

# Exploring Problems Facing Second-Year Secondary Students in Paragraph Writing

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to investigate the problems facing second year secondary school students in writing a paragraph such as using correct grammatical rules, usage of correct structure of tenses, parts of speech, and sub skills of paragraph writing and technique of writing a paragraph. The subjects of the study consisted of (80 2<sup>nd</sup> year secondary school students). The tests took place in Omdurman area in Khartoum State. The students were chosen from a governmental Sudanese secondary school for boys for the academic year 2014/2015. A questionnaire was distributed to (70) English language teachers, which were considered as collected data. A statistical analysis was carried out to find out the students' knowledge in writing a paragraph. The data of the study was analyzed by (SPSS). The findings of the study indicated that, there is a positive, statistical significant relation between the result of questionnaire and the standard of the students in English. Then, the study concluded with some recommendations offered to teachers of English language, for designers of English syllabus so as to enlighten them with the skills of writing in general and paragraph writing in particular.*

**Keywords:** Paragraph writing, significance, second-year secondary, school, written text, discourse

## 1. Introduction

C. Yorkey (1982:81, 82, 83) describes the process of writing as *"Writers put the flesh on the skeleton of an outline. Readers take the flesh to see the skeleton"*

Since thinking of writing, a paragraph is considered effective, concise, and clear as the same way as building an efficient house which is established with each room to serve a clearly definite purpose; each paragraph should concentrate on a separate topic. The body of each paragraph should provide evidence proving this subtopic, with a concluding sentence tying everything to the main argument of the essay. By repeating this for each supporting idea leads to mastering the concept of paragraph writing.

Alice Oshima and Ann Hosuen (1997:26, 27 ) stated that a paragraph is a group of related sentences which a writer develops about a subject. The starting sentence explains the certain idea while the other sentences are stated to support it. They also said that it is emphasized by identifying the first word from the left hand margin. So, a paragraph is made up of three sorts of sentences , the topic sentence is around about sentence or the opening sentence which is due to naming the door of the action and the controlling idea . In addition, it tells the reader what the paragraph is talking about and can be in the beginning or at the end of a paragraph. But, they thought it must be written in the start in order to give the reader an idea of what he is going to say and it will enhance him to be on the same subject without being off point. They added that to determine the subject of the topic sentence .so, the topic sentence can help summarizing the idea from general to specific.

This study is an attempt to investigate the problems for the EFL Sudanese students which face them in the second year at secondary level in writing paragraphs and whether they are able to use their abilities to produce a variety of written texts as descriptive, narrative and to develop better sense of

argumentation and discussion.

As the students in this stage are extremely in need of producing not only proper and good written texts at secondary schools, but also they need them for their higher studies as well as career. Therefore, writing paragraph depends on correct using of sentence structure and prepositions. However, these sub-skills might not perfectly be applied by the students in writing a paragraph. Since, reading skill is considered as the base of writing that means much reading of literary texts can improve the students' abilities and to develop better sense of producing correct sentences, proper lexis and vocabulary. The study presents and focuses on the theoretical background of the study. It actually deals with the issues of writing a paragraph such as strategies of paragraph writing, skills, cohesion and coherence, grammatical structures, paragraph types and words and lexis selection. Moreover, discussions of writing a paragraph within methods of teaching English language.

## 2. Significance of the Study

Paragraph writing is considered as an important and essential part in writing skills which must be mastered by the students in the second year at secondary schools. Since this will promote their standard to carry on their further studies at higher education and future career.

## 3. Statement of the Problem

In fact, during my teaching at secondary schools for so many years, I discovered that most of Sudanese secondary level students are not able to write not only a correct sentence but also a coherent paragraph which is supposed to be an actual problem needed to resolve due to their weak basis. Then, after much careful thinking about that problem and trying to find a solution. Therefore, an idea came out to write a research. So, the study attempts to explore the linguistic and technical difficulties that really face second-year students at

secondary level in using the sub-skills of writing a paragraph. It also tries to check if English language teachers adopt specific techniques in writing paragraphs. Moreover, to find out if the students are able to follow a proper strategy of paragraph writing.

#### 4. Objectives of the study

The objectives are arranged as follows:

- 1) To discover whether the students in the second year at secondary level are able to write paragraphs by using the basic conventions of writing properly.
- 2) To check whether the students are able to follow specific techniques in writing a paragraph.

#### 5. Questions of the Study

- 1) To what extent are they able to use the basic skills of writing paragraph?
- 2) To what extent have English teachers ability to deal with the strategies of teaching to write a paragraph?

#### 6. Methodology of the Study

A. A Questionnaire will be designed for English language teachers at secondary Level in order to investigate the following aspects:

- 1) Difficulties which face students in paragraph writing.
- 2) The strategy of paragraph writing.

#### 7. Population of the Study

- a) Second year students at secondary level.
- b) English language secondary schools teachers.

##### Target Population

Using the random selection technique, the writer chose three categories of participants who were involved in paragraph writing and these categories are:

##### a. Teachers

The first group of the study subjects was a population of 70 teachers who were selected from different secondary schools in Khartoum State? They have different levels of experience in teaching English language. Half of the subjects were male teachers (35) and the other half (35) of them were female teachers. All of those teachers answered the questionnaire based on the strategies and linguistic competence of their students and whether they could use literature extracts to teach paragraph writing. b. The second group (80) secondary school students in 2<sup>nd</sup> year were randomly chosen as experimental (40 students) group and (40) as control one.

#### 8. Tools of the Study

There are two tools that are carried out in this study:

- a) A questionnaire for secondary school teachers.
- b) Two tests (pre test and post test)

##### A. The questionnaire

The main purpose and aims of the questionnaire were to get

information related to writing paragraph as follows:

- 1) To find out if students in the second year at secondary schools face any difficulties in writing a paragraph.
- 2) To check if they are poor in using basic skills of writing such as grammar (punctuation, cohesive devices, prepositions and sentence structure).
- 3) To check whether the teachers use any strategy of teaching a paragraph.

##### The design of the questionnaire

For collecting data from samples, four points like art type scale questionnaire was used. The questionnaires were designed after surveying literature in ELT theories. To check the validity of the questionnaire, the writer presented them to a number of colleagues' five PhD holders who were considered as experts in the field of teaching English language. They examined, judged and corrected the items. Thus, the needed modifications and changes were made. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were done by a statistical analyzer according to the SPSS.

##### B. Pre-test and post-test

Concerning pre-test and post-test, the researcher made two tests for the students; the pre-test and the post-test carried out in "Omdurman province. So, the researcher divided the test into two types for two groups, the first experimental group was given a pre-test. The number of students was 40 in the second year at "Bait A l Mal secondary school for boys" in Khartoum State. The test was given to the students to write a paragraph describing themselves. The purpose was to check whether the students are able to know how to write correct sentences and then to follow the correct techniques of writing paragraphs. Afterwards, the researcher started to teach the students for about 50 periods as control group (A). Then, the students were taught how to make a correct grammatical sentence and were also taught the parts of speech such as pronouns, verbs, prepositions, connectives (cohesive devices), and nouns. The students were also given the tenses in particular the past tense with examples so as to make them know the correct use of the past tense. The students were supposed to write correct sentences and then write a connected paragraph which is the subject of the research. Then, the researcher taught the students the technique of writing a paragraph in general and short stories in particular. More specifically, the students were shown how to follow the steps and the technique of writing stories accompanied with examples and drills to help them to train and practice. After that, the researcher presented two stories as models extracted from Sudanese Folk Stories written by Professor Abdu Allah Al Tayieb and the stories were simply and completely explained by the researcher. On the other hand, the control group was asked to write similar stories from their own by following the same procedure so that the researcher can help the students to a large extent to be able to use the technique of narration in paragraph writing.

In terms of teachers' side, a questionnaire was distributed among (70) secondary school language teachers according to their experiences in teaching to recognize whether they are able and qualified to teach the technique of writing a paragraph.

## 9. Findings of the Study

The findings of the teachers' questionnaire showed that their students' performance in mastering the basic linguistic skills of writing a paragraph was very low. Besides, the students' knowledge of applying cohesive device and using the proper strategies of writing was so poor. Moreover, the students' performance in both the pre-test and the post – test reflected that weakness. However, the technique of using literature episodes in teaching a paragraph had helped the control group making some progress in grammar, vocabulary, developing the topic sentence, cohesive devices and prepositions. In addition, exploiting literature can stimulate students' imagination since these stories are related to their cultural background and help to develop their linguistic competence so as to promote their writing abilities. Above all ,most the teachers are not well-aware of using literature in teaching paragraphs.

## 10. Recommendations and Further Researches

- 1) Further researches can be conducted to check students' abilities in using cohesive device, prepositions, sentence structure and strategies of writing a paragraph.
- 2) Secondary school teachers are asked to have special training course in teaching paragraph writing and essays.
- 3) The syllabus designers are asked to put writing skill in consideration by having a lot of practice and drills on paragraph writing and making in all types such as argument, description and narration. This can be carried in the first and second classes at secondary school stage.

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