?

Aspects	Frequency
Capitalization	21
Punctuation	34
Spelling	36
Plurals	1
Style	39

Table 3.29. The negative impact of texting on students’ academic writing

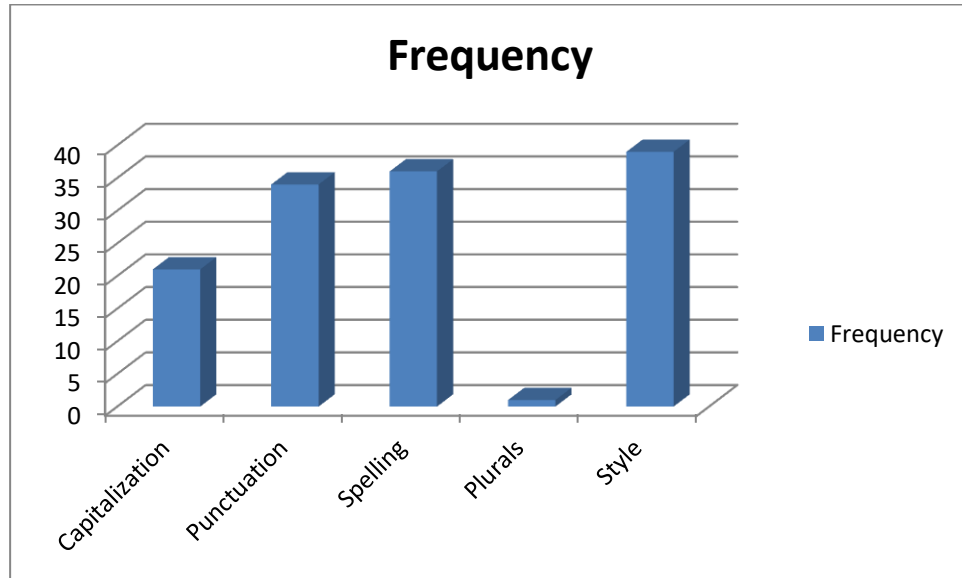


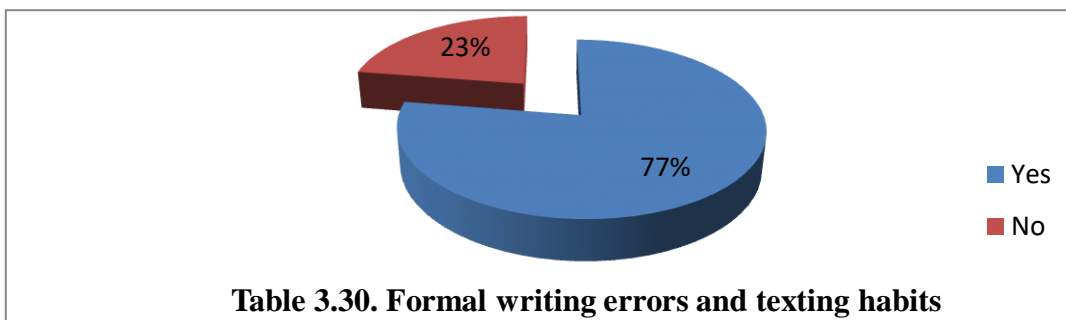
Figure 3.29. The negative impact of texting on students’ academic writing

This item of information aims to discover the aspects of students’ writing that are commonly harmed by texting habit. When asked to point to the aspects of their writing they believe are negatively affected by the overuse of texting, 39 respondents agree upon ‘Style’, followed by ‘Spelling’, which has scored 36 responses, then ‘Punctuation’, which has been selected by 34 participants. ‘Capitalization’ is ranked the fourth, receiving 21 responses, while ‘Plurals’ is the least common aspect the respondents believe it is negatively affected by texting habits. According to the respondents’ answers, the aspects of writing that are commonly harmed by texting are style, spelling, and punctuation.

Q19: Do you think that the errors you make in your formal writing can be related to the overuse of texting habits?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	62	77.5%
No	18	22.5%
Total	80	100%

Table 3.30. Formal writing errors and texting habits

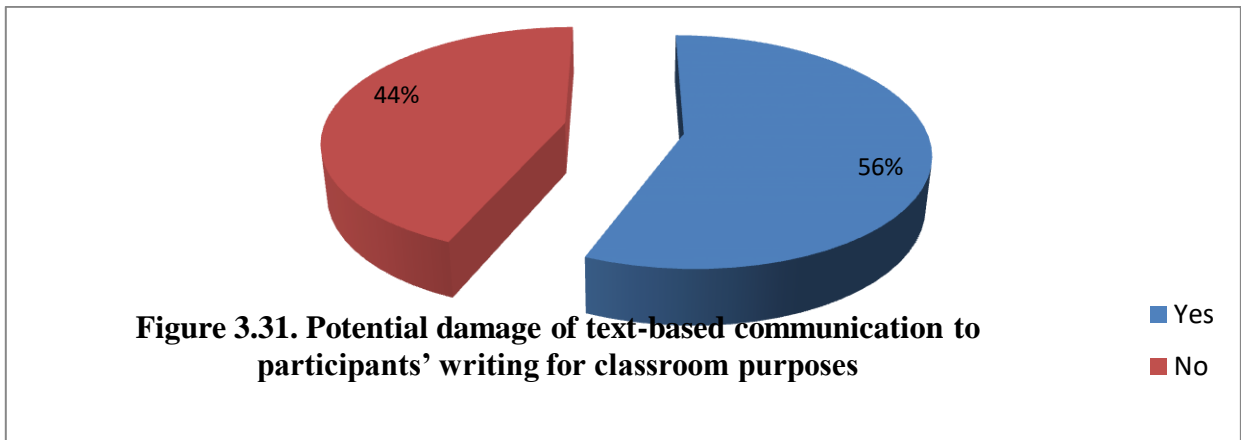


A quick glance at the table above reveals that the majority of the students who have answered the questionnaire (77.5%), i.e., sixty-two respondents, relate the errors they make in their formal writing in terms of resemblance to texting habits. A minority of (22.5%), i.e., 18 students, do not think that texting habits have any resemblance in the errors they make when writing for school purposes.

Q20: Do you think text-based digital communication damages your writing?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	45	56.25%
No	35	43.75%
Total	80	100%

Table 3.31. Potential damage of text-based communication to participants' writing for classroom purposes



The data obtained differentiate between two groups; those who believe that text-based communication is harmful to formal writing, and those who do not find it damaging. More than half of the respondents (56.25%) opt for 'Yes' whereas thirty-five students (43.75%) opt for 'No' as an option to answer the present item of information, meaning that text-based communication does not damage their formal writing.

3.5. The Teachers' Interview

The interview is one of the main research tools that is used for gathering information. It requires an interaction between the researcher and the respondent. One positive aspect of using the interview is that it provides the researcher with in-depth pieces of information about the informant's beliefs and attitudes. There are many kinds of interview, ranging from unstructured, through semi-structured, to structured. The structured interview contains standard and pre-planned questions that are asked in a systematic way. The semi-structured interview includes a flexible way of answering the questions whereby the respondent will not be restricted to the questions. The last type, the unstructured interview, is one where the respondents are free to explore their opinions and attitudes without any guidance as long as they are talking about the same topic.

3.5.1. Description of the Teachers' Interview

In this study, the teachers' interview is structured in nature. The items were designed and arranged beforehand to guide both the researchers and the subjects all along the interview. The interview is made up of eleven (11) items, including yes/no questions, one multiple-choice question, and open questions. They are divided into two sections, 'Background Information' and 'Texting Language and the State of EFL Academic Writing'.

Concerning the first section, 'Background Information', it contains two questions. It seeks to gain personal information about the informants. The first item (Q1) intends to know teachers' experience in teaching at university while the second question (Q2) is meant to discover teachers' experience in dealing with students' writing in terms of paragraphs and essays -for exam purposes or else.

The second section constitutes the essence of the teachers' interview as it is mainly devoted to discuss the state of EFL students' academic writing and its resemblance to digital writing practices from the point of view of teachers.

The first item (Q3) asks the informants about the aspects of writing that they give importance to in terms of content, mechanics of writing, or both of them. The next question (Q4) aims to determine whether the interviewees use English text-based digital tools to communicate with their students, and, if their answers are in the positive, whether they respect the rules and conventions of formal writing while texting. Question (Q5) turns the interviewees' attention to the formal writing of students. It invites them to identify the aspect(s) that they usually find violated in their students' written work for classroom purposes. Departing from the previous question, question six (Q6) examines whether or not EFL students' academic writing resembles texting language or say IText. To this end, it attempts to

capture odd features academic writing is likely to contain. Question seven (Q7) aims to uncover the main reasons behind the occurrence of students' errors. Item eight (Q8) seeks to determine whether the informants demonstrate tolerance of texting features in their students' writing. Moving to the ninth question (Q9), the participants are asked whether they sensitize their students to the existence and seriousness of texting features. Question ten (Q10) invites the interviewees to suggest some possible solutions to this phenomenon. The last item (Q11) seeks to elicit teachers' opinion about the statement that digital writing practices are damaging formal writing; that is, whether texting practices are distorting the nature and structure of academic writing.

3.5.2. Administration of the Teachers' Interview

The teachers' interview is an audio recorded conversation between the researchers and the interviewees. The same questions were addressed to all interviewees; nevertheless, the amount of time devoted to respond to each item varied among the informants. Before starting, we, firstly, introduced ourselves and our topic in few statements. Then, the aim of the oral interview was specified. During the interview, there were introductions to particular questions. At the end, we expressed our deep gratitude and thanks for the informants' willingness and acceptance to take part in the interview, to give up their time, to help, and to contribute to this study.

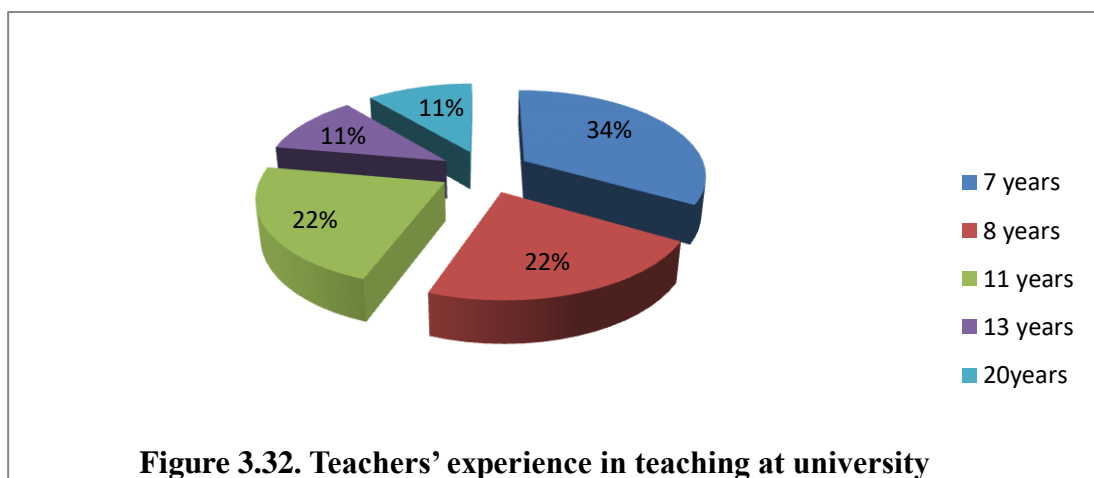
3.5.3. Analysis of the Teachers' Interview

Teachers exhibit different views regarding the resemblance between digital writing and students' formal writing. In the analysis of their answers below, we will show how these features of digital language are applied in their formal writing.

Q1: How long have you been teaching at university?

Options	Number	Percentage
7 years	03	33.33 %
8 years	02	22.22 %
11 years	02	22.22 %
13 years	01	11.11 %
20years	01	11.11 %
Total	09	100 %

Table 3.32. Teachers’ experience in teaching at university

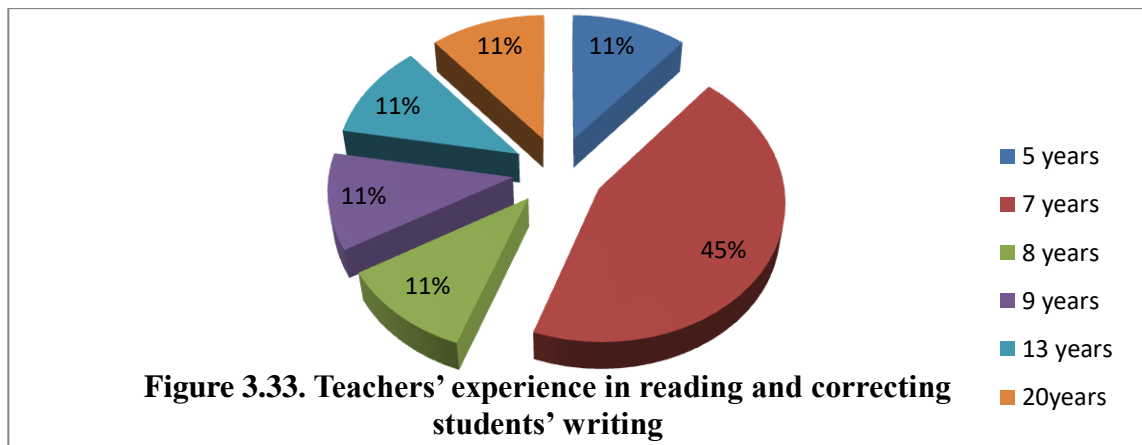


The findings in table 3.32 show that (33.33%) of the respondents have taught English for seven years. Besides, (22.22%) have an experience of eight years, while the same percentage (22.22%) have eleven years experience. Whereas the rest of the interviewees declare that they have been teaching at university for more than eleven years; one teacher (11.11%) for thirteen years and the other (11.11%) for twenty years.

Q2: How long have you been reading and correcting your students’ writing in terms of paragraphs and essays?

Options	Number	Percentage
5 years	01	11.11 %
7 years	04	44.44 %
8 years	01	11.11 %
9 years	01	11.11 %
13 years	01	11.11 %
20years	01	11.11 %
Total	09	100 %

Table 3.33. Teachers' experience in reading and correcting students' writing



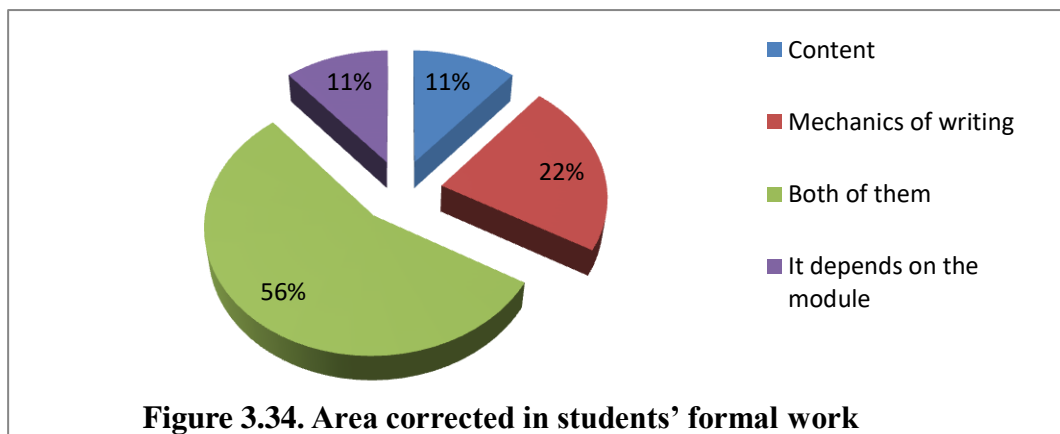
From the table, it is noticed that (44.44%), representing four respondents, have an experience of seven years. All the remaining answers are as follows: five years, eight years, nine years, thirteen years, and twenty years, each equalling (11.11%).

Q3: When you correct your students' formal work, do you give importance to:

- a- Content b- Mechanics of Writing c- Both of Them

Options	Number	Percentage
Content	01	11.11%
Mechanics of writing	02	22.22%
Both of them	05	55.55%
Depending on the module	01	11.11%
Total	09	100%

Table 3.34. Area corrected in students' formal work



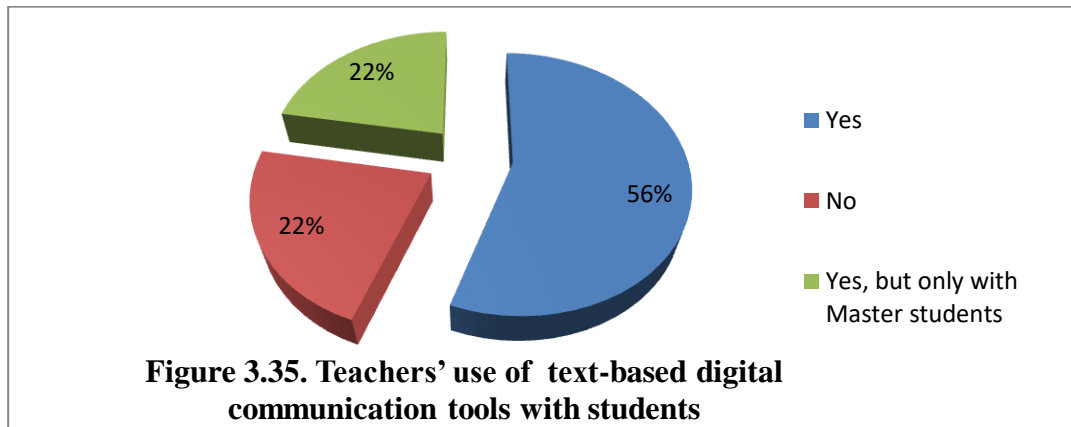
The aim of this question is to see which aspects are corrected in students' formal work. Most of the respondents (55.55%), that is five respondents, answer that they focus on both mechanics and content, while two of them (22.22%) answer that they give importance to the mechanics of writing. Besides, whereas (11.11%) indicates that he is concerned with content, an equal percentage says this depends on the module itself. In elaborating on their answers, teachers who have selected both mechanics and content report that language is seen as a whole that holds together. However, the respondents who have supported the idea of mechanics rather than content add that, since students are learning a foreign language, they need to focus more on form because ideas are expressed through using language, and if language use is wrong, the ideas will be much the same. Finally, the respondents whose correction depends on the module add that if the module is grammar, they focus more on the mechanics and accuracy of the text.

Q4: a. Do you use text-based digital communication tools (e.g., Facebook Messenger, e-mail) to communicate with your students?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	05	55.55%
No	02	22.22%

Yes, but only with Master students	02	22.22%
Total	09	100%

Table 3.35. Teachers' use of text-based digital communication tools with students



This item is an attempt to determine whether the informants use text-based digital communication when they want to get in touch with their students. According to the results, most of the informants (55.55%), i.e., 5 teachers out of 9, answer in the positive. Two interviewees (22.22%) admit that they do not communicate with their students using text-based digital tools. The rest of the interviewees, i.e., two teachers (22.22%), respond that they use text-based patterns of communication with students, but only those whom they supervise and delegates of groups.

b. If yes, do you use English while texting?

This question is addressed to those informants who have indicated that they use text-based digital tools to communicate with their students.

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	07	100%
No	00	00 %
Total	07	100%

Table 3.36. Teachers' use of English while texting

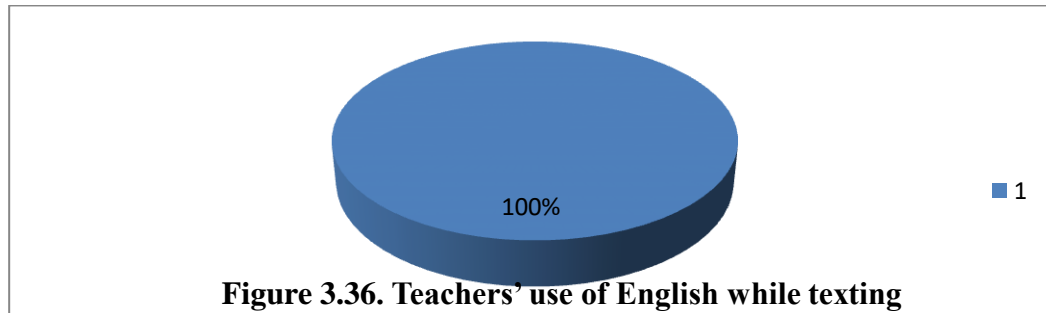


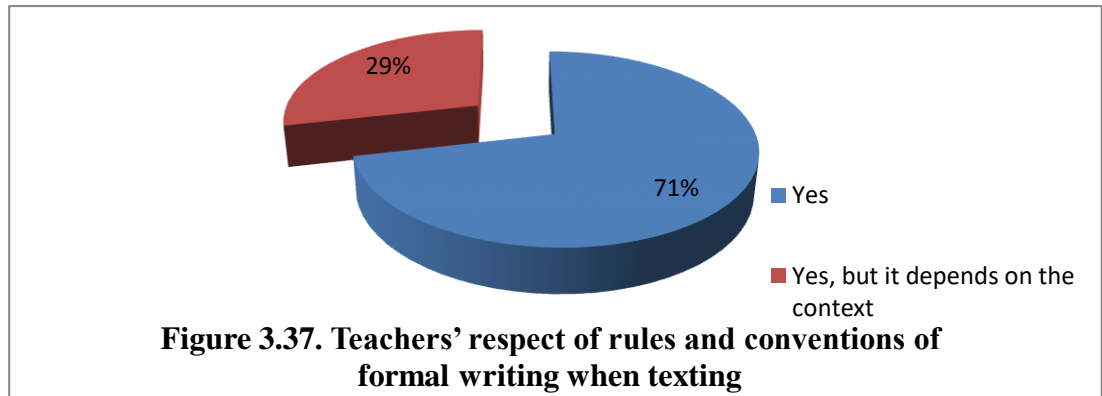
Figure 3.36. Teachers' use of English while texting

As it is indicated in table 3.36 and in the figure above, all the interviewees who are concerned with this question, i.e., 7 teachers, state that they do use English when exchanging messages with their students.

c. If yes, do you respect the rules and conventions of formal writing?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	05	71.42%
Yes, but it depends on the context	02	28.57%
Total	07	100%

Table 3.37. Teachers' respect of rules and conventions of formal writing when texting

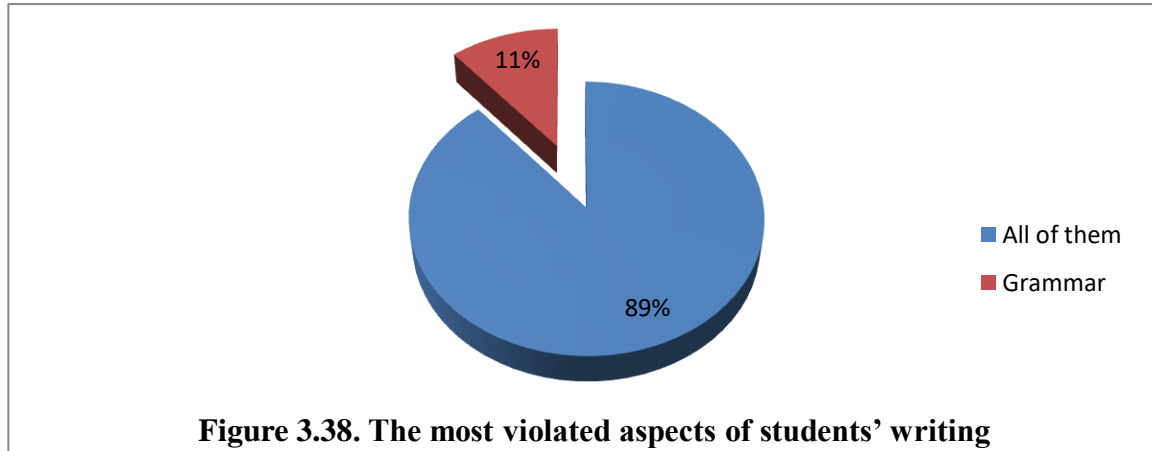


The obtained results indicate that nearly the majority of the respondents (71.42%) state that they conform to the rules of formal writing when texting with their students. The remaining percentage (28.57%) represents those teachers who reveal that they do respect the conventions of formal writing, but this is mainly determined by the context of the textual discussion. They tend to use informal language when the discussion is not related to an educational context.

Q5: Which aspects of your students' writing do you usually find violated in class? (e.g., grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, all of them)

Options	Number	Percentage
All of them	08	88.88 %
Grammar	01	11.11 %
Total	09	100%

Table 3.38. The most violated aspects of students' writing

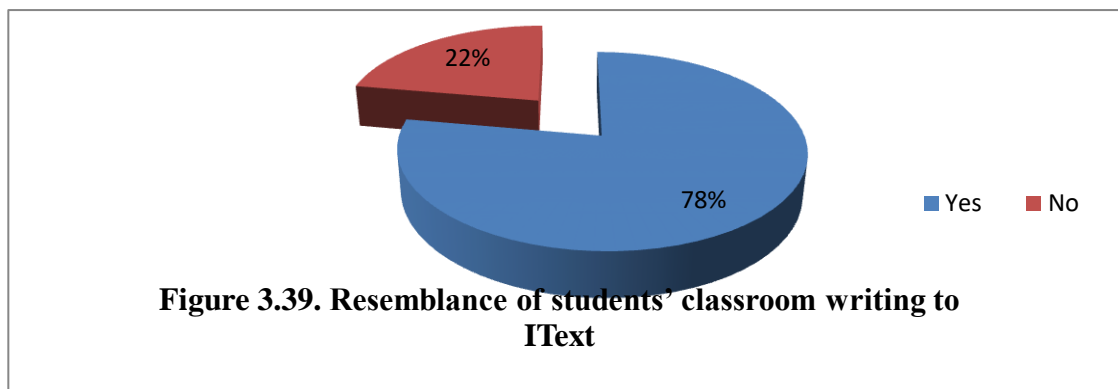


The aim of the fifth item is to see what aspects in students' writing are violated. The overwhelming majority of respondents (88.88%) answer that all the mentioned aspects (grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization) are violated, while only one respondent (11.11%) claims that only grammar constitutes a problem for students when writing formally. He claims that distorting the grammar of a language is the source of all possible errors students can commit. On the whole, it seems that students have all sorts of problems with the basics of writing, the thing that affects negatively the quality of the language they use.

Q6: Does your students' writing for classroom purposes resemble text-based digital communication?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	07	77.77%
No	02	22.22%
Total	09	100%

Table 3.39. Resemblance of students' classroom writing to IText



In answer to the sixth item, the majority of the participants (77.77%) admit that there is a resemblance between students' classroom writing and IText, whereas only (22.22%) hold that there is no resemblance therein. For this question, participants have been provided with a list of common practices to help refresh their memories. They identify digital practices such as abbreviations which are not accepted in formal writing such as: '*Lingui.*' for 'Linguistics', '*Psychopeda.*' for 'Psychopedagogy', '*lge.*' for 'language'. Likewise, acronyms which are commonplace are abused such as: '*OTOH*' for 'on the other hand', '*BTW*' for 'by the way', '*HAND*' for 'have a nice day'. Furthermore, examples of letter and number homophones are reported such as 'b4' for 'before', '2n8t' for 'tonight', 'gr8' for 'great'. The use of small 'i' instead of the pronoun 'I' is also used in students' writing. More importantly, all respondents claim that students have problems with the misuse or no use of punctuation marks. They add that at times one may find no punctuation marks throughout a whole paragraph, or a lot of run-on sentences and fragments. Some teachers add that the wrong use of punctuation marks cannot only be traced to the use of text-based digital communication, but to the lack of knowledge of the rules governing punctuation. The same thing is true for the lack of capitalization, the use of run-on sentences and fragments. In fact, all the foregoing aspects are related to each other, i.e. punctuation, capitalization, run-on sentences and fragments in the sense that lacking one of them may lead to the other especially punctuation marks. Students

should be aware of the types of sentences and how to write and use coordinating/subordinating conjunctions; some participants hold that if there is a need to summarize the types of mistakes made by students, these would be both run-on sentences and fragments, after punctuation problems. Additionally, respondents report the use of contractions in their students' writing such as *'it's* for 'it is', *'it'll* for 'it will', *'don't* for 'do not', *'can't* for 'cannot', *'I've* for 'I have', *'U're* for 'you are'. The aforementioned practices are agreed on by almost all the respondents; for the rest of practices, they were accepted as well but their frequency of use is far less than the others. These practices are: the use of symbols ('/' for 'or', '+' for 'in addition', '@' for 'at', '&' for 'and'); the use of emoticons and smileys, the use of clippings i. e. g clipping and others –final silent letter, double consonant– clippings- and elimination of vowels).

Q7. How would you explain the errors that appear in students' formal writing? i.e., what is/are the reason(s) behind their occurrence? e. g., ignorance and/or lack of training, stress and lack of concentration in exam situations.

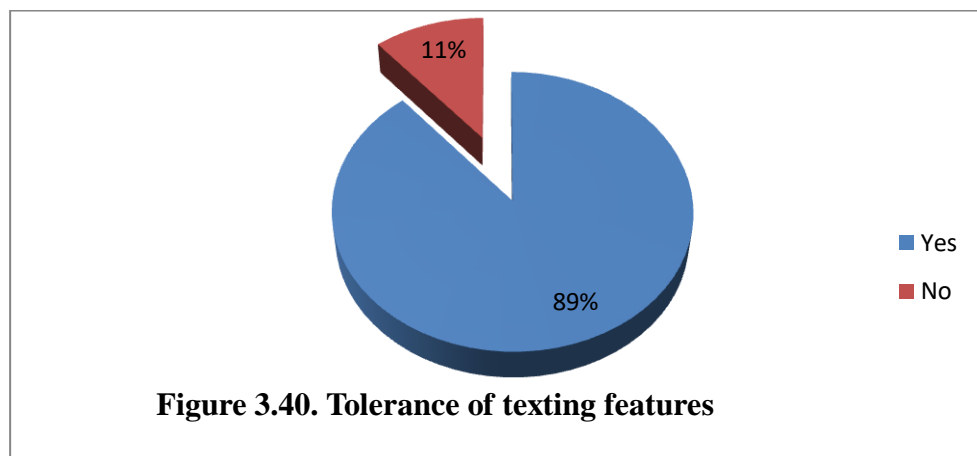
In response to this item, all the participants agree on mainly four to five points. First, the interference of the mother tongue is one explanation, especially where punctuation is used differently. Second, errors may be due to the lack of reading and note taking; all participants strongly emphasize the role of reading as an explanation of the appearance of errors in students' formal work. Lack of training is another important reason, which should not be neglected; this has been provided by all the participants. Furthermore, lack of vocabulary and concentration might well prevent students from expressing and developing their ideas. Ignorance of rules plays as well a significant role in explaining errors, the thing that deters students from using language appropriately. Related to the previous reason is an important

factor which is lack of sensitization and awareness-raising about all these practices and how to avoid using them when writing academically. Moreover, and with regard to digital practices, participants agree that students use them because they are fashionable among the youth. Finally, participants mention the importance of motivation and how it makes students more or less performers of good writing.

Q8: Do you show tolerance to the appearance of “texting” features in your students’ writing?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	01	11.11%
No	08	88.88%
Total	09	100%

Table 3.40. Tolerance of texting features

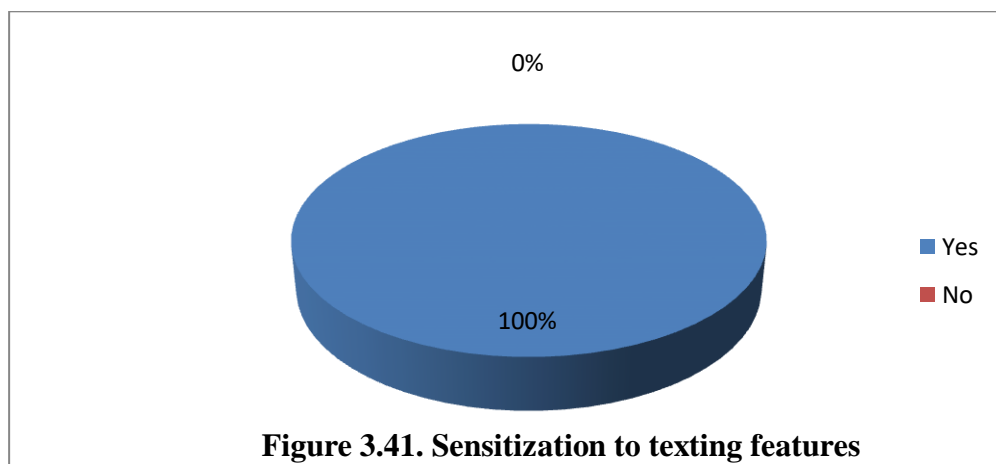


As table 3.40 and the figure above show, a striking majority (88.88%) of the teachers with whom we conducted this interview insist that texting practices are not and should not be welcomed in formal writing. The remaining percentage (11.11%), a minority representing one teacher, indicates that he tolerates the appearance of texting features in his students’ writing.

Q9: Do you sensitize them to their existence? Seriousness?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	09	100%
No	00	00
Total	09	100%

Table 3.41. Sensitization to texting features



From the responses of the nine participants, as clearly illustrated on the table above, all participants (100%) state that they do sensitize their students to the existence of texting features in their writing. Some of them claim that whenever there are such practices, they write them on the blackboard for all the students to notice and avoid using them, in addition to providing students with feedback about their use to show them that they are not accepted in academic writing. Others add explaining that such practices disrupt the formal way of writing. Moreover, features of chatting and electronic use should be rejected because they do not characterize what academic writing is. Most importantly, students should know that if these practices are exported to the classroom situation, they would reduce students' grades.

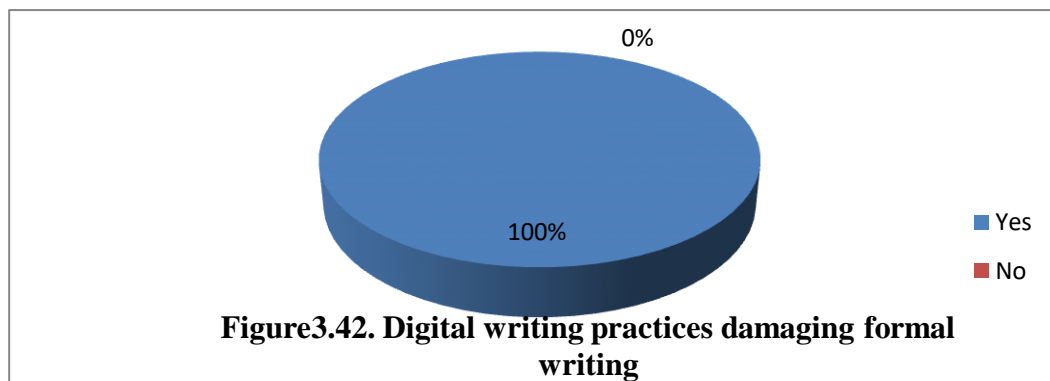
Q10. What would you suggest to be a possible solution(s) to this problem?

When invited to provide some solutions to the appearance of texting language features in students' writing, most of the interviewees suggest that students should read, and practise more formal writing outside of the classroom. One of the respondents reports that students should engage themselves in the process of writing sentences, i.e., they should know how to express their ideas in different sentence structures and styles. One teacher adds that students should take notes while reading. Some respondents put the responsibility on the teachers' shoulders; that is, they believe that it is the teachers' job to protect academic writing. To this end, they offer multiple avenues which encompass teaching students the right way to write formal and respectful writing. Additionally, teachers should eradicate this bad habit by telling, ordering, or advising their student to stop texting practices in class. It is worth mentioning that one teacher reports that punishment constitutes the most effective way to get rid of this undesirable phenomenon. That is, teachers should lower students' grades whenever they detect such practices in their writing. Most importantly, another teacher emphasizes the importance of consciousness- raising and building some awareness in students.

Q11: Do you think digital writing habits are damaging formal writing practices?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	09	100%
No	00	00
Total	09	100%

Table 3.42. Digital writing practices damaging formal writing



As table 3.42 and the figure above show, all the interviewees, with a proportion of (100%), agree that digital writing habits are damaging the nature and the structure of formal writing practices. It is worth mentioning that two interviewees out of nine state that texting practices in themselves are not bad, but it is the misuse of digital writing that damages the structure and the nature of academic writing.

3.6. Discussion and Interpretation of the Main Findings

The analyses of the students' questionnaire and the teachers' interview reveal many facts about students' digital writing practices and the state of their academic writing. Upon analysis of the questionnaire, it is noticed that third year EFL students tend to use a wide range of digital writing practices when texting. The most commonly used practices include: letter homophones, emoticons and smileys, repetition of a letter in a word. The use of symbols (&, +, ♥, <3), abbreviations, number homophones, acronyms, and non-standard punctuation comes next. The analysis of the teachers' interview, on the other hand, demonstrates that students' academic writing really shows some resemblance to texting language (IText), in the sense that the interviewees have detected some non-conventional shortening practices such as: abbreviations, acronyms, letter and number homophones, and punctuation and capitalization mistakes, the thing that damages academic writing. They have further added that if we want to

reduce students' errors to three or four major elements, these would be: punctuation, fragments, and run-on sentences. It is worth mentioning that the teachers do not believe that it is exclusively a matter of texting habits; they claim that it is traceable to other factors as well, mainly ignorance of rules, lack of practice/ training, and lack of reading.

3.7. Pedagogical Recommendations

Relying on the analyses of the obtained results, some recommendations and suggestions for teachers and students are provided in this part.

3.7.1. Recommendations for Students

- Students should be aware of their way of writing; that is, they should respect the context of language use. To put it differently, students have to separate their use of colloquial language with friends on social platforms and formal language used in educational contexts, classrooms.
- Students should enhance their practice of academic writing outside the classroom by applying the rules and norms of conventional writing. They should avoid the use of abbreviations and shortening forms and all the digital practices that disrupt the reality of language.
- Students should be aware of using the language academically, differentiating between the formal and informal language and when to use each.
- Students should read a lot outside the classroom in order for them to develop their writing skills.
- Students should always be aware of the potential harm texting habits might have on their writing for classroom purposes.

- Students need to constantly enlarge their knowledge and deepen their understanding of the rules of English. Areas that are worth developing include grammar (tenses, articles, prepositions), punctuation, capitalization, cohesion, coherence, to name but a few.
- When students read in English outside the classroom, they should take notes which might benefit their writing attempts.
- Students should engage themselves in a process in which they adjust their writing to different styles: both formal and informal.
- Students should practise “sentence structure”, expressing their ideas in simple as well as complex sentences.

3.7.2. Recommendations for Teachers

- Teachers, on the other hand, should react to the appearance of these practices in their students’ writing, by sensitizing them to their existence and the negative impact on their writing.
- Teachers also should build writing habits in their students from a very early stage.
- Teachers should push students to read and take notes. Note taking, while reading, is a very effective strategy for better performance.
- Teachers should raise some awareness in their students of errors and form.

3.8. Limitations of the Study

Because we were not allowed to retrieve papers of students’ tests and examinations (paragraphs and essays), we could not conduct a direct real observation and examination of the presence of texting features in students’ formal writing. We opted for other ways to do this. We examined the presence of texting features in students’ writing in the eyes of their teachers.

Conclusion

Upon analysis, the results of the present study confirm that the features of texting language are truly exported to students' formal writing. That is why teachers should be aware of this phenomenon and should, also, raise students' consciousness of texting language and its potential damage to their academic writing.

General Conclusion

We are drawing to the close of this dissertation which tackles some important aspects both of academic writing and digital writing (IText). This study aims at investigating the common digital writing practices that are used by third year students of English at Mila University Centre when composing ITexts. Besides, it seeks to know whether those practices have breached the boundaries of text-based digital environments and intruded into EFL academic writing. The prominence of the investigation is to build some awareness in EFL students concerning the extent to which IText/texting features are present in their classroom writing, and to raise some educational concerns about the future of academic writing in a world that is predominated by texting language. In order for us to answer our research questions, a questionnaire was administered to third year students of English, and an interview was conducted with EFL teachers at the Department of Foreign Languages, University Centre of Mila.

The obtained results offer an answer to the raised questions. They reveal that third year students use a number of different practices when texting. Moreover, these texting features, indeed, have become part of their academic writing. This implies that EFL academic writing is affected by IText.

The findings of the present research raise educational concerns about the fate of academic writing in the long term. The more EFL students keep engaging themselves in creating, receiving, and dealing with ITexts the way they always do, the faster they keep losing the linguistic heritage (norms and conventions) of Standard English, and replacing it with features typical of IText. This might well bring quality English under a process of decline

and deterioration; therefore, teachers and students are called upon to maintain academic writing and keep it from fading away.

It is worth mentioning that we should not restrict ourselves to the present findings. This study, for sure, has its limitations but it can be a basis for further research on the relation between texting language features and students' formal writing. Indeed, we believe that much work remains to be done in this area.

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Appendix A

The Students' Questionnaire

Dear student,

It would be much appreciated help if you could answer the following questions which will contribute greatly to this research about electronic writing and the state of academic writing of EFL students.

This questionnaire aims at investigating the common digital writing practices third year EFL students use when sending messages. Please, note that the questionnaire is completely voluntary and anonymous. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential, and they will be used only for research purposes.

Please put a tick (✓) in the appropriate box that corresponds to your answer. Note that in some questions more than one answer is possible. Feel free to add your own comments where necessary.

Section One: Background Information

1- How long have you been learning English?

.....
.....

2- Do you like English?

Yes No

Explain:

.....
.....

3- Are you motivated to write in English?

Yes No

Explain:

.....
.....

Section Two: Writing Experience

1- As a student, do you think that writing is an easy task?

No

2- How would you describe your writing?

Average Good

3- How often do you write out of the classroom?

Often Sometimes Rarely Never

4- What kind(s) of writing do you prefer?

Formal writing (e.g. formal paragraph/essays, business letters, sharing pieces of writing of different types...)

Informal writing (e.g. diaries, messages, chatting with friends)

5- Which of these do you have difficulties with the most when writing formally?

Spelling Grammar Punctuation Sentence Structure
 Organizing Ideas

Outlining writing Producing writing Revising writing
Others

6- Which aspects of your writing are corrected the most in class?

Spelling Grammar Punctuation Sentence Structure
 Ideas Unity Coherence Cohesion Organization
Others:

7- Which of the following stages prove difficult to you?

Gathering ideas Drafting Self-evaluation All

Section Three: Text-Based Digital Communication

1- Do you have a smart phone?

Yes No

2- How often do you use text-based communication?

Often Sometimes Rarely Never

3- Do you use English-text-based communication?

Yes No

4- With whom do you use it?

Friends Teachers Classmates

Others(please specify):

.....
.....

5- How often do you use SMS?

Often Sometimes Rarely Never

6- Do you use English SMS?

Yes No

7- Do you have an email account?

Yes No

8- How often do you use it?

Often Sometimes Rarely Never

9- Do you send and receive English emails?

Yes No

10- Do you have a Facebook account?

Yes No

11- How often do you use it?

Often Sometimes Rarely Never

12- Do you use English while facebooking?

Yes No

13- Do you use other social networking tools? If yes, please mention them.

Yes No

Others:

.....
.....

14- What sort of language do you use when using Internet or SMS?

Formal English Colloquial English Both

15- Do you respect the rules and conventions of formal writing while texting in English?

Yes No

If no, which of the following aspects do you violate?

Spelling Punctuation Capitalization Grammar Others

.....
.....

16- The following table illustrates some of the practices used by students while texting; tick and add your own.

Digital writing				
Shortening forms				
	examples	Yes	No	Your own
Abbreviations	“Sept” for September			
Contractions	“txt” for text			
Non- standard spelling	“skool” for school “iz” for is			
Letter homophones	“U” for you “Ur” for your			
Number homophones	“2” for to /too “L8” for late			
Letter and number combination	“b4” for before			
Clipping	“G clipping” “goin” for going			
	“Other clippings” c- Omission of final silent letter: “hav” for have d- Omission of final consonant letter: “wil” for will.			
Acronyms	“BTW” for by the way “GTG”for got to go			
Symbols	“@” instead of at			
	“&” instead of and			
	“+” for and/ in addition			
	“♥/ < 3” for the verb love			
Grammatical forms				
The singular pronoun “I”	“i” instead of “I”			
Omission of the subject	“hope 2c u soon” instead of I hope to see you soon			

Paralinguistic forms: for conveying feelings, emotions, mood, attitudes, gestures, and facial expressions				
Emoticons/ smileys	“☺”/ “:)” for happiness “.:” for surprise			
Repetition of a letter in a word	“pleaaaaaaaase” for begging			
Non-standard punctuation	“How did u know??!!!” “Cool!!!!!!!!!!”			
Non-standard capitalization	‘I’AM ANGRY”			
Others				

17- Why do you use shortening forms, if at all?

- To gain time
 To facilitate texting
 It is fashionable
 Others

.....

.....

18- What does texting impact negatively in your academic writing?

- Capitalization
 Punctuation
 Spelling
 Plurals
 Style (Writing the way we speak)
 Others:

.....

.....

19- Do you think that the errors you make in your formal writing can be related to the overuse of texting habits?

- Yes
 No

20- Do you think text-based communication damages your writing?

- Yes
 No

Thank you for your collaboration ☺

Appendix B

The Teachers' Interview

Dear teacher,

You are kindly requested to spare some time from your busy schedule and respond to this interview. Text-based language communication has been widespread especially among the youth of whom EFL students constitute a considerable portion. The main objective behind this interview is to see whether there is any resemblance between the academic writing of students and their digital writing practices.

Section One: Background Information

Q1. How long have you been teaching at university?

Q2. How long have you been reading and correcting your students' writing in terms of paragraphs and essays?

Section Two: IText and the State of EFL Academic Writing

Q3. When you correct your students' formal work, do you give importance to :

- a. Content b. Mechanics of Writing c. Both of Them

Q4. a. Do you use text-based digital communication tools (e.g., Facebook Messenger, e-mail) to communicate with your students?

b. If yes, do you use English while texting?

c. If yes, do you respect the rules and conventions of formal writing?

Q5. Which aspect(s) of your students' writing do you usually find violated in class? (e.g., grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization).

Q6. Does your students' writing for classroom purposes resemble text-based digital communication?

- In your students' writing, do you find :
 - a. Uncommon abbreviations like 'Lingui.' and 'Psychopeda.'?
 - b. Uncommon acronyms like 'OTOH' to stand for 'on the other hand'?
 - c. Letter and/or number homophones like 'R' for 'are', '2' for 'to', 'b4' for 'before'?
 - d. 'i' instead of 'I'?
 - e. Symbols : @, &, +,...etc?
 - f. Misuse/no use of punctuation marks?
 - g. Lack of capitalization?
 - h. Spelling mistakes/misspelling?
 - i. Grammatical problems in terms of fragments and run-on sentences?
 - j. Contractions: 'can't' instead of 'cannot', 'don't' instead of 'do not', 'it's' instead of 'it is', 'it'll' instead of 'it will'...etc?
 - k. Elimination of vowel letters in words, e.g., txt for text?
 - l. Clipping:
 - a. 'g Clipping'? e.g., 'becomin' and 'writin'.The 'g' in these words is dropped.
 - b. Other clippings? Like 'wil' and 'shal' where 'l' is omitted, 'hav' where the silent letter 'e' is omitted.
 - M. Emoticons and/or smileys like☺?

-Others.

Q7. How would you explain the errors that appear in students' formal writing? i.e., what is/are the reason(s) behind their occurrence? e. g., ignorance and/or lack of training, stress and lack of concentration in exam situations.

Q8. Do you show tolerance to the appearance of "texting" features in your students' writing?

Q9. Do you sensitize them to their existence? Seriousness?

Q10. What would you suggest to be a possible solution(s) to this problem?

Q11. Do you think that digital writing habits are damaging formal writing practices?

Thank you so much for your cooperation and for the time you devoted to answer this interview.

المخلص :

يهدف هذا البحث الى اكتشاف ممارسات اللغة الرقمية الأكثر انتشارا بين الطلبة أثناء عملية التواصل الكتابي. و الأكثر أهمية من ذلك يهدف لمعرفة إذا ما كان هناك تشابه بين هاته اللغة الرقمية و اللغة الأكاديمية. ولذلك طرحت بعض الأسئلة من أهل الاختصاص- آباء، أساتذة و إداريين- عن مستقبل اللغة الأكاديمية مقارنة بميزات اللغة التواصلية لمعرفة كيف أن هاته الممارسات مصدر (أي منقولة) إلى كتابة الطالب. الأسئلة البحثية المطروحة في هذا العمل هي: ماهي ممارسات اللغة الرقمية الأكثر انتشارا/ شيوعا المستخدمة من طرف طلبة السنة الثالثة تخصص لغة إنجليزية أثناء عملية التواصل الكتابي؟ هل هاته الممارسات الرقمية اللغوية تتداخل مع الكتابة الأكاديمية للطلاب؟ للإجابة على هاته الأسئلة، قمنا باعتماد ما يعرف بالبحث الوصفي لإتمام هاته الدراسة. المعلومات تم جمعها من خلال أداتي بحث: إستبيان موجه لثمانين طالبا للغة الإنجليزية سنة ثالثة، و مقابلة شفوية مع تسعة أساتذة من قسم اللغات الأجنبية، شعبة اللغة الإنجليزية بالمركز الجامعي ميلة. نتائج البحث أظهرت أن طلبة السنة الثالثة تخصص لغة إنجليزية بالفعل يستخدمون اللغة الرقمية أثناء تواصلهم الكتابي بكثرة، و هو الأمر الذي انعكس على كتابتهم الأكاديمية. في نهاية البحث، طرحنا عددا من الاقتراحات و الحلول لكل من الطلبة و الأساتذة حول كيفية التعامل مع هاته الظاهرة، إضافة إلى كيفية تحسين الكتابة الأكاديمية للطلبة و المحافظة على أهم ملامحها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكتابة الرقمية، النص المعلوماتي التكنولوجي، ممارسات الكتابة الرقمية، الكتابة الأكاديمية، اللغة الرقمية.

Résumé :

Le but de cette recherche est de découvrir les pratiques langagières numérique les plus courantes chez les étudiants au cours du processus de la communication écrite. Et encore le plus important, il s'agit de vérifier s'il existe une ressemblance entre cette langue numérique et la langue académique. Par conséquent, les spécialistes (parents, professeurs, administrateurs) s'interrogent sur l'avenir de la langue académique par apport aux avantages de la langue de communication pour savoir comment ces pratiques sont exportées à l'écriture de l'étudiant. Dans ce travail, les questions de recherche sont : quelles sont les pratiques linguistiques numériques les plus répandues parmi les étudiants de troisième année, spécialisés en Anglais? Ces pratiques interfèrent-elles avec la rédaction académique de l'étudiant ? Pour répondre à ces questions, nous avons adopté la recherche descriptive afin de compléter cette étude. Les informations recueillent à travers une recherche et un questionnaire destiné aux quatre-vingts étudiants d'Anglais de troisième année, puis un entretien oral avec neuf enseignants du Département de Langues Etrangères d'Anglais Centre Universitaire, Mila. Les résultats de la recherche montrent que les étudiants de troisième année se spécialisent en anglais et utilisent la langue numérique lors de leur communication écrite, ce qui se reflète dans leurs écrits académiques. A la fin de la recherche, nous avons présenté un certain nombre de propositions et de solutions à tous les enseignants sur la manière de traiter ce phénomène, en plus d'améliorer la rédaction académique des étudiants et de préserver les fonctions les plus importantes.

Les Mots Clés : L'écriture numérique, Texte Informatif et communicatif, pratiques de la langue numérique, langue académique, langue numérique.