



# Suggested Strategies to Enhance Moroccan High School Students Writing Skills: A Classroom Action Research (The Case of First-Year Bacculaureate Students)

Nourelhouda BOUHAISSA

Research Laboratory: Language and Society, Ibn Tofail University,  
Faculty of Languages Literature, and Arts , Kenitra, Morocco

## Abstract:

Difficulties in writing among EFL learners are recognized as one of the major impediments to their academic success. The absence of essential writing skills not only gives rise to difficulties in other competencies, such as communication, but also hampers the overall performance of EFL learners in schools. Given its pivotal role in enhancing students' academic achievements, this research is dedicated to exploring the prevalent writing obstacles encountered by Moroccan first-year bacculaureate students in their English writing assignments. Moreover, it proposes strategies designed to enhance students' writing proficiency within EFL classrooms. To achieve this, approximately 30 first-year bacculaureate students from Morocco and 10 Moroccan EFL public high school teachers were interviewed to gain insights into their perceptions regarding English writing difficulties. In essence, this paper has a dual focus: firstly, it aims to investigate common writing challenges among the targeted student group, and secondly, it puts forth remedial strategies to ameliorate these difficulties.

**Key Terms:** writing skills, writing obstacles, writing difficulties, remedial strategies,



## Introduction

In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, the writing proficiency of Moroccan students emerges as a nuanced and compelling area of exploration. As globalization continues to underscore the importance of English proficiency, understanding the specific obstacles encountered by learners in Morocco is crucial for educators and policymakers alike. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to delve into the difficulties Moroccan students encounter while navigating the intricacies of English writing, shedding light on key factors that contribute to these challenges. By unravelling these writing complexities, this study fosters a deeper comprehension of the issues at hand and contributes to the development of remedial strategies that can enhance the writing capabilities of Moroccan students in the EFL context.

## Related Review

To effectively use a non-native language for communication, learners need to be *au fait* with its both spoken and written aspects. Among the four language skills, teaching writing is often the most challenging due to various factors, including outdated teaching methods and students' reluctance to master this vital skill. As stated in the English Language Guidelines for Secondary Schools (2007), Practising writing is very beneficial for learners at the high school level for a variety of reasons, to name but a few:

- Writing enables learners to dig into other different and yet related skills. In other terms, prior to writing, learners should have already done some reading, listening, and discussion on a specific topic of writing. It is through these three skills that the student collects the information needed to be engaged in the writing process.
- Writing helps recycling vocabulary, in the sense that while writing, the learner presents a variety of words he /she encounters in other situations and use them in his/her writing.
- Writing helps learners acquire the problem solving ability.



Similarly, the Standard Based Approach emphasizes that learners at the high school level must be able to:

- Use language for a variety of purposes and with a variety of audiences.
- Use a variety of strategies in their writing process.
- Differentiate between cultural and rhetorical aspects of different types of texts to write appropriately.
- Engage in either individual or groups work projects.

In this regard, numerous methods and approaches have been developed to simplify the writing process in Moroccan EFL classrooms. Nowadays, the primary method employed in Moroccan school classrooms is process writing. The essence of process writing is to help students recognize that writing is often a journey of exploration, leading to the generation of ideas rather than mere transcription. Put differently, students should understand that writing, by its very nature, is a step-by-step procedure, encompassing vocabulary selection, audience consideration, and format assessment, even for crafting simple messages. Students who grasp these writing processes can then choose the one that aligns with their writing style and with the specific task at hand. In fact, the process writing approach has demonstrated positive impacts on a significant number of EFL Moroccan students. According to Becky (2006), process writing entails seven distinct steps.

- 1) Prewriting: After determining the purpose for the writing, students brainstorm ideas via graphic organizers to come up with a word list.
- 2) Rough Draft: The instance where students put all their ideas without paying attention to grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and the structure of the paragraph.
- 3) Peer Editing: Students exchange their papers in order to share ideas for their writing improvement and help each other understand the task by raising what and how questions.
- 4) Revising: In this stage students try to benefit from their classmates' suggestions so as to improve their piece of writing. Additionally, at this stage the instructor intervenes in the process through providing feedback.



- 5) Editing: Students with their teacher or peers correct their blunders.
- 6) Final Draft: Students jot down their writing on a paper, and the teacher gives the last suggestions for improvement.
- 7) Publishing: Students submit their last writing copy to the teacher, share through reading it in front of the whole class, put it in their portfolio or class book, or publish it in the school magazine.

To sum up the whole, proficiency in a foreign language is not exclusively assessed through communicative abilities, but also through writing. The latter is a cover term for different linguistic abilities, where grammar is put into application. This being said, the current research aim is to dig into the reasons behind writing difficulties and try to offer solutions to resolve some problems that hinder the acquisition of the writing skills, and therefore help improve and achieve higher level of writing skill development.

### **The Methodology**

According to Bell and Burnaby as cited by Nunan (1989, p: 36), writing is a highly intricate cognitive process that necessitates the writer's simultaneous mastery of various skills. These skills include content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and letter formation. Therefore, based on the results of research conducted in the Moroccan context, which clearly demonstrated Moroccan high school students' difficulties while practising writing, the study at hand purports to answers the following questions:

### **Research Questions**

- ✓ What are the common mistakes Moroccan first year baccalaureate' students make while writing in English?
- ✓ What are some strategies that can help Moroccan students overcome such difficulties while writing in English?



## Participants

The students who take part in this study are from ELMASSIRA high school in Meknes, Morocco specifically, first- year baccalaureate Arts stream students. Students are 30 in number, chosen depending on the conditions of the researcher.

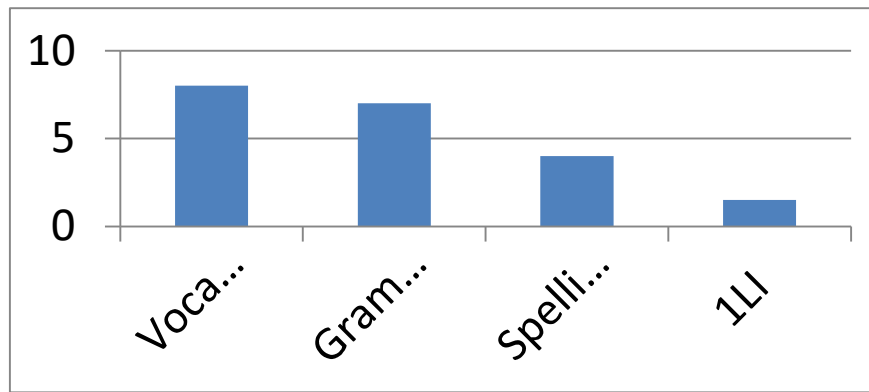
## Data collection Techniques

To address the research inquiries outlined above, the researcher conducted two interviews. One of these interviews was directed towards students, while the other was designed to explore the perceptions of EFL teachers regarding the challenges their students face when writing in English. The purpose of using two interviews serves a dual purpose: first, to delve into the underlying causes of students' writing deficiencies, and second, to establish a comparison between the teachers' and learners' opinions regarding first-year baccalaureate students writing difficulties.

## Results:

### 1) Students Views

Effective writing requires numerous skills; a precise choice of vocabulary, correct use of grammar, correct use of mechanics of writing, and a high degree of organization in the development of ideas and information. However, it has been proven following the studies conducted in Moroccan EFL classrooms that not all Moroccan EFL learners are able to produce a quality piece of writing. Therefore, this study aims at tracing the most frequent problems Moroccan students face while writing a simple paragraph in English. The students interview revealed that the most frequent problems students face are related mainly to vocabulary choice, grammar, style and organization, and spelling as indicated in the diagram below:



Furthermore, while interviewing students, they expressed concerns regarding the methodologies used in writing in the English class and in other school subjects. In this respect, Mohammed, an Art stream first-year baccalaureate student articulated his point of view, stating:

➤ “I can't write because each teacher has his own writing strategy. We study using different writing methodologies in each school subject. For instance, our philosophy teacher asks us to write using the strategy he has given us. The same thing applies to, French, Arabic, and English teachers. Each one of them demands a specific type of writing. Therefore, I don't know which one to use.”

Mohamed's situation is a representative case for the rest of students. Similarly, other interviewees mentioned that they encounter confusion related to writing methodologies, leading to adverse effects on their writing skills. Some struggle with organizing and developing their ideas, while others, due to the lack of appropriate vocabulary, deviate from the assigned topic. Additionally, some students experience writer's block, finding it challenging to articulate their thoughts. Consequently, they find themselves unable to produce written work, not due to a lack of willingness but rather due to the difficulties they face because of the absence of appropriate writing strategies.

Students may not be aware that, despite teachers assigning various types of writing tasks, there is a consistent process applicable to all types of writing. Raising



their awareness about the commonalities of written tasks helps alleviate the confusion associated with writing. It also helps enabling teachers to aid students in building confidence in their writing potentials. In simpler terms, students need to learn how to structure their writing into well-organized paragraphs, connecting ideas logically with supporting details. The challenge lies in motivating students to use a framework and guiding them to produce effective writing.

## 2) Teachers Views

In the interview, teachers of English at the same high school were invited to order the common writing problem among EFL learners from the most frequent to the less frequent as shown in the chart below:

**Which of the following are common writing problems to your students?**

Writing Problems	Order
Spelling	2
Singular/Plural	7
Word order	1
Verb tense	6



Vocabulary, wrong word or usage	5
Think in Arabic and write in English	8
Punctuation (including capital letters)	9
Irrelevant information	10
Meaning not clear	3
Word(s) missing	4

As reported by teachers, the most prevalent issues in their students' writing are word order errors, followed by spelling mistakes, vocabulary errors, verb tense inconsistencies, singular/plural inaccuracies, the tendency to think in Arabic and write in English, punctuation mistakes, and inclusion of irrelevant information. To gain a deeper understanding of this issue, more open-ended questions were employed to illuminate the teachers' perspectives on students' writing. Precisely, EFL teachers were asked to explain the reasons behind their students' writing difficulties. In response, nearly all teachers asserted that overloaded teaching programs, the lack of appropriate logistical teaching equipments in Moroccan schools, and the large number of students in classes are the primary factors contributing to students' struggles in writing skills. A female teacher underscored this by stating "the curriculum is too extensive, making it challenging to complete and engage in remedial work."





In exploring the strategies employed by teachers to address the aforementioned writing issues, teachers, due to the absence of sufficient time and adequate teaching materials, resort to humble and old strategies. For example, teachers highlight prevalent errors made by students while correcting their writing in exams. For them, this technique could encourage students to recognize and rectify the mistakes in their own sentences, thus, fostering a learning process from their own errors. Other teachers, on the other hand, emphasized the effectiveness of peer correction as a strategy that enables students to focus on their own errors while correcting their peers' written paragraphs.

In sum, to most teachers, the challenge Arts Moroccan first-year baccalaureate students face while writing in English goes primarily to the content of the textbook that lacks emphasis on guiding learners into applying effective writing methodologies. Consequently, students feel hopeless when dealing with writing tasks as they lack knowledge about the methodology and structure.

### **Suggested Classroom Remedial Strategies to Improve Students Writing Skills**

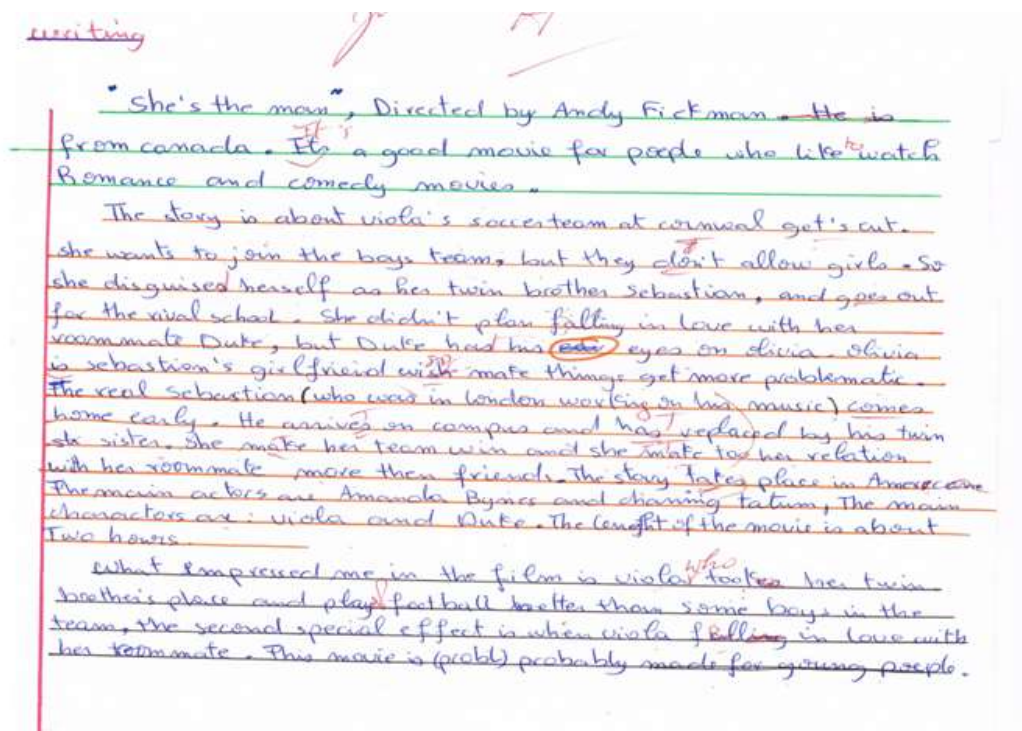
The first remedial strategy to enhance students writing skills was based on providing students with the maximum information possible to enable them write a film review. Moroccan students in their first year baccalaureate level are required to have an idea about how to write a film review especially that it is one of the probable types of writing to be given in their Moroccan Baccalaureate Nation Exam. This strategy stressed on offering a readymade framework to allow students avoid writing concerns regarding the development of their ideas or how to link each idea with another. By doing so, students became familiar with the ways ideas should be developed and how to organize oneself through writing. On the other side, this technique tried to make students concentrated on vocabulary, grammar, mechanics of writing and content instead of focusing on the organization of ideas.



After a detailed brainstorming process to identify the key elements that make up a quality film review, as a first step, students were asked to fill in the template that serves as a film review framework (See appendix 1). In this framework, students were provided with a template containing the necessary elements related to the appropriate vocabulary used in writing a professional film review. The objective of this strategy is to help students shift their attention from all what is related to the structure of a certain type of paragraph and concentrate on the vocabulary and grammar parts while writing.

### Results:

Throughout the remedial process, students were motivated to write as they felt at ease because of having an already established writing plan. Their engagement was evident as they understood the instruction, resulting in a smooth completion of the assignment. In the subsequent stage of the process, students were asked to follow the framework given and turn their answers into a paragraph. Surprisingly, the majority of students successfully produce well-developed film review paragraphs. Shortly after, students submitted their final drafts; the following is an example of one of the papers of students who managed to successfully write a well-developed film review paragraph.





Apart from some spelling mistakes and verb tense errors, the students, beside many other students, managed to write an acceptable film review. For most of students involved in this action research, it is an excellent idea to have similar frameworks for all the other types of writing they are supposed to produce. The greater portion of students believe that such framework would help enabling them develop writing strategies for future assignments. Moreover, with more practice in the course of time they could become able to write without resorting to such strategies.

### **Second Remedial Strategy**

In a bid to improve students' writing skill, another strategy is adopted wherein students this time were asked to write seven-sentences biography about their friends following a set of questions. The timing devoted to this activity was about ten minutes. The following are the key questions employed as a remedial strategy to aid students come up with a well-developed biography.

#### **Key Questions:**

1. What is his / her name?
2. When and where he/she was born?
3. How many years did he /she spend studying (Education in general)?
4. What are his /her Hobbies?
5. What are the languages he/she masters or speak?
6. What is he /she doing now?
7. What he/she hoped to do instead of his/her present situation?

These are the key questions used to provide students with hints to start their sentences and produce an acceptable biography-paragraph. Prior to writing a biography about their favorite friends, students were given a sample where both the teacher and the students answered the questions above in the form of complete sentences.



## Results:

This strategy, in fact, gave fruitful results since the overwhelming majority of students including excellent, average, and underachievers could come up with seven-sentences biography paragraph. The following are two examples of the students writing products.

1. *Chaimae was born in 1994 in Rabat. From 2000 to 2008 she received her primary education .Four years later she finished her secondary education. Today she is in first year baccalaureate student . Chaimae likes shopping , sleeping, and cooking cakes. She wants to be a models in the future. Every year she celebrate her birthday on February,10.*

2. *Majdolin Dani was born in Rabat, on March ,18,1990. She has got four sisters and she is the youngest of her family. From1996 to 2002 she received her primary education in Moulay Ben Youssef primary school in Rabat. Three years later, she finished her secondary education. After that, her family moved to Temara, so she continued her studies there in Maaty Bouabid high school. After getting her baccalaureate, Majdolin studied at a flight attendants school, but she did not like it, so she decided to go to the college. She studied for three years in Mohammed 5 university in Rabat, she graduated and received her BA degree. When she was a child, Majdoulin wanted to be a singer and actress, but now she becomes a teacher. Majdolin likes singing, reading novels, and figuring out mathematical problems. The thing that I like most about her is modesty and her sense of humor; she is a good person and an excellent teacher.*

**N.B: These two pieces of writing are not corrected by any teacher .**

From the researcher's point of view, the last strategy is as successful as the first one since students could write without difficulties. Mistakes, as it can be noticed in



the writings, are very few and one can feel the great ability and potential of students to write in a limited period of time.

In conclusion, the outcomes of these two strategies highlight the pivotal role of providing first-year baccalaureate students with already-established writing frameworks as of the beginning of the school year. This proactive approach not only enhances their ability to tackle diverse writing tasks but also cultivates independence in their writing endeavors. By instilling these foundational skills early on, students are better equipped to navigate the intricacies of various writing challenges throughout their academic journey.

### **Limitations And Recommendations for Further Studies**

This study was prone to a number of limitations, some are related to the nature of this action research (Limited in time and content in addition to the absence of supervision) and others are related to the classroom conditions from where the data was taken. In fact, it was completely impossible for the researcher to investigate the writing difficulties in a rigorous manner since the time of each session was limited. Bearing in mind all that has been said thus far, further research has to overcome the above mentioned limitations, and give more importance to each component of writing separately. Another suggestion in this respect is that future studies should tackle the issue of writing from the teacher's standpoint since teaching revolves around the role of instructor in guiding students towards production. Finally, further research has to take into account the timing devoted to the writing lessons.



## Conclusion

With the ongoing emphasis on English proficiency in the current globalized world, it has become essential for educators and policymakers to grasp the specific hurdles faced by learners in Morocco. Therefore, this article aim was to explore the challenges first-year baccalaureate students confront while writing in English. Through unraveling these intricacies, this paper intends to promote a deeper understanding of the issues at hand and contribute to the suggestion of remedial strategies that could improve the writing skills of Moroccan students within the EFL context.

## Appendix 1

### Components of a Film Review.

#### Introduction

Title : "....."

Director:

Directed by .....

The director of this film is .....

Country:

\_ He is from .....

\_ His nationality is .....

Type of movie :

\_ This movie is great for people with a sense of .....

\_ It is a good movie for people who like to watch.....

#### Body

Story

\_ The story is about .....



\_The movie tells the story of .....

Setting :

\_The action is set in.....

\_The story takes place in .....

Main actors :

\_The main actors are .....

\_The main characters are .....

Length :

\_The length of the movie is about .....

\_The duration of the movie is about .....

**Conclusion**

Special Effects :

\_Above all I liked this movie because .....

\_What Impressed me in the film is .....

Targeted audience:

\_The people who like this movie are the kind of people .....

\_This movie is probably made for .....

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