

The Interplay of Proficiency, Gender, and Cultural Context in EFL Argumentative Writing Processes

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Abstract

This study explores the writing processes of undergraduate university EFL learners, with a focus on argumentative compositions. Drawing from structured interviews with a cohort of students at Yarmouk University, Jordan, the study offers insights into the foundational writing stages, namely prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing.

The findings underscore a universal commitment to these stages, suggesting dominant pedagogical influences. Notably, a proficiency-driven dichotomy emerged in revision techniques, with proficient writers leaning towards a holistic approach and less proficient ones emphasizing surface-level concerns. The study also flagged overlaps in students' understanding of 'revision' and 'editing', hinting at potential pedagogical ambiguities.

Additionally, gender-driven nuances and potential cultural implications became salient, echoing broader socio-cultural research trends. These findings, while aligning with established academic paradigms, spotlight evolving trends and necessitate adaptive pedagogical strategies.

Keywords: EFL learners, argumentative compositions, writing processes, proficiency-driven dichotomy, revision techniques, pedagogical influences, gender dynamics, cultural contextualization

1. Introduction

The proficiency in writing within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts remains a critical yet often under-emphasized component in language education. Despite its pivotal role in academic and professional communication, EFL writing continues to be a challenging skill for learners, marked by complexities in structure, content, and linguistic expression. This study, "Writing Processes and the Influence of Proficiency and Gender in Argumentative Compositions: A Study of Undergraduate EFL Learners," aims to delve into these challenges, exploring how proficiency levels and gender dynamics influence the writing processes in argumentative compositions among undergraduate EFL students.

Historically, EFL writing has been fraught with difficulties, as evidenced by instructors' concerns over students' written tasks, particularly in formal evaluations (Lee, 2009; Negari, 2011; Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012; Manchón & Murphy, 2007; Hyland, 2003; Tsui, 1996). These challenges encompass a spectrum of issues, from generating ideas and vocabulary knowledge to constructing grammatically correct sentences. Kharma (1985) notably highlighted these aspects, pointing out the struggles EFL learners face in producing cohesive and thematically consistent texts.

In recent years, the scope of research in EFL writing has expanded, shedding light on more nuanced aspects of the writing process. Studies have increasingly focused on the cognitive and metacognitive strategies employed by learners, emphasizing the role of individual proficiency levels in writing development (Rahayu, 2021; Li & Zhang, 2021). Moreover, contemporary research has also begun to explore gender-related differences in writing strategies, providing insights into how male and female learners approach writing tasks differently (Auliyah & Arrasyid, 2019; Rashtchi, 2019).

The genre of argumentative writing poses unique challenges for EFL learners, as it requires not only linguistic competence but also critical thinking and the ability to articulate and support a coherent argument (Ghanbari & Salari, 2022). This genre, therefore, serves as an ideal focal point for examining the interplay between proficiency, gender, and writing processes in an EFL context.

This study builds upon existing literature by incorporating recent research findings and employing a comprehensive approach to understand the multifaceted nature of EFL writing. It seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how undergraduate EFL learners navigate the stages of writing argumentative compositions, influenced by their proficiency levels and gender. The insights gained from this study aim to contribute to more effective pedagogical strategies in EFL writing instruction, addressing the unique needs of diverse

learner populations.

1.1 Study Objective

The objective of this study is to investigate the disparities in the utilization of writing processes among university students, with a focus on the variables of proficiency levels and gender in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. This exploration is driven by the growing awareness that proficiency and gender can significantly influence the learning and application of writing strategies, potentially leading to variations in writing quality and style. The inclusion of gender, alongside proficiency, is driven by an emerging body of research suggesting significant impacts of gender on cognitive and learning strategies in language acquisition and writing (Chen, 2021). Understanding these disparities is crucial for developing more effective, tailored pedagogical approaches in EFL writing instruction. To achieve this objective, the study employs qualitative methodology through interviews, recognized for their ability to provide deep insights into complex subjects (Creswell, 2014).

1.2 Research Questions

In pursuit of achieving the study objective, the following questions will be investigated:

1. In what ways do university EFL learners traverse the preliminary stages of writing, encompassing prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing, especially when tasked with argumentative compositions?

Background: Recent studies indicate the complexity of the writing process in EFL, involving stages like prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing (Rianto, 2020). This question explores how learners approach these stages in argumentative writing.

2. Can differences in writing processes and revision methodologies be distinctly identified between writers of varying proficiency levels?

Background: Proficiency levels impact writing styles and strategies in EFL contexts, with higher proficiency correlating with more sophisticated strategies, particularly in argumentative writing (Teng, Yuan, & Sun, 2020).

3. How do learners demarcate between the concepts of 'revision' and 'editing', and what pedagogical inferences can be drawn from such distinctions?

Background: Recent scholarship reveals potential gender-related differences in EFL writing tasks (Mohammadi & Izadpanah, 2018). This question examines the influence of gender on the choice and application of writing strategies.

4. Are there gender-related patterns evident in the writing techniques employed by EFL learners, and how are they manifested?

Background: Understanding the distinction between revision and editing stages is crucial, as misconceptions can impact pedagogical approaches (Liu, 2019).

2. Literature Review

The literature on writing within the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education unveils writing as a complex cognitive act, central to the field of language learning and teaching. Writing not only facilitates the externalization of knowledge but also aids in its internalization, acting as a catalyst for cognitive and linguistic development. This dynamic process, crucial for academic and personal expression, allows EFL learners to engage deeply with language structures and employ various cognitive strategies for text production and refinement. For EFL learners, this journey through the written word serves as a rich landscape to fine-tune their linguistic competencies, ushering them from rudimentary expressions to sophisticated academic dialogues (Manchón, 2011; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005).

The cognitive dimensions underlying writing have long held scholarly attention. Older paradigms that considered writing as merely a tool for expression or a mechanical task have been largely overshadowed by increased recognition of its complex cognitive aspects. This is not just a matter of articulating pre-formed ideas, but a sophisticated cognitive activity in itself, involving processes like memory recall, conceptual organization, and evaluative judgment (Kellogg, 2001a).

Moreover, writing has a distinct association with cognitive development and organization. Far from being a simple transcription of thoughts onto paper, writing serves as an act of intellectual orchestration where multiple cognitive processes come into play. Otsuka and Murai (2021) identify the cognitive underpinnings of Japanese kanji abilities and their impact on higher-level language skills. They demonstrate the dimension-specific relationships between these abilities and cognitive predictors. In addition, Olagbaju (2020) investigated the role of cognitive styles and gender as predictors of students' achievement in summary writing, highlighting the influence of individual cognitive preferences on writing proficiency. In another study, Rivas (2020) examined the (sub)cognitive processes activated in written practice among university students of Spanish as a Foreign Language. This study provided insights into the cognitive processes inherent in textual creation, particularly through guided planning and understanding of discursive genres.

The writing process's cognitive demands suggest that it could serve as a valuable pedagogical tool for fostering cognitive flexibility, especially in academic writing. Hayes's insights into these cognitive demands reinforce the need for teaching strategies that enable students to switch between various cognitive tasks fluidly (Hayes, 2012). This flexibility is essential not only for academic success but also for the learner's overall language development.

The relationship between language proficiency and the utilization of the writing process has been an area of keen interest in applied

linguistics. Studies by Cumming (1989) and Schoonen et al. (2003) have provided empirical insights into how proficiency levels can significantly influence different stages of the writing process. For instance, proficient writers often spend more time in the planning and revising phases than their less proficient counterparts (Cumming, 1989). Schoonen et al. (2003) further revealed that proficient writers employ a variety of cognitive strategies that help them to draft, revise, and finalize their texts more effectively.

Moreover, Chung (2020) found that higher language proficiency levels lead to increased effectiveness in post-editing machine-translated texts, indicating that more proficient learners are better at identifying and correcting errors, especially above the word level. Also, Qin and Uccelli (2020) revealed that higher English proficiency correlates positively with textual linguistic complexity. However, the association between proficiency and register flexibility varied across linguistic levels and learner backgrounds.

The relationship between the writing process and gender is a nuanced subject that has garnered scholarly attention, particularly in the field of education and language learning. Researchers have delved into how gender may influence writing styles, approaches to writing tasks, and even outcomes in various writing genres. It is important to note that while some studies indicate observable differences between males and females in their writing processes, others argue that such differences are often exaggerated or shaped by social and cultural factors.

Recent work by Almashour and Davies (2023) provides additional insight into how gender and proficiency intersect with strategy use in EFL writing. Their study, which examined Jordanian university students during argumentative writing tasks, found that female learners used affective strategies significantly more than their male counterparts. However, no statistically significant differences were found between high- and low-proficiency groups in the use of six core strategy types. These findings underscore the role of individual and contextual factors, beyond language ability, in shaping how learners navigate writing tasks, and they support the present study's emphasis on exploring such dimensions in greater depth.

Tarigan, Dirgeyasa, and Husein (2021) focused on the cognitive processes of different genders in writing argumentative texts. The study found that male and female students had different manners in writing argumentative text, with male students generating ideas through brainstorming and outlining, while female students developed ideas through brainstorming, reading, and revising.

Sianturi and Saragih (2021) explored the cognitive processes of students in writing argumentative text, revealing differences between male and female students. Male students' cognitive process included organizing ideas and translating text, while female students also reviewed the text in addition to these stages.

In addition, Al-Saadi and Galbraith (2020) investigated the influence of the language of writing, foreign language proficiency, and gender on revision processes. It found that female participants generally made more revisions in both languages than males, indicating a gender difference in the revision stage.

In summary, while gender differences in the writing process are not universally consistent, existing research indicates that gender can influence various facets of writing, from self-efficacy to cognitive strategies, collaborative dynamics, and discourse styles. Educators and curriculum designers should thus be cognizant of these factors when developing writing instruction and assessment methods.

2.1 Deciphering the Writing Process

The writing process, traditionally viewed as a linear sequence, has evolved into a more complex and dynamic paradigm. Earlier perspectives, which regarded writing as straightforward, were reshaped by Hayes and Flower (1980) who proposed a more intricate, cognitive approach. Kellogg (2001) further expanded this view, emphasizing writing as an interactive task involving substantial planning, revising, and editing.

The writing process is characterized by its non-linear, recursive nature, as described by Graham (2006). Writing is not merely sequential but involves revisiting and modifying earlier phases, reflecting its adaptive character. It involves five key phases: prewriting (ideation), drafting (expression), revising (refinement), editing (perfection), and dissemination (circulation). Each stage presents unique challenges, especially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners.

The prewriting phase, critical for EFL learners, involves setting goals and organizing ideas. Cumming (1989) highlights its importance in structuring content and purpose. More recent studies reinforce this view; for instance, Bitchener and Storch (2016) emphasize the recursive nature of prewriting and its impact on overall composition quality.

Novita, Sibarani, & Saragih, (2023) emphasized the importance of collecting information and planning text in the prewriting phase for argumentative writing, highlighting the need for awareness of the genre's structure and explicit statement of the writer's standpoint.

Planning, an extension of prewriting, is essential in transitioning from ideation to a structured document. Influenced by educational and cultural backgrounds, as noted by Zamel (1985), planning significantly impacts the quality of EFL writing, as evidenced by Silva and Matsuda (2002), and Storch and Wigglesworth (2010). In addition, Mahmoudi (2017) studied the effect of planning on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' mastery of writing skills. This research highlighted how planning positively impacts learners' writing performance, particularly in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, and language use. Also, McDonough and Vleeschauwer (2019) compared the effects of collaborative and individual prewriting on EFL learners' writing development, offering insights into how different planning methods influence various aspects of writing, such as accuracy and content. These studies underscore the importance of the planning phase in the writing process.

The drafting stage, as explored by Wang and Wen (2002) and Hyland (2003), requires EFL learners to balance idea expression and language precision. Weigle (2012) and Polio (2013) emphasize the need for strategies to develop both fluency and accuracy during this phase. Moreover, Suprpto et al. (2022) explored students' perceptions of the writing process, including drafting. It reveals that students experience difficulties during the drafting phase, particularly in generating and structuring ideas. Finally, Fatsah & Basalama (2020) identified two types of students' writing difficulties in essay writing: pre-writing and pre-drafting. The findings showed difficulties in getting topics and organizing essays, indicating significant challenges in the drafting process.

Revision, the transformative stage of writing, involves critical reevaluation of content, structure, and style. Faigley and Witte (1981) categorize revisions as surface or text-based, with the latter having a more significant impact. Sommers (1980) illustrates that experienced writers view revision as an ongoing opportunity for improvement. McMartin-Miller (2014) investigated how undergraduate students approach the revision process in argumentative writing. The findings revealed that many students struggle with making substantive text-level changes, often focusing primarily on surface-level corrections. The study suggested that instructional interventions targeting specific revision strategies could significantly improve students' ability to critically evaluate and enhance their argumentative essays. The role of feedback, particularly for L2 learners, is crucial in this stage, as highlighted by Goldstein (2005). For example, Li & Zhang (2021) explored EFL students' revision and how it was influenced by peer feedback, instructor feedback, and revision goals. The findings indicated that the majority of revision changes were triggered by these three mediating sources, with revision goals as the most significant contributing source. This supports the idea that self-regulation plays a crucial role in the revision process.

Additionally, external factors such as audience, purpose, and writer's emotional state influence the writing process. Storch (2005), Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), and Galbraith (1999) discuss the significance of collaboration and knowledge transformation in writing. The integration of digital tools in writing, as noted by Jones and Hafner (2021), has further expanded the scope and interactivity of the writing process.

In conclusion, the writing process in EFL contexts is a multifaceted journey, shaped by cognitive processes, language skills, and external influences. It reflects the personal and academic growth of learners, illustrating the transformation of their ideas into refined, effective communication.

2.2 Writing in Bilingual and Multilingual Contexts: An Intricate Interplay of Forces

Writing within the realms of bilingualism and multilingualism unveils a rich mosaic of cognitive, linguistic, and sociocultural orchestrations. Raimes (1985) paved the way by spotlighting the intricate mechanism of strategy transfer across linguistic landscapes. This revelation underscored the cognitive dexterity and resilience inherent in multilingual writers. Cummins (1991) further elucidated this terrain by intertwining linguistic mastery with cognitive ideation processes, positing that multilingualism potentially enhances the richness and variety of thought generation during the act of writing.

Canagarajah (2006) delved into the lived experiences of multilingual writers, providing a detailed and nuanced picture. He found that being multilingual is a bit of a double-edged sword for writers. On one hand, it gives them a rich pool of linguistic and cultural details to draw from, but on the other, it makes their writing process more complex. Multilingual authors often find themselves navigating between different languages, dealing with a complex mix of language structures and ways of expressing ideas. While this can lead to rich and layered writing, it also brings the challenge of maintaining coherence and meeting the expectations of their readers.

Moreover, Ramanathan (2002) took a sociopolitical approach to investigate the underlying social and political factors that affect how people express themselves in multiple languages. She pointed out that for multilingual writers, languages are more than just tools for communication; they become symbols of cultural identity, status, and power relations. These social perceptions and attitudes have a strong impact on multilingual writers, who may find themselves gravitating towards languages that have more cultural prestige or avoiding those associated with negative stereotypes. This complex combination of language skills, social values, and the writer's intentions creates a rich and dynamic picture. In this way, multilingual writing is more than just the skillful use of language; it becomes a powerful way of expressing and commenting on social and cultural issues.

These insights affirm that writing in multiple languages is a strategic activity, influenced by and contributing to the writers' cognitive development, linguistic competence, and social identity. The field remains ripe for research, particularly in the way that digital tools and online communication may be shaping the practices and perceptions of multilingual writers today.

In conclusion, the engagement with bilingual and multilingual writing is a rich, complex experience that defies simple characterization. It draws upon deep cognitive resources, engages with varied linguistic knowledge, and reflects the sociocultural context of the writer. The implications for teaching are significant, suggesting that EFL instruction should not only address language proficiency but also encourage strategic, reflective, and critically aware writing practices.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The study enlisted the participation of sixty senior university students from the English Language and Literature Department at Yarmouk University, Jordan. Representing 38% of the total cohort (160 students) in the program, the chosen sample boasted an equitable gender distribution, encompassing thirty male and thirty female students.

All the chosen participants were in their fourth academic year, ensuring they had undergone foundational writing courses integral to their academic program. Specifically, they had completed the following courses:

- Writing (1) (Eng.202)
- Writing (2) (Eng.206)
- Writing about Literature (Eng.320)

These are mandatory courses in the Department of English Language and Literature at Yarmouk University.

The selection criteria pivoted on their cumulative academic scores. Male students required a minimum cumulative average of 70% to qualify for the study. In contrast, female students were required to have a cumulative average of 77% or above. The rationale for this differentiated threshold was the limited number of male students attaining the 77% benchmark. This measure ensured a balanced representation from both genders. A tabulated summary of the participants based on specific variables is as follows:

Table 1. Distribution of participants according to the study's independent variables

| Variables | Frequency |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| Gender (Males) | 30 |
| Gender (Females) | 30 |
| Proficient Males | 10 |
| Proficient Females | 20 |
| Less Proficient Males | 17 |
| Less Proficient Females | 13 |
| Total | 60 |

Finally, the participants were asked to provide written consent to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of their identities. The research design was reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Education, Yarmouk University.

3.2 Data Collection

The structured interview approach was adopted to delve deep into the writing processes of the students, especially vis-à-vis argumentative writing tasks. These interviews aimed to harness qualitative insights into their strategizing during planning, their techniques during drafting, their habits in revision, and their post-writing reflections. Employing structured interviews as a research methodology is widely recognized for its ability to provide in-depth understanding, particularly in complex cognitive domains like writing (Dörnyei, 2007). By ensuring a consistent set of questions across participants, structured interviews enhance the comparability of responses, while still allowing for rich, descriptive data collection (Mackey & Gass, 2005). This method of data collection has been particularly lauded for its effectiveness in accessing the intricate layers of writers' thought processes, further establishing its validity in capturing the nuances of writing strategies (Patton, 2015).

Initially, the participants were tasked with composing two distinct argumentative essays, with a fortnight's gap between each. This exercise was intended to furnish a baseline understanding of their inherent writing methodologies. After this, structured interviews, meticulously designed to explore each phase of the writing process, namely prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing, were conducted.

3.3 Interview Questions Design

To obtain a nuanced and holistic understanding of the learners' engagement with each writing phase, the interview questions were meticulously constructed. The objective was to gauge not only their interaction with each stage but also the depth and regularity of such interactions, particularly within the context of argumentative writing tasks. Through this dual-pronged approach—assessing both depth and frequency—I sought to procure a panoramic view of their writing methodology:

1. Prewriting Considerations:

- **Question:** "Before initiating the writing process, what preliminary steps do you undertake? Do you immediately dive into the composition, or do you consult various resources for information gathering?"
 - **Rationale:** This inquiry aims to discern the preparatory strategies students deploy. It elucidates whether they are instinctive in their writing approach or if they gravitate towards a more research-informed preparatory phase.

2. Drafting Methodologies:

- **Question:** "Upon commencing your writing, do you first delineate a draft, or do you venture directly into the final composition?"
 - **Rationale:** The intent here is to fathom whether students perceive drafting as an instrumental precursor to articulate their thoughts or if they exhibit a predilection towards immediate articulation.

3. Revision Strategies:

- **Question:** "Post-composition, do you immerse yourself in a revision phase?"

- **Rationale:** The revisionary phase stands as a cornerstone in the writing trajectory. This probe aspires to assess students' acknowledgment and implementation of this pivotal phase.

4. Revisionary Focus:

- **Question:** "During your revision, which facets command your primary attention? Do you zero in on structural robustness, overarching semantics, lexical precision, cohesion, or narrative coherence?"
- **Rationale:** Even though revision is multifarious in nature, writers often exhibit varied prioritizations. This query seeks to unveil the focal areas students underscore during their revisionary endeavours.

5. Editing Deliberations:

- **Question:** "After your revision, do you engage in an editing regimen? If affirmative, could you elucidate the rationale? If negative, could you elucidate your reservations?"
- **Rationale:** Editing, although intertwined with revision, constitutes a discrete step, accentuating linguistic and structural finetuning. This interrogation delves into students' perceptions and inclinations towards editing, unearthing the underpinnings behind their editorial choices.

By systematically structuring the interview around these cardinal phases of the writing process, I aim to elicit meaningful insights, aiding in the comprehension of the strategies, considerations, and decision-making processes undergirding students' writing practices.

4. Findings

The investigation into the nuances of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing has unfolded a rich panorama of cognitive, linguistic, and educational interconnections. The conducted structured interviews for this research aimed to shed light on the varied strategies and techniques employed by university EFL students, specifically focusing on the crafting of argumentative compositions. The following are the main findings of the data analysis obtained from the interviews.

One of the most salient findings was the almost ubiquitous adherence to foundational stages of writing, such as prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. These stages were consistently employed by the interviewed EFL learners irrespective of their linguistic proficiency or gender. This observation suggests that these stages were an integral part of their writing pedagogy. For example, one participant articulated this approach as follows: "I always start with an outline, then draft, then keep revising until it seems right." Such consistency aligns with existing pedagogical frameworks that emphasize the structured approach to writing, reinforcing the notion that explicit instruction in foundational writing stages can result in more uniform writing behaviours among students (Hyland, 2003).

However, a notable divergence among participants was observed in the *prewriting phase*, with a wide range of strategies employed. Some learners took a minimalist approach; for instance, one participant said, "I write down a few points and start writing." In contrast, others had a more in-depth engagement, as exemplified by a participant who noted, "I spend a lot of time researching before I even write the first sentence."

This disparity underlines the heterogeneity that exists among EFL learners regarding their initial approach to writing. It also indicates the need for pedagogical strategies that can accommodate this range of initial behaviours and perhaps offer targeted instruction aimed at enhancing prewriting skills.

In addition, analyzing the participants' revision strategies revealed stratifications largely influenced by linguistic proficiency. Participants who identified as having higher proficiency levels had revision practices that went beyond surface-level changes. As one participant expressed,

"My focus during revisions is on improving the flow of arguments and strengthening my evidence."

In contrast, those who identified as lower proficiency learners often found themselves bogged down with correcting grammatical and spelling errors. One such participant noted, "I usually find myself stuck correcting grammatical errors and spelling." This observation corroborates previous studies that have examined the relationship between linguistic proficiency and revision practices, demonstrating that lower-proficiency writers often focus on language errors at the expense of content and argumentative quality (Silva, 1993; Sommers, 1980).

By integrating these perspectives into the findings, the research paints a more nuanced picture of the varied approaches to writing among EFL learners. These insights have the potential to inform pedagogical interventions that can more precisely address the unique challenges and strategies employed by this population.

Another recurring theme which emerged from the collected data pertained to the conflation between revising and editing, two stages of writing that are often misconstrued as synonymous. Revising generally refers to the process of reorganizing and refining ideas, arguments, and evidence in a draft to improve its coherence and logical flow. On the other hand, editing is a later stage, concentrating on sentence-level adjustments like grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

In the interviews, this conflation became evident through comments from several participants. One participant disclosed, "I revise and edit at the same time, often in the same sitting." Another mentioned, "Once I am done writing, I usually revise for grammar and spelling errors," which illustrates a misunderstanding of the purpose of the revision stage. These statements suggest that there might be a

pedagogical gap in how these writing stages are taught and understood.

The conflation of these distinct processes may have pedagogical implications, as it could lead to inefficient writing practices and hinder the development of well-rounded writing skills. This finding calls for an educational response that clearly distinguishes between revising and editing in the curriculum and instructional methodology, aligning with the pedagogical focus on teaching distinct writing stages effectively.

Another intriguing finding emerged on the topic of gender-specific approaches to writing. Female participants, in particular, displayed a structured and disciplined approach to their writing tasks. This was not a universal trait among all female students but was nonetheless a noticeable pattern. One female participant described her writing process as, "I always start with a detailed outline, then move to a rough draft, and finally, I focus on revising and editing separately."

This finding suggests that gender could potentially be a variable that influences the choice and application of writing strategies. This is particularly salient in the context of EFL learning, where learners are grappling with linguistic challenges alongside the usual cognitive demands of academic writing. It raises questions about whether instructional designs should consider gender-specific pedagogical strategies to cater to these observed tendencies and whether future research should delve deeper into the role of gender in writing strategy adoption.

Another striking observation from the research data was the genre-agnostic behaviour exhibited by the participants. The term "genre-agnostic" refers to the idea that foundational writing processes—such as brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and revising—remain constant regardless of the specific genre of writing. This was particularly noteworthy given that the research focus was on argumentative compositions, a genre with its own unique set of conventions and structures. For example, one participant's comment encapsulated this behaviour: "Whether it is a narrative or an argumentative essay, my approach does not change much." Another stated, "I stick to what I know works for me, regardless of the assignment's genre." Such remarks suggest that the core writing strategies adopted by these EFL learners are transferrable across various genres.

This genre-agnostic approach raises several important questions for EFL pedagogy. It suggests that foundational writing strategies may indeed be universal, and applicable across differing rhetorical contexts. This could potentially streamline instructional design, allowing for a core curriculum that focuses on teaching foundational writing skills that are then adaptable to various genres.

However, the downside is that this lack of genre-specific adaptation may also indicate a gap in students' understanding of the nuances that different genres demand. This would necessitate the inclusion of genre-specific instruction in EFL curricula to ensure that students are equally adept at navigating the particular demands of each genre.

To conclude, the landscape of EFL writing, particularly among university students, is complex and multi-faceted, encompassing a myriad of strategies, challenges, and practices. The findings discussed offer multiple avenues for targeted pedagogical interventions, each aimed at addressing specific aspects of the writing process or individual challenges learners face. Through a deeper, nuanced understanding of these complexities, educators can design curricula and instructional strategies that better cater to the needs of EFL learners. In turn, such tailored approaches have the potential to significantly augment both the writing proficiency and the academic confidence of these learners.

5. Discussion of the Findings

The landscape of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing, especially at the university level, is an intricate tapestry woven with multiple threads—strategies, challenges, practices, and the influence of varying educational backgrounds. The overarching aim of this study is to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the writing process among EFL learners, focusing on critical elements such as foundational writing stages, proficiency-driven approaches to revising, gender dynamics, and cultural influences.

By elucidating these aspects, the researcher aims to offer invaluable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and academic researchers to assist them in devising targeted pedagogical interventions that can effectively bridge gaps in learners' writing proficiency, foster self-confidence, and thereby contribute to a more robust EFL educational framework.

The discussion that follows will interpret the findings of this study, corroborating them with established theories and prior research where applicable. This will enable a rounded understanding of current writing practices and preferences among EFL learners and propose recommendations that are grounded in empirical evidence.

Through this discussion, I hope to highlight the intricate complexities and multifaceted challenges that characterize the EFL writing process, while also advocating for a pedagogical approach that is both comprehensive and responsive to the nuanced needs of the learners.

The subsequent sections will delve into each aspect in detail, providing not just theoretical perspectives but also practical implications that can guide future pedagogical practices and research endeavours.

5.1 Universal Engagement with Foundational Writing Stages

Beyond the influence of institutional frameworks and curricula, the current study discerned that individual agency significantly shaped the ways learners navigated through different writing stages. Participants displayed autonomy in customizing these stages to align with their unique learning trajectories. For example, one participant stated, "When I start to write, I have to follow the steps I learned in school: brainstorm, outline, draft. Otherwise, I feel like I'm missing something."

This sentiment supports earlier works by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) and extends to Zimmerman and Bandura's (1994) model of self-regulated learning, which emphasizes how learners actively engage in their educational processes.

In addition, the data analysis indicated a bifurcation in revision strategies contingent upon the linguistic proficiency of the participants. Writers with advanced skills were more concerned with higher-level revisions, focusing primarily on the content and argumentative rigour. This was evident in what several participants mentioned, "I find myself revisiting the ideas and arguments in my drafts more than worrying about word choice or grammar."

This finding resonates not only with Cumming (1989) but also with studies by Kellogg (2008), who acknowledged the cognitive dimensions affecting how expert writers engage in revising their text.

Another interesting finding that emerged was the observation that males and females employ different cognitive strategies while writing; for example, males are often more likely to engage in a "planning" approach before writing, whereas females adopt a "freewriting" or "discovery" method.

5.2 Ambiguities Surrounding 'Revision' vs. 'Editing'

An intriguing nuance that emerged is the semantic ambiguity enveloping the terms 'revision' and 'editing.' These terms, while frequently interchanged in common discourse and even academic settings, were found to encapsulate distinct functional roles in the writing process. The data suggests that learners initially conflate these concepts but gradually differentiate them as they gain more experience and exposure to academic writing. Several participants indicated that they view revision and editing are the same process. This raises pertinent questions about how EFL undergraduate writers conceptualize the recursive processes that take place during writing. The blurred lines between 'revision' and 'editing' have been the subject of scholarly inquiry for years. For instance, Sommers (1980) delved into these complexities, suggesting that the conflation of the two terms could potentially be more strategic than arbitrary. Sommers found that experienced writers view revision as a process of discovering the form and meaning of their arguments, as opposed to simply correcting errors or improving style.

Building on this, more recent studies, such as those by Hyland and Hyland (2006), examine the shifting roles of 'editing' and 'revision,' especially in the context of digital writing environments. They argue that digital tools not only offer more functionalities but also expand the scope of what both editing and revising can entail. These tools allow writers to move seamlessly between 'macro-level' revisions, which involve content and structure, and 'micro-level' editing focused on language accuracy and style.

Further, Faigley and Witte (1981) provide another angle by exploring the cognitive strategies involved in revision and editing. They posit that while editing generally involves surface-level changes, revision is more concerned with global changes that have a broader impact on the text's coherence and overall argument.

5.3 Gender Dynamics in Writing Processes

Intriguingly, the current study did not uncover pronounced disparities between male and female participants in terms of meticulousness applied to their writing processes. This finding calls into question previous academic works that posited a gendered approach to writing tasks, often cited as being shaped by sociocultural norms and expectations. For example, a female participant "I think the way I approach writing is more influenced by my educational background rather than my gender." In another instance, a male participant stated, "I don't think my gender has much to do with how I write or revise my work."

This counters the conventional wisdom, advanced by researchers such as Pajares and Valiante (2001), who have argued that gender can play a role in writing self-efficacy and attitudes toward writing. Similarly, research by Jones and Myhill (2004) has shown that societal norms around gender may influence how writing is approached, particularly at younger ages.

However, these findings seem to align more closely with a body of scholarship that challenges the notion of gender as a defining factor for writing. For instance, work by Cameron (2005) in the field of language and gender has pointed out the lack of empirical evidence supporting the idea that men and women inherently differ in their communicative styles or meticulousness in writing.

Furthermore, a study by Scholes (1998) posits that while there may be observable differences in the writing styles and strategies employed by men and women, these differences often dissipate when other variables, such as educational background and writing instruction, are considered.

5.4 Depth Variability in Revisions

The current study contributes new insights into the nuanced strategies employed by writers of varying linguistic proficiency, particularly concerning their approach to revisions. One finding that emerged was the pronounced focus on linguistic accuracy by less proficient writers. For example, one participant stated, "Most of the time, I focus on fixing the language first because that's what we were taught to prioritize in school." This tendency aligns closely with Ferris's work (2004), which suggests that less experienced or proficient writers often zero in on surface-level features such as grammar and vocabulary. Ferris points out that such a focus is generally encouraged by traditional educational paradigms that prioritize linguistic accuracy as an assessment metric.

In contrast, Zamel (1983) posits that an undue emphasis on language mechanics can potentially divert the writer's attention from more substantive content-based revisions. According to Zamel, the fixation on form could hinder a writer's ability to engage deeply with the content and thus could be counterproductive to the writing process.

Another perspective comes from Truscott (1996), who questions the effectiveness of grammar correction and suggests that it might not lead to any substantial improvement in writing. In this view, a strong linguistic base alone may not automatically elevate the depth or quality of content revisions.

Therefore, the diverging perspectives in the existing literature and the study findings underscore the complex interplay between linguistic proficiency and the types of revisions writers make, further emphasizing the need for a balanced approach to both form and content in writing instruction.

5.5 Cultural Contextualization of Writing Processes

The role of cultural context in influencing writing processes emerged as a significant theme from the study data, adding a nuanced layer to existing academic discussions. These findings resonate with the scholarship of scholars like Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur (2011), who argue that writing practices are deeply rooted in sociocultural contexts. This underscores the idea that writing is not solely a linguistic exercise but also a culturally mediated activity.

One example is what one participant said, "My cultural background does influence my approach to writing. It's not just about language but also about the way I structure my thoughts and narratives."

This participant's testimony provides empirical support to the idea that culture permeates writing practices, shaping not only language use but also structural and rhetorical choices. Such observations are in line with recent work by Matsuda (2014), who emphasizes the need to consider the cultural dimensions of writing, particularly as academic and professional settings become increasingly globalized.

In the Jordanian context, cultural values such as respect for authority and educational hierarchies often influence students' writing processes. For example, learners may avoid strong personal opinions in argumentative writing, reflecting societal expectations of modesty and. This tendency was evident in interviews, where participants expressed hesitation to critique ideas they disagreed with. Additionally, the prevalence of rote memorization in earlier schooling shapes a linear approach to writing, with less emphasis on recursive practices like revision. These cultural imprints suggest the need for localized pedagogical strategies that encourage critical thinking and iterative writing.

Thus, this study extends the current literature by highlighting the intricate relationship between culture and writing processes, pointing to the necessity for educators and policymakers to consider cultural factors when developing writing pedagogies.

6. Recommendations and Conclusion

This study contributes to both reinforcing established paradigms and identifying new directions in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing research. It highlights the complex interrelationship between pedagogical frameworks, individual learner characteristics, and the evolving academic landscape. The findings demonstrate that writing in an EFL context is not merely a technical skill but a cognitively and socially embedded process, influenced by linguistic proficiency, cultural conventions, and instructional practices.

6.1 Emphasizing Recursive Writing in Curricula

A central pedagogical implication of this study is the necessity of adopting a recursive approach to writing instruction, aligning with Flower and Hayes's (1981) cognitive process model. This model conceptualizes writing as a non-linear, exploratory, and iterative process, requiring continuous revision and refinement. Recent research, such as Deane et al. (2016), further substantiates the benefits of viewing writing as an evolving process, where students engage in multiple drafts and self-reflection, leading to long-term writing development.

To enhance curriculum design, structured prewriting activities such as guided brainstorming, outlining, and genre-based planning should be explicitly incorporated. These activities support students in organizing their thoughts, reducing the tendency to rely on memorization or formulaic structures. Additionally, fostering genre awareness would enable learners to recognize distinct textual conventions and adapt their writing, accordingly, thus addressing the observed challenges related to genre-agnostic tendencies.

Equally important is the integration of critical thinking instruction within writing courses. Jordanian EFL learners, like many in high-context cultural settings, often demonstrate hesitancy in expressing critical opinions. Therefore, analytical reading exercises, structured argumentation tasks, and debate-based writing assignments should be implemented to encourage deeper engagement with texts. These approaches can help bridge cultural expectations with academic writing norms, fostering both linguistic accuracy and independent reasoning.

6.2 Advancing Peer Review Mechanisms in Writing Instruction

A key recommendation emerging from the study is the systematic integration of peer review activities into EFL writing curricula. The literature consistently demonstrates that peer feedback enhances students' academic performance, writing confidence, and critical thinking skills (Topping, 1998; Gielen et al., 2010). The study's findings reinforce these conclusions, as participants acknowledged the value of diversified perspectives in peer feedback, which often provided insights beyond what an instructor alone could offer.

To optimize peer review effectiveness, institutions should establish structured peer feedback frameworks, including training students on constructive critique techniques, utilizing grading rubrics, and embedding reflective elements to enhance metacognitive awareness. Additionally, teacher moderation of peer review sessions is crucial to ensure feedback quality and maintain engagement. Faculty development programs should equip educators with strategies to facilitate peer review effectively, reinforcing its role as a collaborative learning tool rather than a superficial editing exercise. By prioritizing well-structured peer review, institutions can promote self-regulated

learning, writing autonomy, and engagement with the revision process.

6.3 Strengthening Teacher Training and Professional Development

To fully implement process-oriented writing instruction, comprehensive teacher training programs must be established. Instructors should be equipped with pedagogical strategies that support recursive writing, including process-based assessment, formative feedback methods, and scaffolded revision techniques. Training workshops should also address culturally responsive teaching, ensuring that instructors balance critical engagement with respect for local academic norms.

Furthermore, fostering a culture of teacher reflection is essential. Encouraging educators to maintain teaching journals, participate in peer observation, and engage in continuous professional development would enhance their ability to adapt writing instruction to diverse learner needs. Ultimately, teacher training should focus on bridging the gap between traditional EFL teaching methodologies and contemporary, research-backed process-writing approaches.

6.4 Expanding Student Support and Inclusive Writing Environments

The study also highlights the importance of establishing supportive writing environments where learners feel encouraged to engage in the writing process without fear of judgment. Writing centers, peer mentoring programs, and collaborative digital platforms can serve as spaces where students receive structured support in developing their writing skills. Additionally, providing multilingual scaffolds—such as contrastive rhetorical analysis between Arabic and English writing styles—can help students transition more effectively between linguistic frameworks.

A further recommendation is to embed reflective writing practices within the curriculum. As previous studies suggest (Moon, 2004; Yancey, 2016), self-reflection enhances metacognitive awareness and fosters independent learning. Assignments that prompt students to analyze their writing choices, identify patterns in instructor feedback, and set revision goals would cultivate greater self-regulation and critical engagement.

6.5 Policy-Level Implications: Toward a National Writing Strategy

At the policy level, a nationally coordinated approach to writing instruction should be developed to ensure consistency across educational institutions. This strategy should align with international assessment frameworks, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), while remaining sensitive to Jordan's linguistic and cultural context.

A reform in assessment practices is also necessary to reflect process-based learning. Rubrics should not only reward grammatical accuracy but also evaluate structural coherence, logical argumentation, and depth of analysis, even when these are expressed through locally influenced discourse patterns. Policymakers should collaborate with educators, researchers, and language specialists to create standardized writing guidelines that promote both academic rigor and contextual relevance.

In conclusion, the recommendations outlined in this study advocate for a comprehensive, layered approach to writing instruction that integrates recursive learning, peer collaboration, professional development, and institutional reform. Rather than perceiving writing as a static, formulaic skill, this model embraces it as a recursive, strategic, and culturally embedded process.

Participants' reflections throughout this study reaffirm the transformative potential of writing when taught as a process of inquiry rather than mere transcription. By adopting evidence-based pedagogical strategies, institutions can empower students to develop writing autonomy, enhance critical reasoning skills, and engage in deeper, more meaningful academic discourse. Ultimately, these reforms position learners to navigate the communicative challenges of higher education and the professional world with confidence and competence.

6.6 Concluding Remarks

The recommendations derived from this study seek to elevate the standard of EFL writing instruction through a multi-faceted pedagogical strategy that integrates both avant-garde techniques and core principles of language learning and cognition. It is not merely an endeavour to improve writing as an isolated skill but rather aims to provide a comprehensive framework for fostering overall language proficiency and cognitive development.

The study's participants' experiences corroborate the efficacy of adopting a more holistic approach. One salient observation is that the recommended methods contribute to a transformation in learners' perspectives on language. The shift is not just about enhancing writing proficiency but extends to nurturing a more critical understanding and engagement with language as a tool for thought and communication.

In operationalizing these recommendations, educational institutions can create a conducive environment for the emergence of highly competent and confident communicators. The curated blend of innovative and foundational approaches outlined in this study promises to instill in learners a sense of empowerment, allowing them not only to engage with the written word more effectively but also to navigate the complexities of language and thought with greater facility.

This synthesized pedagogical model serves as a roadmap for future academic endeavours and institutional implementations. By investing in these advanced pedagogical practices, the educational community stands to reap long-term benefits, cultivating a generation of learners well-equipped to meet the diverse and evolving demands of a globalized world. Therefore, it is imperative that educators and policymakers take heed of these findings and actively integrate them into EFL writing curricula, professional development programs, and

broader educational policies.

7. Directions for Future Exploration in EFL Writing

The realm of EFL writing, punctuated by its complexities and diversities, beckons deeper exploration and inquiry. Delving into the recesses of the EFL writing process requires a multi-pronged approach that addresses the confluence of cognitive, sociocultural, technological, and pedagogical elements.

7.1 Deep Dive with Longitudinal Studies

A longitudinal lens offers a unique vantage point, allowing researchers to chronicle the evolutionary trajectory of students' writing processes. Tracking the same group of learners over time can yield insights into the developmental milestones, potential regressions, and overarching patterns that punctuate their writing journey. Such studies could be instrumental in distinguishing temporal phases, allowing educators to offer timely interventions.

7.2 Examination Across Varied Educational Milieus

EFL learners navigate varied educational settings, each with its distinct pedagogical underpinnings. Delving into how these milieus—whether traditional, online, or blended—affect the writing process can provide a nuanced understanding of how context shapes writing behaviours. Such exploration promises to unravel the distinct challenges and strengths intrinsic to each pedagogical paradigm.

7.3 Assessing the Impact of Digital Advancements

With technology reshaping educational landscapes, its impact on the EFL writing process merits scrutiny. Beyond merely assessing the utility of digital tools, it's pivotal to understand how these platforms alter the dynamics of writing, potentially redefining established paradigms, especially in the recursive revisionary stages.

7.4 Diverse Cultural Lenses on Writing

EFL writing is a mosaic, coloured by diverse cultural influences. Exploring how these cultural prisms shape and influence the writing trajectory promises profound insights. By juxtaposing writing behaviours across varied cultural spectrums, researchers can discern unique cultural artifacts that either bolster or impede the writing journey, offering educators a more globally attuned pedagogical perspective.

The domain of EFL writing remains a fertile ground for academic inquiry. The findings and insights of current research set the stage, but the vast expanse of uncharted territory awaits exploration. By addressing these suggested directions, future research can deepen our understanding, ensuring that the pedagogy of EFL writing remains dynamic, informed, and attuned to the multifaceted needs of the global learner community.

Declarations

Ethical Approval Statement

The research study titled "Writing Processes and the Influence of Proficiency and Gender in Argumentative Compositions: A Study of Undergraduate EFL Learners" received full ethical approval from the Faculty of Education at Yarmouk University. The approval process included a thorough review of the research proposal, methodology, participant recruitment strategies, and data handling procedures to ensure compliance with ethical standards and respect for participant rights and well-being. The Faculty of Education's ethical review board assessed the study's adherence to ethical guidelines, including the protection of participant confidentiality, the informed consent process, and the assurance of voluntary participation. This approval signifies that the study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles and standards set forth by Yarmouk University and the broader academic community. All research activities were carried out following the ethical approval granted by the Faculty of Education, Yarmouk University.

Consent to Participate Statement

Prior to the commencement of the study titled "Writing Processes and the Influence of Proficiency and Gender in Argumentative Compositions: A Study of Undergraduate EFL Learners," all participants were fully informed about the nature, objectives, and methods of the research. Participants were provided with detailed information regarding their role in the study, the procedures involved, and the intended use of the research findings.

In accordance with ethical research practices, informed consent was obtained from each participant. This process involved clearly explaining the voluntary nature of their participation and ensuring that participants understood they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any adverse consequences. The consent procedure also addressed confidentiality and data privacy, assuring participants that their identities would be protected and that all information collected would be used solely for research purposes and handled with the utmost confidentiality.

Participants were given a Consent Form, which outlined the above aspects in an understandable manner. They had the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarifications before signing the form. Written consent was obtained from each participant, indicating their informed, voluntary agreement to participate in the study.

This Consent to Participate process ensured that all participants were willingly and fully informed about their involvement in the study, adhering to the ethical standards set by the Faculty of Education, Yarmouk University, and respecting the autonomy and rights of each participant.

Funding Statement

No external funding was received to conduct this study titled "Writing Processes and the Influence of Proficiency and Gender in Argumentative Compositions: A Study of Undergraduate EFL Learners." The research was carried out with the resources available to the authors and did not involve financial support from any external organizations or institutions. All aspects of the study, including design, data collection, analysis, and manuscript preparation, were conducted independently by the authors without external funding.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to confidentiality agreements and ethical considerations regarding participant privacy. The data includes detailed responses from participants, which were assured confidentiality and anonymity as part of the consent process. This is to protect the identities of the participants and the sensitive information they provided.

However, data may be available from the authors upon reasonable request and with permission from the Faculty of Education, Yarmouk University. Requests for data access will be considered in line with ethical guidelines and agreements, and subject to the approval of the relevant oversight bodies. Any data provided will be suitably anonymized to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of the participants.

For further inquiries or requests regarding data availability, interested researchers can contact the corresponding author, providing a detailed explanation of the purpose and scope of their request. The corresponding author will facilitate the process in accordance with the ethical and legal constraints governing the study's data.

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Authors' Contributions

Dr. Mohamad Almashour (m_almashour@ju.edu.jo) was responsible for conceptualizing the study, designing the methodology, conducting the interviews, and drafting the initial manuscript.

Dr. Abdel Rahman Mitib Altakhaine (a.altakhaine@ju.edu.jo) contributed to data interpretation, reviewed the manuscript critically for intellectual content, and participated in the refinement of the literature review and discussion sections.

Dr. Hesham Aldamen (h_aldamen@ju.edu.jo) assisted with manuscript editing, language enhancement, and the finalization of recommendations and pedagogical implications.

All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript. No special authorship agreements apply.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Obtained.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. How often do you revisit and revise a piece of writing before finalizing it?
2. Do you believe that the curriculum sufficiently emphasizes the iterative and recursive nature of writing?
3. How often do you engage in peer review sessions?
4. How beneficial do you find peer review sessions in improving your writing?
5. Do you use any digital tools or platforms to assist you in writing? If so, which ones?
6. How do these tools impact your writing process and the quality of your work?
7. Have you ever maintained a writing journal or engaged in reflective writing about your writing process?
8. How do you think reflective writing can influence your approach to writing assignments?
9. How has your approach to the writing process changed over time, from school to university?
10. Have you experienced writing in different educational settings (e.g., traditional classrooms, online courses)? How do these settings influence your writing process?