Difficulties of EFL learners in organizing a good academic paragraph in Almergib

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الملخص:

الكتابة مهارة إنتاجية تعتمد على قدرة الطلاب على إتقان أسلوبها. لكتابة فقرة أكاديمية جيدة، يجب على الطلاب تعلم بعض الاستراتيجيات في تنظيم عناصرها الرئيسية. لذا، يتناول هذا البحث مشاكل طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في تنظيم الفقرة الأكاديمية بكلية الآداب والعلوم في جامعة مسلاتة. يهدف البحث إلى معرفة العقبات التي يواجهها الطلاب في اتباع أسلوب معين في كتابة الفقرة او النص، وذلك من خلال دراسة 30 طالبًا من قسم اللغة الإنجليزية. ولأن الكتابة من أهم مهارة في تعلم اللغة، يواجه بعض الطلاب صعوبات في تنظيم أفكارهم وترتيبها منطقيًا. وخلال فترة التعلم، لم يتمكن الطلاب من تحديد أخطائهم، مما دفعهم إلى الكتابة بشكل عشوائي. لا يقتصر الأمر على عملية الكتابة فحسب، بل يواجهون أيضًا بعض المشكلات المتعلقة بعدم استخدام العناصر الرئيسية لتنظيم الفقرة. لذلك، استخدم المنهج الكمي في هذه الدراسة استبيانًا لجمع البيانات لدراسة صعوبات الطلاب في تنظيم الأفكار وتأثيراتها على قدرتهم على كتابة نص او فقرة أكاديمية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، اقترحت هذه الدراسة استراتيجيات وتقنيات معينة لمساعدتهم على التغلب على صعوبات تعلم كتابة الفقرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تقنيات ما قبل الكتابة، العناصر الرئيسية للفقرة، تنظيم الفقرة.

Abstract:

Writing is the productive skill relies on students' ability in mastering its technique. To write a good academic paragraph, students should learn some strategies in organizing the main elements of the paragraph. Thus, this research paper conducts to investigate EFL student's problems in organizing the academic paragraph at the faculty of Art and Science Misallata College. The research aims to find out the obstacles that students face in following a certain technique in writing a paragraph on 30 students of the English department. As writing is the most important skill in learning language, some students face difficulties in organizing their thoughts and how to put their ideas in logical order. Throughout their learning, students couldn't identify their mistakes that led them to write randomly. Not only on the process of writing, but also, they have certain issues in lacking of using the main elements of paragraph organizations. Hence, quantitative method in the current study used a questionnaire as data collections to investigate students' difficulties in organizing the ideas and their influences on the student's ability to write an academic paragraph. In addition, this study also proposed certain strategies and techniques to help them overcome difficulties when learning paragraph writing.

Key words: prewriting techniques, main elements of the paragraph, paragraph organization

Introduction 1_1

A good academic writing depends on main components in organizing the paragraph, and these components are the main keys of learning. Writing a successful paragraph, require essential techniques that lead learners to learn perfectly and gains useful information that helps them in the future to evaluate and synthesis the words, ideas, and opinion of others to develop their own academic work. Writing effectively depends on students' ability in learning and practicing the material. Developing writing skills depends on lots of practice and correcting mistakes. However, some students find it complicated to study academic passages. And that's due to the main factors through their learning process. Language problems such as interference from the mother tongue before writing are the main factors that lead to the lack of unity and clarity in paragraphs. Also, the lack of editing caused them to make some mistakes in grammar and spelling. Moreover, lack of vocabulary leads students to interfere their mother tongue and find a difficulty to convey their ideas and thoughts into English language, so due to these factors, students couldn't write in the coherent way. In fact, students need some practice in class to learn effectively, for example, through group work they will learn to narrow down their ideas rather than generate them. Training in editing their draft helps them to concentrate on parallel construction and repetition of key nouns that's led students to write logically and gives their paragraphs smoothness.

1_2 Research question:

 1_what are the difficulties that students face in writing academic paragraph?

2 _how students will improve their abilities to write effectively?

3_ Is lack of practice being the main factor? And how to improve it?

1_3 Statement of the problem:

Writing in target language is not simple for foreign language learners, because learning academic writing isn't like any kind of writing. Its advanced level will be helpful for students' future development after graduation. Hence, students face the problem in organizing the academic paragraph, and that's related to the ignorance of unity and coherence in their writing. They couldn't arrange the ideas logically that will be difficult to understand and makes an ambiguity for readers to grasp the main idea of the content. Furthermore, no attention was paid to grammatical functions to achieve parallel structure when writing the outline. And the use of vague vocabulary without realizing the need to focus, leading to a lack of clarity in the paragraph.

1_4 the research hypotheses:

1_writing is considered a most complicated material for EFL students at Almergeb university Misalata while learning second language

2_most of students couldn't write correctly due to lack of practice inside classroom

3_ ignorance of students to organize their ideas which make their paragraph unclear and lack of unity and coherence

4_ lack of applying parallel construction while writing an outline.

1_5 significance of study:

This study proposes a technique and strategies to improve students' level in learning the academic paragraph. As well as for teachers to apply a certain approach and ways to maintain students' activities in the classroom. Through repeated practice, students will overcome problems in organization and learning and improve their thinking in a perfectly organized manner. By applying an outline before writing a paragraph, help students to concentrate on parallel construction and editing their ideas in logical words to achieve coherence. Also, choose clear vocabulary to avoid unclear words, which helps in developing one main idea into several supporting sentences. These elements provide clarity and fluidity in its operation, convincing and delighting the reader. Thus, teachers should provide an interesting method to make students interactive and communicative by utilizing peer editing to share their ideas and opinions by working in a group to get more ideas and express their thoughts with each other that's making them to be motivated to learn material precisely.

1_6 limitation of study:

This study focused on the importance of well-organized academic paragraphs rather than focusing on common mistakes in writing. Therefore, the researcher intended to conduct this study on EFL learners at Maslata Al Mergehb University and collected data using a questionnaire on 30 participates of second to third year students. Therefore, the results may vary depending on the level of the students.

2_Literature review:

2_1 Importance of maintaining prewriting technique:

Learners' difficulties in organizing ideas logically are related to the lack of maintaining prewriting procedures not only in Almergeb University, Masalta but also in other parts of the world. Sagvan, et al. (2023) conducted research in Iraqi Kurdistan to explore the importance of pre-writing strategies in students' writing. The researchers used a questionnaire for data collection and results show that most of the learners

don't use prewriting techniques due to insufficient time and ignorance of the importance of these techniques. In reality, many students face these obstacles, especially neglecting the importance of editing their essays. The strategies of prewriting help learners to concentrate on one main idea and allow them to check their mistakes. Thus, there are three steps for planning a good paragraph.

2_1_1 prewriting

Choosing and narrowing the topic is considered as a first stage of the pre-writing process, in this stage, learners learn to narrow their topic to be more specific. After that apply a brainstorming technique. According to Folse, et al. (2015), while applying brainstorming technique, don't worry about the ideas if are related or not. You just write any ideas that comes to your mind. (p. 14). It is creative thinking to get subconscious ideas and this technique encourages to improve creativity and to vary their ideas before writing. Listing and free writing are brainstorming techniques, which help students to apply the process of writing logically. By writing any words by writing any words or phrases quickly the main goal of this technique, is to get and produce the main idea as well as to concentrate on the topic without worrying about grammatical structure and spelling. Through this activity, students could write freely just to generate ideas without focusing on organization. (Oshima 1999).

2_1_2 outline:

 The next step in the writing process which is considered a challenge for many learners is outlining. It is a plan before writing, and learners through this strategy learn to divide their ideas logically and cross the irrelevant ideas. Grenville states, outline is a plane which arranged ideas in any piece of writing in logical order, and these ideas will be arranged in piece of writing. (P.69,2001). The outline helps to write quickly and improves a grammatical structure that leads students to focus on parallel forms of the content. Therefore, equal parts of the outline should be written in parallel form that means all ideas should have the same grammatical structure which all word sentences should be nouns, or adjectives, or prepositional phrase.   (Hogue &Oshima, 1999, P.36). Kamila in Surabaya (2018) conducted research about the effect of using outline technique to improve students' ability in writing a descriptive paragraph. The author stated that students' obstacles in using outlines for content and organization are due to how to transfer their ideas into writing. The researcher used a pretest and posttest to score the changes of learners after applying the outline technique, and the results showed the progress of students in writing a descriptive paragraph was effective.

2_1_3 writing and revising draft:

After writing an outline, writing and revising a draft is the final step in the prewriting process. Oshima and Hogue (1999), state, that in these steps students write a paragraph by following the plan of the

outline, then revise the first draft for content and organization of ideas and deleting irrelevant ones. Through writing the first draft, students should focus on gaining more information about the topic and don't worry about punctuation or grammar. It is a frequent technique to remove unrelated ideas and add additional information to be more effective. Therefore, revising and checking the content leads learners to focus on organization, which involves unity and coherence along with transition signals if they are used correctly. Finally, this technique encourages students to concentrate on a formal unit of the content and also, helps to check their sentence structure, grammar, and spelling mistakes.

The main elements of paragraph organization2_2

In academic writing, paragraph structure must be well organized and comprehended. The organization is crucial to convey the ideas clearly and logically to interest the readers. The paragraph involves three main elements: a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a conclusion sentences. As Oshima and Hogue (1999) said, in writing the organization of paragraphs is essential which one main idea developed in a group of related sentences. (P. 16). That main idea exists in a topic sentence that is called a controlled idea that one single idea develops consequently in supporting sentences that discuss and explain it, so by providing reasons and examples, the paragraph will be effective. Supporting sentences are used to prove a point with specific details, but learners are unable to express their ideas in more convincing language. To demonstrate these ideas, there are various ways to improve supporting sentences, such as examples, explanations, quotations, and statistics. (Zuhriyah,2021. P.16). Thus, these specific details, that were debated in supporting sentences logically should be adequate, unified, and clarified. The other element of a good paragraph is the conclusion sentence, its reinforcement of the topic sentence that sums up the main idea. It's important and helpful that it gives essential points about the topic, and it could be a comment or paraphrasing of the topic sentence. As (Zuhriyah,2021) argues that the main idea of the paragraph is summarized in conclusion sentence. It reminds the reader about the main idea of the paragraph, and should not introduce a new idea or point, however, it should introduce a summary of the paragraph content.

The other main elements of a good academic paragraph that are considered a main goal in academic writing are:

1_2_2Unity

Unity in general, is considered the main characteristic of paragraph organization. To write a paragraph effectively requires developing a central idea in logical order. Therefore, every paragraph should have unity, which means one single idea should be developed in supporting sentences. (Folse & Solomon, 2015) Claim, unity is achieved in the paragraph when all supporting sentences are related to the

controlling idea, and skilled writers maintain to ensure their supporting details are related to the main idea of the paragraph. (P.53). Furthermore, focusing on one main idea is the purpose of writers to achieve unity, and this technique helps to inform an interest to the readers and persuade them.

2_2_2 coherence

 In any piece of writing, coherence is essential to make a paragraph flow smoothly and be understood by readers. Moreover, coherence in academic writing is crucial to connect ideas clearly and in logical order. The sentences of paragraphs hang together to convey a writer's idea and provide actual meaning for readers. Murray & Hughes (2008) stated a skilled writer connects their ideas in such a way that they function like links in a chain, each link joining the previous one to the subsequent one. The argument structure breaks down and the connection becomes ambiguous if any links are absent. P.45. Good writers ensures that their ideas are hold together, however unclear sentences make their paragraph structure un successful. Nevertheless, learners have difficulty in learning to write, due to a lack of applying features of coherence. Firstly, some students don't write transition signals that connect the ideas smoothly from one sentence to another, which results a confusion and abruptness of learners and misunderstanding by readers. Similarly, Oshima and Hogue (1999, P.43) stated that transition signals provide a coherence in any piece of writing that makes a paragraph easier to read and understood. Secondly, unawareness the importance of concentrating on using pronouns for the repetition of key nouns. Therefore, some students repeat the key noun frequently in their text without substituting it with the proper pronoun which causes unclear writing. In general, there are no rules regarding the substitution of pronouns or the way to repeat a key noun. When students use pronouns instead of repeating the key noun, they substitute the gender of a pronoun throughout the paragraph, which leads pronoun not referring clearly to the key noun in the sentences.

Besides that, the logical order is regarded as an important method for using coherence in the writing process. It is utilized to arrange sentences and thoughts so that enhances readers' comprehension and facilitates sequential content. Students need to pay attention to logical order techniques to overcome their writing problems and enhance their ability in paragraph organization. There are some common methods of logical order which helps in paragraph organizations are logical division, chronological order, and comparative contrast. Each type has its phrases and words to make a relationship among sentences to achieve coherence. Consequently, these methods create a challenge for students; they couldn't differentiate how and when should be used these methods and how to write a sequence of events in chronological order. After reviewing some research about paragraph organization, it is clear that the lack of maintenance techniques for paragraph organization led to writing difficulties in arranging ideas. Ratu and Nur, 2017 investigating students' challenges in sustaining their coherence in

writing, and this study carried out in Tarbiyah, Makassar in 2016/2017 at English language department. The researchers used descriptive qualitative data and an interview. They stated the students' difficulties in determining their ideas on how to use a suitable transition signal and how to write a good supporting detail.

2_2_3 Clarity

Clarity in writing is fundamental making an idea communicate effectively in any piece of writing, also well-developed paragraphs should have a precise use of words and clear descriptive language. Folse, Solomon, and Clabeaux, point out that clarity helps in reading comprehension, a good writers clarify their points of ideas to be easier and more understandable (2015, P.46). Clarity necessitates stylistic writing and precision of the content along with appropriate words to enhance vocabulary and that provides a good impression for readers. Furthermore, it requires a clear use of pronoun references without ambiguity and confusion. However, misuse of clarity is due to misunderstanding and meaningless expressions, so EFL needs to realize the importance of clarity in their writing to avoid redundancy of their ideas and unclear words throughout their paragraphs.

2_3 Teaching strategies for students' improvement

To write successfully, students need to develop their abilities in learning writing skills effectively by engaging them in various teaching techniques. However, teachers should emphasize students' complications to overcome their problems and encourage them to improve and express themselves. Learners need to engage in many exercises to enhance their capability and creativity in writing by using their imaginations to express their thoughts, emotions, and opinions. Naturally, teachers have a boundless role to increase students' abilities and prevent their mistakes. Thus, engaging in several exercises produces communicative responses and enjoyable discussions. Classroom discussion reduces the complexity of training and develops proficiency, likewise responding to students' writing is measured as an essential technique in the teaching process, which motivates EFL learners to concentrate on their weak points. Correspondingly, students need encouragement and enough time to improve language structure along with clarity. Therefore, writing frequently and editing mistakes prevent students from organizing their ideas correctly and gaining knowledge definitely. Besides that, editing drafts and revising in the classroom, is a useful procedure to advance their skills quickly by sharing their piece of writing. Participation inside the classroom facilitates students to acquire more knowledge about the material and gain as much as possible appropriate vocabularies. Furthermore, peer editing is an enjoyable technique that supports learners to learn from each other and focus on their errors. Equally, Rames (1983) argue that Classroom lesson writing activities can engage students in a variety of languages, and their use extends beyond the purposeful sequences of

teacher instruction, student writing, and teacher checking. P.14. Peer editing is an interactive process through reading and commenting on colleagues' writing help to improve organizations of the ideas, coherence, and maintaining a grammatical structure.

3_ Method

3_1 Data collection instruments

Qualitative data is used in this research to analyze student's challenges. The researcher attempted to use a questionnaire for an in-depth understanding of students' difficulties in organizing a good academic paragraph at the English department in Almergeb University, Faculty of Art and Science-Missalata. The questionnaires were distributed to 30 students of the English department of second and third year.

3_2 population of the study:

Purpose of this investigation is students of the English department at College Art of Sceience-Missalata/Almergeb University. The participants about 30 students of second and third year. The samples were chosen randomly in May, 2024 and the students were asked to join the study freely.

3_3 Research method

The instrument of this study is a questionnaire used as qualitative descriptive data. The reason for obtaining this tool for data collection is that a questionnaire is considered a practical way of measuring data. Therefore, the researcher adopted the questionnaire as an analytical study to determine the differences between students' ideas. The questions were divided into two parts: the first part was about the difficulties that students face in organizing paragraph questions, and the second one was about the techniques for student improvement to learn academic paragraphs effectively.

4_1 Data analysis and discussions of findings

This section is presented the findings of the research question:

1_what are the difficulties that students face in writing a good academic paragraph?

2_ how students will improve their abilities to write effectively?

3_is lack of practice being the main factor? And how to improve it?

This research was conducted in Almergeb University Faculty of Art and Science Miasslata. The questionnaire distributed on English department students and the total of participants were 30 students.

4_2 chart 1

what are the difficulties that students face in organizing paragraph?
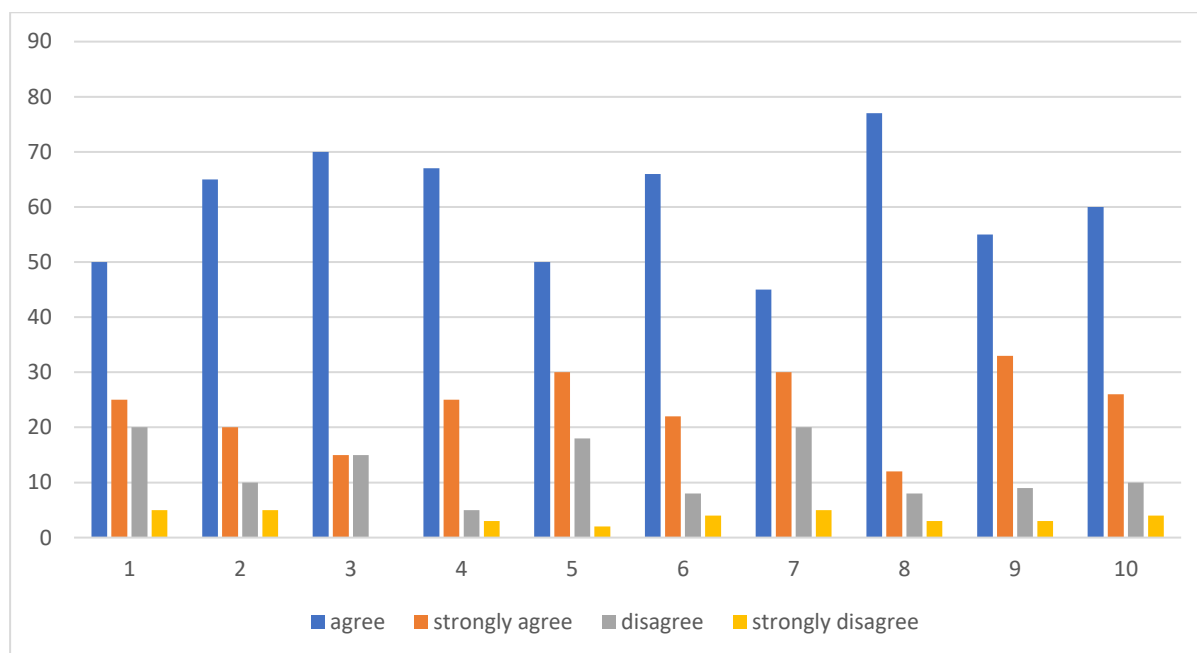
4_2_1I couldn't identify between the topic sentence and controlling idea

Based on the figure above, most of the students agree that they couldn't identify between the topic and the controlling idea about 50%, whereas 25 % strongly agree and 20% disagree and the remaining 5% strongly disagree. This result revealed students' difficulty in identifying the topic sentence in the text.

 4_2_2 I can generate ideas more than narrowing the topic

As the figure shows, 65% of students can generate their ideas while they write and can't narrow the topic. Also, 20% responses of students that they strongly agree, however, the percentage where nearly 10% of students disagree about the basic problem of generating their ideas, and the remaining 5% that they are strongly disagree. It is obvious that students' main problem in paragraph organization is writing in general which results lack of unity in their paragraphs.

4_2_3 Organizing and checking the ideas in my draft is the main problem

According to the figure above, the majority of learners agree about 70% that the lack of editing their draft is due to paragraph organization problems. Moreover, 15% of EFL learners of the college Art of

Science Misallata strongly agree that the absence of editing is the main factor. However, the percentage of students who disagree about editing the draft is about 15%, and 0% of students strongly disagree about the lack of checking the draft. This shows that students' disability in writing a paragraph is related to the absence of the main technique of prewriting strategies is editing drafts.

4_2_4 planning an outline is difficult technique

Most EFL students agree about 67% that planning an outline is considered a difficult technique. Furthermore, 25% strongly agree and 5% of learners disagree about the difficulty of outlining. Whereas, 3% of answers strongly disagree. According to the answers, EFL students face difficulty in outlining writing a paragraph and due to a lack of opportunities to do exercises inside the classroom.

4_2_5 I rarely revise my mistakes

According to the figure, the answers were nearly the same, in which 50 % of students agree about the lack of editing mistakes and 30% disagree. As well as, 18% of answers were strongly agree; while 2% of answers strongly disagree. That reveals how students ignore the most important technique of the writing process is revising and editing the draft.

4_2_6 I have limited vocabulary and write unclear words

66% of answers agree that lack of vocabulary is due to unclear writing, and that causes ambiguity. In addition, 22% of answers strongly agree that the main reason for failing to write a paragraph related to the limit of using vocabulary which prevents students from writing freely even if they have ideas. However,8 % of answers disagree that limited vocabulary is the main factor, and 4% strongly disagree. Thus, reveals that students write unclear vocabulary in writing a paragraph, and that results in the ignorance of maintaining the main elements of paragraph components is clarity.

4_2_7 lack of practice is main factor

According to the figure, 45% of answers agree and 30% strongly agree that absences from several exercises inside the classroom cause a challenge for EFL students to overcome their mistakes in arranging academic paragraphs. Whereas, 20% of answers were disagree, and 5% were strongly disagree. The results show the main influence of writing problems for EFL learners is ignorance of doing tasks and encouragement of suggesting several techniques inside the classroom to maintain their ability to organize academic paragraph.

4_2_8 I have grammatical mistakes and punctuations problems

 EFL students of the college Art of Science Misallata, face a problem with accuracy in writing paragraphs which causes many problems in organizing outlines. 77% of answers agree about the punctuation and grammatical problems, as well as, 12% strongly agree that accuracy is the main reason. However, 8% of students disagree about grammatical problems and 3% strongly disagree. This exposes EFL students to several writing errors while editing their written work.

4_2_9 I can't organize my ideas logically

As second language learners, the basic issue in learning writing skills is how to arrange the ideas logically. So, the results showed that 55% agree that they have a problem arranging ideas, and 33% of answers strongly agree. However, 9% of answers disagree about disability of organizing the ideas logically, and 3% of answers were strongly disagree.

4_2_10 I couldn't make a brainstorming perfectly

Most EFL learners at college Art and Science Misallata, couldn't generate their ideas while applying a brainstorming technique. The results show that 60% of answers agree about not using brainstorming techniques before writing a paragraph, and 26% of answers strongly agree about difficulties in generating ideas. However, 10% of answers were disagree and 4% strongly disagree. Thus, this shows that generating ideas before writing a paragraph is considered a challenge for EFL learners

4_3 Chart II

How students will improve their ability in organizing a good academic paragraph?

4_1 planning ideas in the draft before writing helps to unified my topic
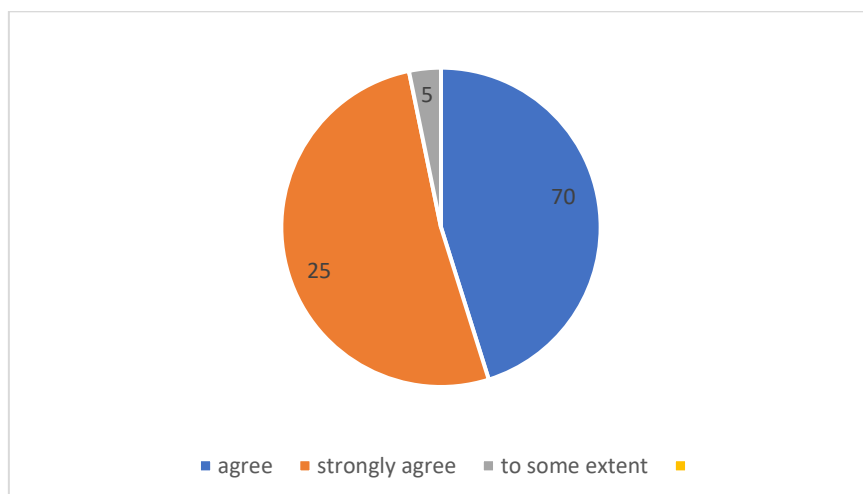
According to the figure, 80% agree that planning ideas is essential in the prewriting process to unify the ideas logically. Moreover, 70% of answers were strongly agreed and 5% to some extent about using a technique of organizations.

4_3_2 revising my draft helps me to put my ideas in logical order

Revising a draft is an essential strategy in learning writing skills, so students' ability to organize ideas logically and smoothly depends on revision technique. Thus, the results show that 55% of answers agree and 45% strongly agree, while 0% to some extent
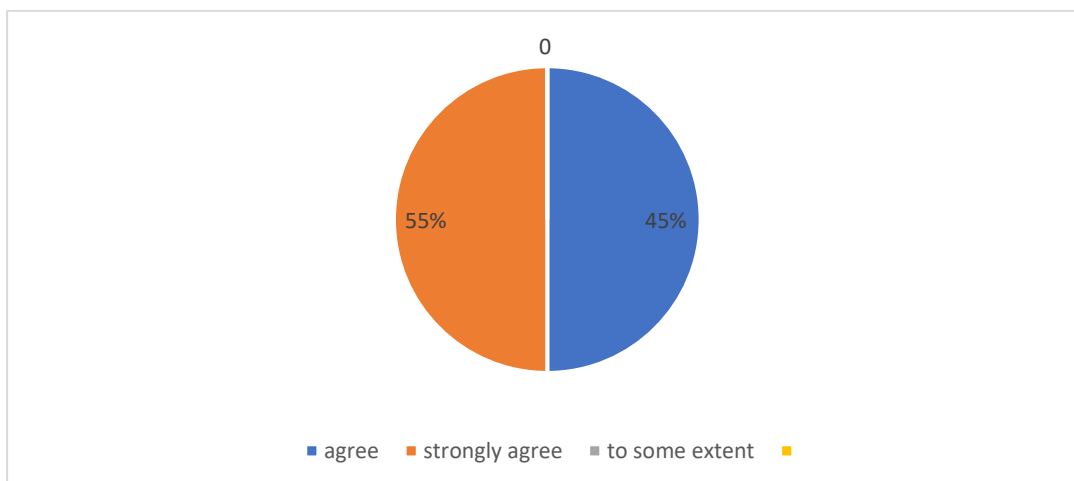
4_3_3 several activities inside classroom improves my grammatical structure
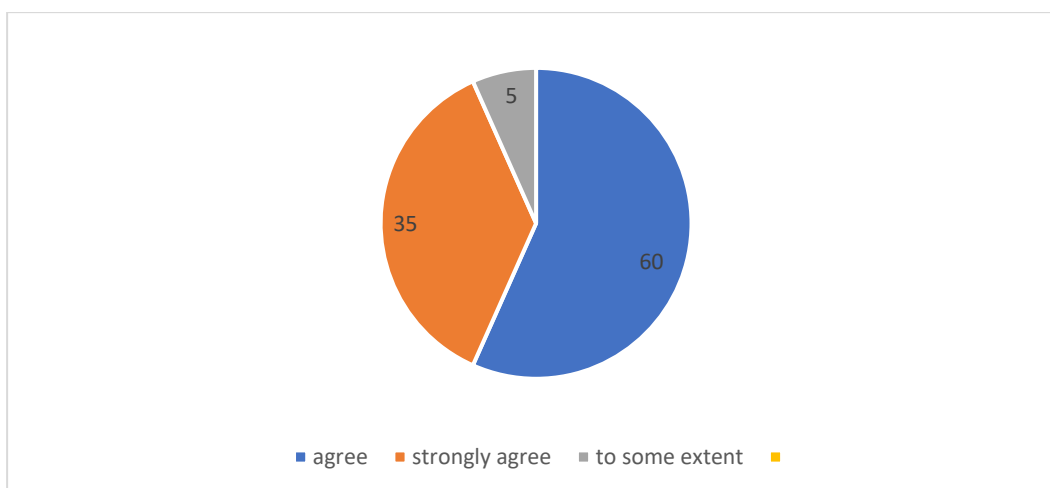

The best way to learn writing is to conduct several exercises inside the classroom. So, according to the figure above, 60% of answers agree and 35% strongly agree that engaging students in extensive exercises will improve their ability to write paragraphs, while 5% of answers were to some extent.

4_3_4 through editing, I could write in coherent way.
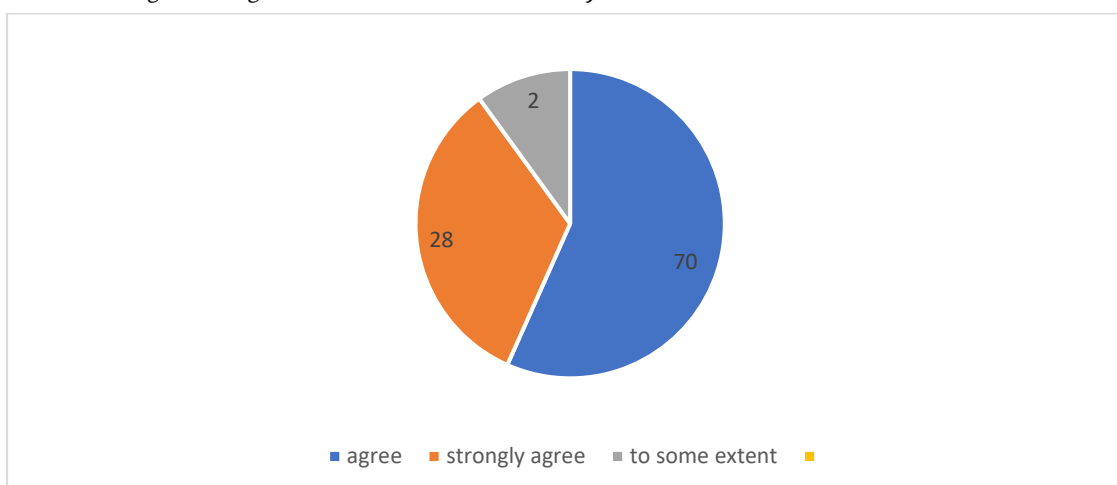
Based on the figure, the results showed that 70% agree and 28% strongly agree about the importance of editing drafts for gaining coherent content. At the same time, 2% answered to some extent. Therefore, editing the first draft is important for learners to focus on the main features of coherence.

4_3_5 making an outline helps to write more quickly

agree   strongly agree   to some extent
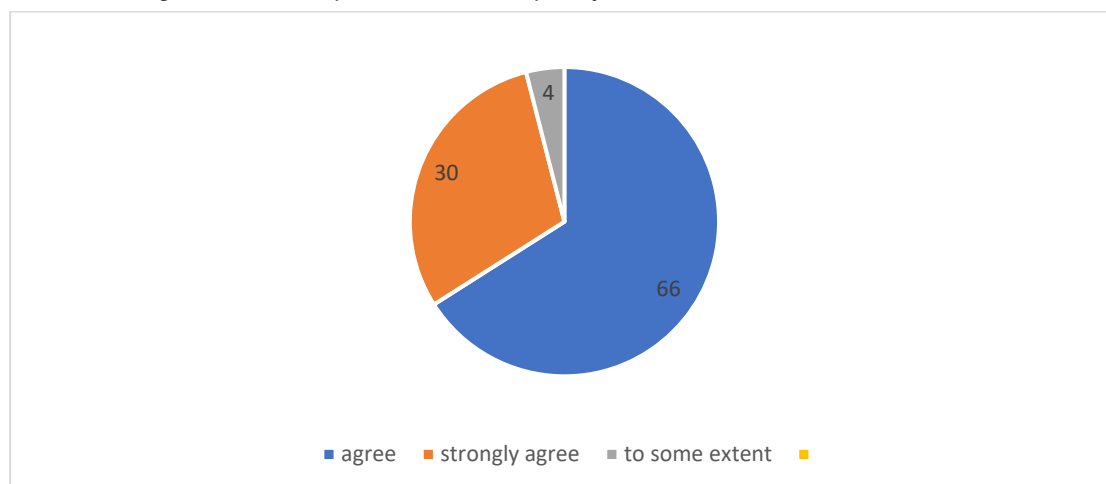
The results in this statement, 66% of students agreed that an outline is crucial for planning the ideas before writing and 30% of answers strongly agree. However, 4% of answers were to some extent. Thus, revealed that making an outline helps students to organize their thoughts in logical order.

4_3_6 focusing on parallel structure inside outline provides a clarity of the paragraph

agree   strongly agree   to some extent
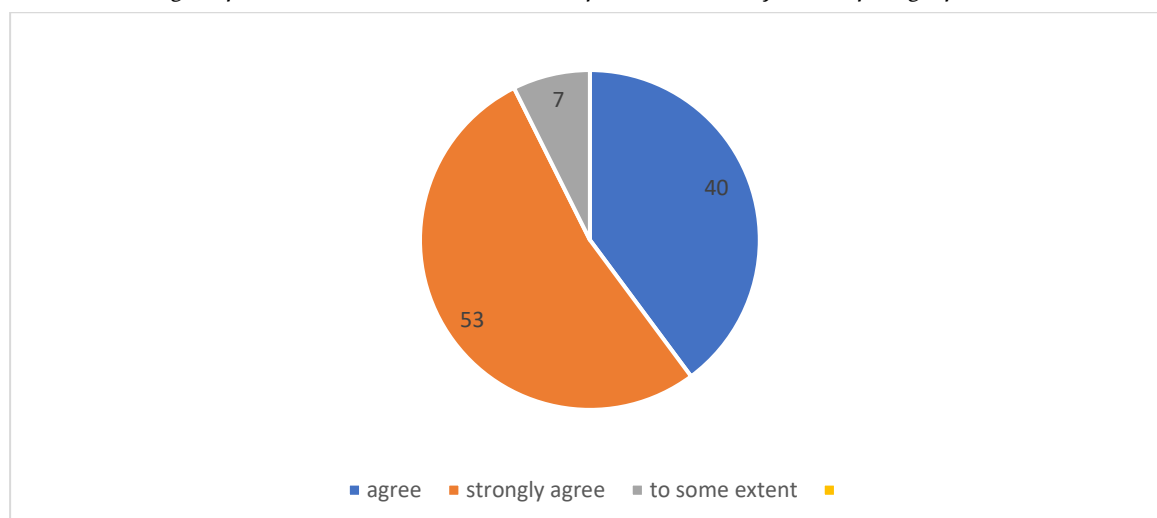
The figure above showed that 53% of students strongly agree about concentrating on language mechanics while outlining provides writing content. However, 7 % of answers were to some extent and 40% of students agree that parallel structure is crucial and helps to focus on their mistakes before writing a final draft.

5_ conclusion and recommendations

5_1 conclusion

The sequence of poor organization results a confusion, miscommunication and misunderstanding to the readers. Moreover, lack of practice, motivations and feedback from teachers leads learners to poor

academic writing. Thus, this research aims to investigate the complexities of EFL learners in organizing a good academic paragraph. As a result of this study student's difficulties in learning due to ignorance of students' the importance of prewriting technique that reflects on their written product. Also, the essential paragraph elements were not applied perfectly in their writing. However, the other main factor was the lack of doing several exercises in the side classroom, which the absence of this technique let learners write arbitrarily, also lack of motivation and feedback by the instructor impacted students' progress in learning academic paragraphs. Besides that, the lack of maintaining the main components of the paragraph, unity, coherence, and clarity, influences on learner's writing. Moreover, the results reveal that learners faced a problem in arranging their ideas by using unity and coherence, they couldn't unify the ideas that related to the topic, and these ideas were written randomly and repeated without concentrating on key nouns. Also, the findings showed that the absence of appropriate vocabulary was the other challenge for learners because they used a limited vocabulary and unclear words which prevented them from writing freely and expressing their ideas effectively. EFL learners need to engage in several strategies by their teachers to overcome the complexity of learning through applying peer editing techniques and divide learners into groups to encourage and motivate them.

5_2 recommendations

Since organizing a paragraph is considered a main writing challenge for EFL students of faculty of Art and Science Missalta, this research suggests for further study in future to investigate the other reasons behind learner's complexity in organizing a good academic paragraph.

1_ Teachers should provide feedback by editing their mistakes to learn effectively and need a motivation to write and express their ideas freely without hesitation of making mistakes

2_ Students should read many books to enhance their ability while writing assignments by using appropriate vocabulary to improve the clarity of their writing and avoid vague words.

3_ Teachers should apply peer editing technique and let students to work in groups and discuss the main idea

4_Outline technique is crucial for planning ideas logically furthermore, provides opportunity for learner to focus on language mechanism.

5_ Prewriting is essential technique that guide learners to unify their ideas and write successfully. In addition, students should take in consideration that coherence is main element of paragraph organizations that provides smoothness and logic of the content

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